

**“Spanner in the works”: Trade union responses to sickness
absence policy management within local government**

Declaration

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Abstract

Through the prism of workplace union representatives (reps), the thesis explores the ‘War on the Sickies’, the shift towards stricter sickness absence policy (SAP) implementation within local government. By synthesising the literature on sickness absence management, labour process theory, workplace union organisation and workers’ representation, the thesis delivers new insights to the sickness absence phenomenon, workers’ resistance, union revitalisation, and the dialectics of individual and collective union representation.

Utilising a case study approach, data has been gathered from a wide range of sources, including union and employer documentation, questionnaires, and individual and focus group interviews. Conceptualising the workplace as a ‘contested terrain’ where structured antagonism between employers and employees take place, stricter attendance management is viewed as a ‘effort bargain’ issue at the ‘frontier of control’ which has been shifted in employers’ favour. The thesis affirms the continuing relevance of labour process theory to study of work and work organisations, utilising its core concepts such as labour indeterminacy, the structured antagonism between capital and labour, management control regimes, the frontier of control, and competitive accumulation imperatives. Workers’ absence from work is seen as an important element in the construction of labour indeterminacy.

While stricter attendance management, for inter-related cost, control and productivity reasons, pressured workers to come work when unwell and return prematurely, managerial prerogative did not go unchallenged, as union reps employed diverse strategies and tactics to defend their members. Although union organisations have been on the defensive in recent decades, this study of reps’ organising activities suggest that, provided unions engage in the ‘politics of production’ and defend members at the ‘frontier of control’, they can stem decline and find renewal.

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Homeless Caseworkers Lobby UNISON Conference, 2015

Contents

Chapter/Title	Page
1. Introduction	
1.1 Introduction	13
1.2 Research Rational	13
1.3 Research Aims and Research Questions	15
1.4 Thesis Structure	16
1.5 Summary	17
2. Workers' Absence and the Labour Process: Theoretical Underpinnings	
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Marx and the Labour Process	19
2.3 Braverman and Labour Process Theory	24
2.4 Theorising Work Attendance	29
2.5 Discussion	35
2.6 Summary	36
3. The Sickness Absence Phenomenon	
3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Economic Perspectives	37
3.3 Psychological Perspectives	42
3.4 Sociological Explanations	45
3.5 Discussion	49
3.6 Problematising Workers' Sickness Absence	50
3.7 Public Sector Sickness Absence	55
3.8 Attendance Management Strategies	57
3.9 Modern Work and Workers' Health	66
3.10 Summary	68
4. The Public Sector Labour Process and Austerity	
4.1 Introduction	70
4.2 The State, Capitalism and the Market	70
4.3 Public Sector Commercialisation and Marketisation	74
4.4 Public Sector Labour Processes	77
4.5 Austerity	81
4.6 Scottish Public Sector Reform and Austerity Spending Cuts	83
4.7 Conceptual Framework Summary	85
5. Shop Stewards: Theory and Practice	
5.1 Introduction	87
5.2 Historical Perspective	87
5.3 Shop Stewards' Sociological Significance	92
5.4 Under Neoliberal Assault	96
5.5 Structure and Agency: Trade Union Growth and Renewal	99

5.6 The Individual and the Collective	104
5.7 Summary	107
6. Research Philosophy, Methodology and Methods	
6.1 Introduction	109
6.2 Critical Realism	109
6.3 Case Studies Methodology	118
6.4 Research Techniques and Methods	123
6.5 Data Analysis	135
6.6 Reliability and Validity	138
6.7 Insider Research	140
6.8 Axiology and Bias	142
6.9 Research Permissions	145
6.10 Research Ethics	145
6.11 Summary and Conclusions	147
7. Glasgow: The ‘Neo-liberal City’	
7.1 Introduction	148
7.2 Labour in Glasgow	148
7.3 Glasgow: “Open for business”	149
7.4 Glasgow’s Tangled Web	151
7.5 Glasgow’s Response to the Financial Crisis	155
7.6 UNISON Branch Structures and Organisation	157
7.7 Glasgow City UNISON Membership	159
7.8 Glasgow City UNISON Industrial Disputes	162
7.9 Summary	166
8. Reps’ Experiences and Perceptions of the ‘War on the Sickies’	
8.1 Introduction	167
8.2 Timeline	168
8.3 Benign Neglect: Earlier Policy Implementation	168
8.4 The Opening Shots in the ‘War on the Sickies’	172
8.5 Sickness Absence Policy Implementation	175
8.6 Reps’ Perceptions of Managerial Strategy	201
8.7 Summary	213
9. Union Representation and Effectiveness in the ‘War on the Sickies’	
9.1 Introduction	214
9.2 The Extent of Representation	214
9.3 The Demand of Reps	215
9.4 The Representation Process	215
9.5 Evaluation of Union Reps’ Effectiveness: The “counterfactual question”	222
9.6 Union Strategies	226
9.7 Impact on Union Organisation	235
9.8 Union Profile	238
9.9 SAP Implementation and Union Mobilisation	239
9.10 Barriers to Mobilisation	242

9.11 Analytical Framework: Push-Pull at the Frontier of Control	245
9.12 Summary	249
10. Sickness Absence Management: The Contested Terrain	
10.1 Introduction	250
10.2 Local Government Attendance Management	250
10.3 Frontier of Control Resistance	262
10.4 Organising in a Weakened Regulatory Work Environment	268
10.5 Organising Individually and Collectively: Two Sides of the Same Coin	270
10.6 Conclusion	272
11. Conclusions and Summary	
11.1 Introduction	275
11.2 Main Findings	275
11.3 Contribution to Knowledge	278
11.4 Study's Generalisability	280
11.5 Study's Limitation	281
11.6 Suggestions for Further Research	281
Bibliography	283
Appendices	
Appendix 1: 2010 Questionnaire	334
Appendix 2: 2013 Questionnaire	343
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule	354
Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet	355
Appendix 5: Glasgow City Council and Related Organisations' Disputes (1998 - 2017)	358
Appendix 6: Managerial SAP Implementation 2010	361
Appendix 7: Managerial SAP Implementation 2013	362
Appendix 8: Steward Organisation 2010	363
Appendix 9: Steward Organisation 2013	364
Appendix 10: Management Implementation and Stewards' Organisation, 2010 and 2013	365

List of Tables

Table/Title	Page
3.1 Sickness Absence Costs	39
3.2 UK Sickness Absence Costs 2004-16 (CIPD Surveys)	41
3.3 Falling Sickness Absence Rates (CIPD)	56
3.4 Falling Sickness Absence Rates (EEF)	57
3.5 Employee Benefits Research Strategies	61
4.1 Scottish Local Government Pay Awards 2008-17	85
5.1 UK Shop Stewards' Numbers	89
6.1 Example of Likert Scale Statement	126
6.2 Questionnaire Response Rate	126
6.3 Length of Service and Time Spent as a Rep	127
6.4 Union Reps' Age	128
6.5 Union Reps' Age Distribution	128
6.6 Questionnaire Respondents Gender	129
6.7 Individual Interviews by Gender	132
6.8 Individual Interviews by Service/ Department	133
6.9 Focus Group Members by Service	133
7.1 Glasgow City Council's ALEOs	153
7.2 UNISON Branch's Membership (2002-2017)	160
7.3 UNISON Branch's Membership by Service (2007-2017)	161
8.1 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied	178
8.2 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council/ Non-Council	179
8.3 2010 - Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council Department	179
8.4 2013 - Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council Department	180
8.5 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Age	180
8.6 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Gender	181
8.7 Agreed or Disagreed in Which Way Stricter?	182
8.8 Agreed or Disagreed that Disciplinary Sanctions Imposed are Often Too Harsh	183
8.9 Agreed or Disagreed that Workers were Coming to Work When Unwell and Returning Too Soon	192
8.10 Reasons For Coming to Work When Sick	194
8.11 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP had a Negative Effect on Workplace Morale	195
8.12 Agreed or Disagreed that Line Managers have Discretion Over SAP Implementation	197
8.13 Agreed or Disagreed that Managers Decide Outcomes Before a Disciplinary Hearing	198
8.14 Managerial Strategy	202
8.15 Agreed or Disagreed that Managers were More Concerned with 'Punishing' Sick Workers than Supporting Them	210
9.1 Extent of Representation	215
9.2 Represented at FAI	217
9.3 Represented at Disciplinary Hearing	218
9.4 Agreed or Disagreed that Reps Influence Managers' Decisions Whether or Not to Proceed to Discipline	222
9.5 Agreed or Disagreed that Members Who Bring a Union Rep to Meetings are Treated More Fairly than Those Who do Not	223
9.6 Agreed or Disagreed that Union Representation Influences What Happens	223
9.7 Agreed or Disagreed that Members Valued Union Representation Irrespective of the	

Outcome	226
9.8 Agreed or Disagreed that SAP Implementation Motivated Workers to Join and Stay in the Union	235
9.9 Agreed or Disagreed about SAP Implementation's Impact on Employer-employee Relations and Fuelling Discontents	239
9.10 Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP influenced Other Union Member Decisions (e.g. in pay ballot)	240
10.1 Stricter SAP	252
10.2 Contrasting Benign Neglect SAP implementation and the 'War on the Sickies'	252

List of Figures

Figure/Title	Page
6.1 Past SAP Implementation Coding	115
6.2 Past SAP Coding	137
6.2 Current College SAP Implementation Coding	137
7.1 Glasgow's Blurred Organisational Boundaries and Disordered Hierarchies	152
7.2 Employers and Union Organisation	157
7.3 UNISON Branch Structure	158
9.1 Managerial SAP Implementation and Steward Organisation, 2010	247
9.2 Managerial SAP Implementation and Steward Organisation, 2013	247
10.1 SAP Representation, Union Activity and Underlying Structural Processes	257

Abbreviations

AGM Annual General Meeting
ALEO Arms-Length External Organisation
BBC British Broadcasting Corporation
BC Branch Committee
BAME Black, Asian and minority ethnic
CBI Confederation of British Industry
CBS Central Business Services
CIPD Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CSG Community Safety Glasgow
CSO Community Service Officer
COHSE Confederation of Health Service Employees
COSLA Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities
DACS Direct and Cleaning Services
DRS Development and Regeneration Services
EAT Employment Appeal Tribunal
ET Employment Tribunal
EEF Engineers Employers Federation
EU European Union
FAI Formal Absence Interview
FE Further Education
FLM Front Line Manager
GCC Glasgow City Council
GDC Glasgow District Council
GDP Gross Domestic Product
GP General Practitioner
HD SSC Housing Department Shop Stewards Committee
HMRC Her Majesty's Revenue and Custom
HR Human Resource
HRM Human Resource Management
HSE Health and Safety Executive
JCF Joint Consultative Forum
KPI Key Performance Indicator
LES Land and Environmental Services
MWF Managing the Workforce of the Future
NALGO National Association of Local Government Officers
NUPE National Union of Public Employees
NHS National Health Service
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSP Occupational Sick Pay
PCS Public and Civil Services Union
PFI Private Finance Initiative
PSA Pupil Support Assistants
RMT Rail, Maritime and Transport
RTW Return to Work
SAP Sickness Absence Policy
SCF Service Conditions Forum
SCW Social Care Worker
SNP Scottish National Party
SRC Strathclyde Regional Council
SSC Shop Stewards Committee

SSP Statutory Sick Pay
SU Strathclyde University
STUC Scottish Trade Union Congress
SWS Social Work Services
TUC Trade Union Congress
TUPE Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981
UK United Kingdom
UKIP United Kingdom Independence Party
US United States
WPBR Workforce Pay and Benefits Review

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for the thesis and outlines the research aims and research questions. It concludes with an outline of how the thesis is structured.

1.2 Research Rationale

The thesis takes as its starting point Taylor, Cunningham, Newsome, and Scholarios' (2010: 270) argument that research on sickness absence and absence management requires reformulation. They contended that our knowledge on sickness absence and absenteeism, which derived from influential studies within the sociology of work and employment, 'has been overtaken by hugely significant developments in political economy, regulation and employment relations'. In response, they urgently called for 'a new research agenda that addresses the changed organisational politics of absence management and the consequences for employees' (*ibid*, p. 270).

It is also argued here that the sociological and management literature on sickness absence has not caught up with the current realities of public sector workplaces where disciplinary approaches towards attendance management have become widespread. In the last decade, this deficit has been exposed within the academic literature. Although accepting that attendance management had become more prominent, Edwards (2005) stated that managers were 'often reluctant to actively manage issues of individual attendance and work performance', concluding that 'the evidence suggests that processes of monitoring and controlling attendance have changed little' (p. 393). Further, Noon and Blyton (2007) stated that there was 'a widespread tendency for managers to tolerate a degree of voluntary absence without making concerted efforts to suppress it' (p. 88). While Marchington and Wilkinson (2008) acknowledged that disciplinary procedures were widely used, they too asserted that case study evidence 'points to softer approaches being prevalent, with line managers given a wide degree of discretion' (p. 299).

Edwards and Greasley (2010) accepted that stricter absence management resulted in workers feeling pressurised to attend work when ill. However, they concluded that 'Coercive forms of attendance control seem to be rare. There are pressures towards costs control, but their effects are likely to be mediated by other factors' (p. 25). More recently, Noon, Blyton and Morrell (2013) claimed that managers allowed some 'voluntary' absence as they found it

difficult to differentiate between it and 'involuntary' absence. They stated that management only took action when absences exceeded an 'acceptable' level or impacted on production 'and/or where staffing levels contain so little spare capacity that covering for absent colleagues is difficult' (*ibid*, p.86).

The thesis is premised upon the belief that such perspectives fail to capture current workplace realities where competition, cost and labour productivity concerns have resulted in employers implementing strict attendance policies which have significantly reduced, or even eliminated, distinctions between voluntary and involuntary absence. This results in widespread presenteeism where workers come to work when unwell, or return prematurely, as a result of workload pressures, fear of disciplinary sanction or dismissal and job insecurity (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 282).

Following Edwards and Scullion (1982) and Edwards and Whitson (1993), attendance management is considered within the dynamics of the employment relationship. Influenced by labour process theory (Thompson, 1989), strict absence policies are viewed as one aspect of managerial efforts to restructure the contemporary public sector workplace in an attempt to cut costs and increase labour productivity, while at the same time tighten and extend control over its labour process. At a time when union organisations are struggling to cope with neoliberal attacks, heightened during a time of austerity (Bach, 2012; Nolan, 2011), strict attendance management is one way employers attempt to overcome *labour indeterminacy* (Thompson, 1989). By tightening SAP implementation, employers attempt to change the terms of the 'effort bargain' (Behrend, 1957), shifting the boundaries at the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1975) in their favour, increasingly through coercive rather than collaborative methods (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 274).

This study of sickness absence practice is framed by contemporary neo-liberalism, which is characterised by heightened competition, strengthened managerial authority, intensified work pressures, the global expansion of 'the market and the entrepreneurial ethic', and 'the commodification of all aspects of everyday life' (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009a: 4). Debates about insecurity at work, work intensification and workers' ability to control work pace, stem from employer pressures to maximise the exploitation of labour power at the 'frontier of control'. As Taylor *et al* (2010) stated, against a background of unparalleled economic crisis, employers utilised market disciplines 'to alter the terms of the wage-effort bargain by exposing workers to competitive economic pressures and by systematically removing obstacles to value extraction' (p. 274).

Positioned within ‘the current stage of capitalism and the dominant ideology’ which shapes present-day ‘economic, political and employment policies’ (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009a: 2), empirical evidence is presented from a Scottish local government setting, at a time of extreme budgetary pressures. Broadly classified as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991, 1995; Pollitt, 1993), market and commercial methods and philosophies were introduced into the public sector, leading to financial and privatisation pressures (Cunningham, James and Dibben, 2006: 208). This forms the contours in which managers implement sickness absence policies (SAPs) and procedures in which, concomitantly, shop stewards represent their members.

The thesis draws upon several literatures. In particular, the thesis synthesises the attendance management, labour process theory, and workplace union organisation and representation literature, the latter of which has seen renewed interest (Atzeni, 2014a: 2). By investigating union representatives’ (reps) collective responses to managerial SAP implementation, the thesis seeks to increase understanding of austerity’s impact on workplace union organisation. Moore (2011) observed that a wide literature which explains declining collective bargaining and falling union membership since 1979 has emerged, but ‘less has been written on the role of trade union activists within this’ (p. 2). By examining reps’ attendance management representation, the thesis attempts to address this deficit. Many previous absence studies have been carried out from a managerial standpoint, assuming ‘absence should be studied so that ways can be found to control it’ (Edwards and Scullion, 1984: 549). Instead, like Cohen (2006), this research puts ‘workplace based rank-and-file organisation and resistance at the head of strategic discussion’ rather than ‘a largely neglected footnote’ (p. 1).

1.3 Research Aims and Research Questions

The thesis aims are as follows:

- 1) To explore the processes which are resulting in stricter SAP implementation within local government, in particular the economic, organisational, political and social policy drivers
- 2) To consider the impact stricter SAP implementation is having on workers, and trade union responses
- 3) To consider the effect on industrial relations and the implications for union organisation

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) Within the context of changing public sector workplace regulation regimes, to what extent has there been a shift towards stricter SAP implementation?
- 2) Within the chosen case study, what are the reasons for this change?

- 3) Within the chosen case study, to what extent has management utilised strict SAP implementation to shift the frontier of control in their favour?
- 4) Within the chosen case study, to what extent have workplace union reps been able to develop resistance to this management offensive, in terms of individual representation and collective organisation?

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis addresses the research questions in the following manner. The initial chapters review the attendance management, labour process theory, workplace union organisation and representation literature. Initially, as Marx's (1990) writings on the labour process underpin the thesis' theoretical framework, Chapter 2 outlines their key concepts. Marx located his analysis of work relationships within the capitalist mode of production, examining major changes in the economy and labour process. As Thompson (1989) observed, 'To understand the latter, it is necessary to start with the general framework' (*ibid*, p. 38). Although it examined nineteenth century production and employment relations, it is argued here that Marx's labour processes analysis, developed further by other writers (Braverman, 1974; Thompson 1989), still remains relevant to understanding contemporary work. Viewing workers' absence from work as an additional aspect of labour indeterminacy (Taylor *et al*, 2010), the chapter places employer concerns about attendance within the context of productivity and time discipline considerations. As well as examining the significance of labour process theory to this study, the chapter considers those writers which have critiqued or developed Marx and Braverman's writings (Burroway, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977). As the thesis explores reps' endeavours to frustrate strict attendance management, the chapter locates worker resistance to managerial encroachment at the frontier of control as an essential feature of the labour process (Hyman, 1975), an aspect of which Thompson (1989: 213) suggests that some writers (Braverman, 1974; Burroway, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977) have neglected or downplayed.

Chapter Three reviews the economic, psychological and sociological literature on sickness absence and explores employer attendance management control strategies, considering how pressures to increase productivity and reduce labour costs have led employers, particularly in the public sector, to take action to maximise workers' attendance. As the case study is set within a local government setting, Chapter Four provides context by exploring the public sector labour process (Carter, 1997) and the introduction of market and commercial methods into the sector, concluding with an examination of the impact of austerity on its domain. As this study reaffirms workers' resistance as an integral element of the labour process and explores SAP implementation through the prism of reps' organising efforts, Chapter Five considers the

sociological literature on shop stewards and assesses their important role in representing union members, despite the difficulties unions have faced since the late 1970s as they came under neo-liberal assault (Waddington, 2003: 214).

Chapter Six outlines the study's critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 1978), and the methodology and methods that are used. Then the case study, which explores union resistance to SAP implementation within Glasgow City Council, its arms-length external organisations (ALEOs), former and related organisations is outlined. Thereafter, the selected research methods and techniques, and the steps taken to analyse the data gathered are described. Finally, Chapter Six explores issues relating to insider research, axiology, bias, reliability, validity and research ethics. Further, as this case study is located within the UNISON union in Glasgow whose members are employed by current, related and former local government organisations, Chapter Seven provides information on the city's local authority governance, employer and union organisations, and the severe budget crisis that forms the backdrop to the research.

The next two chapters present the research findings. Chapter Eight reports on reps' experiences and perceptions of the shift towards strict attendance management. Chapter Nine provides an evaluation of reps' critique of their effectiveness, considering the impact of their representation on union organisation and strategies. Then, reps' views on the extent to which union members' experiences of attendance management is a mobilising factor in taking action over other issues is discussed, concluding with an exploration of the factors which limit union activity around attendance issues. Chapter Ten discusses the research findings' significance in relation to current debates on attendance management, managerial control regimes, workers' resistance, union revitalisation, and the dialectics of individual and collection union representation. Finally, Chapter Eleven provides conclusions, consideration of the study's contribution to knowledge, its generalisability, limitations and suggestions for further research.

1.5 Summary

This chapter provided the rationale for the thesis and outlined the research questions which seek to explore whether a shift towards stricter attendance management has taken place, and if so, what are the reasons. Further, this chapter outlined additional research questions, namely, to what extent managers have shifted the frontier of control at work in their favour through stricter SAP implementation and the extent to which workplace reps have been able to defend union members. In exploring this, the study's implications for managerial control regimes and worker representation were delineated.

Chapter 2: Workers' Absence and the Labour Process: Theoretical Underpinnings

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is informed by labour process theory (Thompson, 1989: 242-4). This takes the view that the labour process is fundamentally one of extracting surplus value from labour power. To do so, capital must constantly transform production processes and achieve control over labour. This gives rise to 'structured antagonisms' (Edwards, 1986: 5) between employers and workers which are expressed in various forms of conflict and resistance. According to Thompson and Newsome (2004), labour process theory can explain 'the variations and complexity of workplace relations', delineating cross sector, company, and nation-states trends, 'while setting out the systemic features of the capitalist labour process that shape and constrain those relations' (p. 135).

Smith and Thompson (1998) doubted claims that labour process theory had been overtaken by changes in work production and work organisation, arguing that it still remained relevant to understanding contemporary work realities, although it should take cognisance of the increase in 'more individualized and employer-dominated forms of employment, which seek to engage workers' subjectivity in realizing labour power' (p. 571).

This chapter introduces labour process theory concepts such as 'labour indeterminacy, structured antagonism between capital and labour, forms of management control, the frontier of control...[and] the logic of competitive accumulation' (Taylor and Moore, 2015: 80). At the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1975), labour and capital are engaged in struggle over the terms of the 'effort bargain' (Behrend, 1957). In this study, workers' absence from work is seen as one aspect of the indeterminacy gap (Thompson, 1989). Employer concerns about workers' absence are located within wider aspects of productivity and time discipline. While employer concerns about workers' regular attendance at work are recurrent, the thesis contextualises them within contemporary local government, at a time of austerity.

The chapter begins with a review of Marx's writings on the labour process. Then it explores Braverman's (1974) 'degradation of work' thesis and subsequent debates (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). Thereafter, this chapter considers work intensification, the temporal aspects of capitalist employment relations and attendance discipline, before outlining contemporary work realities. In doing so, this chapter highlights the importance of political-economy in understanding work and labour processes, in contrast to neo-classical theories where 'the problem of how to get work out of the worker does not even arise' (Nolan, 1983: 300).

2.2 Marx and the Labour Process

Written in 1867, Marx's *Capital* (1990) provided a systematic analysis of the labour process which was central to his explanation of the capitalist system's working (and its proneness to crises). This was rooted in Marx's historical materialist approach. Marx' theory of social development attempted to reconcile German philosophy (Kant and Hegel), British classical economics (Adam Smith and Ricardo) and the French revolutionary tradition (Callinicos, 2010: 68). While Marx analysed how societies transformed, above all he was concerned with trying to understand the world, so that it could be changed (Hyman, 1975: 95).

Initially, this section examines commodification which structure public sector marketisation and commercialisation. This is then followed by a description of the labour process within capitalism, its role in creating value and generating conflict, setting the scene for exploring workers' absence and labour indeterminacy.

2.1.1 Commodification: The Hidden Hand

Capital (Marx, 1990) begins with an analysis of commodities (Lukács, 1971: 83), noting that they are known to, and used by, everyone. Further, commodities are 'essential to our existence: we have to buy them in order to live' (Harvey, 2010a: 15). Marx distinguished between a commodity's *use value* (its utility) and its *exchange value*. Exchange values *appeared* to be the quantitative relation which measured how commodities with use values are exchanged. According to Marx (1990), this relation was 'constantly changing with time and place' and thus appeared 'to be something accidental and purely relative' (p. 126). Marx recognised that a commodity does not have a solitary exchange value, but many, allowing for one item to be exchanged for another, and so on. Accordingly, in principle a commodity can constantly be exchanged for other commodities *ad infinitum*. Exchange values allow commodities to be exchanged but in a form abstracted from its use value.

Marx recognised that commodities, irrespective of whether they had a use or exchange value, were products of labour, albeit abstracted human labour. Commodification resulted in 'the sensuous characteristics' of 'useful thing[s]' being 'extinguished' or put out of sight. The workers' labour that was utilised in production was also hidden. For Marx, commodities were 'merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure' (*ibid*, p. 128). Although the labour process of making a table is hidden, the table could not be exchanged in the market without the labour process that went into making it.

Marx defined value as the ‘socially necessary labour time’ which was ‘required to produce any use value [article] under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent in that society’ (*ibid*, p. 129). Marx considered commodity exchange from a societal perspective, posing perennial questions: ‘what is socially necessary? How is that established and by whom?’ (Harvey, 2010a: 20).

The sum of society’s productive output represented its aggregated labour. Producers do not meet each other in the production process so the specific social character of their labour shows itself only through the exchange of labour products on the market. According to Lukács (1971), a general *reification* of social relations takes place ‘when commodity production becomes so highly developed and so widespread as to dominate the life of society’ (Sweezy, 1942: 113). Throughout society, social relations between human beings were transformed ‘into apparently natural relations between things’ (Callinicos, 1999: 206).

Marx recognised that commodity values are not constant and are perpetually transformed by a range of factors which affect productivity, including, workers’ skill levels, scientific development, the social organisation of production, the means of production and physical conditions (Marx, 1990: 130). Marx suggested that in order to be socially necessary, the labour time expended must create useful products that can be sold: ‘nothing can be a value, without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value’ (*ibid*, p. 131).

Exchange was expressed in abstract and relative terms which synthesised in the form of a money commodity ‘which functions as a universal equivalent in relation to all other commodities’ (Harvey, 2010a: 26). Money hides the social, temporal and geographical relations between the producer and what is produced. Thus, it becomes impossible to determine under what conditions the workers worked and what the level of exploitation was. As Harvey (1990) stated, ‘The grapes that sit upon the supermarket shelves are mute; we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from’ (pp. 423-4).

2.2.2. The Labour Process and Creating Value

Marx suggested that, irrespective of the mode of production, labour was an essential human activity. Marx’s proposition that men and women were essentially producers challenged the Aristotelian separation between rational thought and the drudgeries of work which was seen as the preserve of slaves (Callinicos, 2010: 86-8). Marx was concerned with the ‘social

relationships of production', the exploitative relationships between slave owner and slave, lord and serf, capitalist and worker (*ibid*, pp. 89-90). For Marx (1990), production was not just a technical process, it was essentially a social activity in which humans came together to change nature, whereby they 'simultaneously' changed their 'own nature' (p, 283). This dialectical relationship was central to understanding how society and nature developed. Throughout history, humans changed and improved their methods of production (Harvey, 2010a: 112). Unlike animals, humans causally reflect on their activities.

There are two unique aspects of the capitalist labour process. Firstly, unlike slave societies, workers under capitalism are not bought and sold. Instead, it is their labour power (capacity to work) that is sold on the market as a commodity. Secondly, workers' labour power is purchased by capitalists who decide what tasks, in which way, are to be performed (Marx, 1990: 291-2). The work product of the labour-process was owned by the capitalist, not the worker, 'just as much as the wine which is the product of the process of fermentation going on in his cellar' (*ibid*, p. 292). While workers were *free* under capitalism to sell their labour power, owning only their labour, they faced poverty if they became unemployed (Hyman, 1975: 20-22).

In *Capital*, Marx (1990) explained the nature of exploitation and conflict within capitalism. For Marx, capitalists had two objectives when they brought together labour power (living labour) and the means of production (dead labour), namely the creation of commodities and *surplus value*. Firstly, they wished 'to produce a use-value which has exchange-value', in other words, 'an article destined to be sold, a commodity' (p. 293). Secondly, they wanted 'to produce a commodity greater in value than the sum of the values of the commodities used to produce it' (*ibid*, p. 293). Labour was a commodity which had the specific use value 'of being a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself' (*ibid*, p. 301). Marx gave an example whereby half a day's labour was sufficient to keep a worker alive for twenty four hours. However, when the labourer worked beyond the half day they created greater value than the value of their labour power. This was the proverbial Golden Goose, 'an animated monster' that multiplies (*ibid*, p. 302).

According to Marx, surplus value creation entails workers' exploitation. The working and capitalist classes are formed out of this exploitative relationship and are co-joined in a struggle over their respective share of the surplus. As Hyman (1975) stated, 'The wages and conditions which the worker naturally seeks as a means to a decent life are a *cost* to the employer, cutting into his profits, and he will equally naturally resist pressure for improvements'(p. 19). Thus,

‘the labour process becomes an area of class conflict, and the workplaces becomes a contested terrain’ (Edwards, 1979: 16).

2.2.3. Conflict and Resistance

For Marx (1990), the essential aspect of capitalist production process was ‘the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value’ (p. 304). The capitalist must ensure that labour power is ‘expended with the average amount of exertion and the usual degree of intensity’ (*ibid*, p. 303). Employers buy workers’ *labour-power* (their capacity to work) ‘for a definite period’ and must ensure that they transform it into *actual labour*, ensuring that they ‘are not idle for a single moment’ (*ibid*, p. 303). However, while the employer purchases workers’ capacity to work, the *actual* amount of effort is not detailed in the employment contract, nor is determined by the wage-rate offered. As Hyman (1975) stated, workers’ ‘obligations...are imprecise and elastic’ (p. 24). While they are expected to attend work, ‘they need not necessarily *labor*’ (Edwards, 1979: 12).

Management’s function, ‘through its hierarchy of control’, was to address labour indeterminacy (Hyman, 1975: 24). To do so, employers attempted to control the labour process and workers’ performance. Counter-balancing management powers, in every workplace ‘an unceasing power struggle’ takes place at the ‘invisible’ frontier of control which is ‘defined and redefined in a *continuous* process of pressure and counterpressure, conflict and accommodation, overt and tacit struggle’ (*ibid*, p. 25-6). Managers and workers are locked in day-to-day conflict as employers attempt to reduce labour costs and maximise labour efficiency (Edwards, 1979). According to Edwards, conflict existed ‘because the interests of workers and those of employers collide, and what is good for one is frequently costly for the other’ (p. 12). As Dibben, Klerck and Wood (2011) stated, ‘firms will naturally seek to maximise the effort exerted by their employees and keep wages to the minimum; employees will have the opposite agenda’ (p. 9).

At the frontier of control, conflict arises when ‘workers resist the discipline and the pace that employers try to impose’ (Edwards, 1979: 14). Such conflict is the ‘wellspring of trade unionism’ as workers collectively resist managerial control (Ironsides and Seifert, 2000: 12). Consequently, work control disputes have been a perennial feature of labour movement struggle, ranging from disagreement over work effort and wage rates, to questions about ‘who runs the factory’ and the ‘essential nature and purpose of production within capitalism’ (Beynon, 1973: 129).

Hyman (1975) suggested that the frontier of control is ‘a compromise’ which is ‘unsatisfactory to *both* parties’, that each attempts to shift to its advantage when ‘circumstances are in its favour’ (p. 27). This dichotomy lies at the heart of the employment relationship. While speeding up, lengthening working hours and work intensification can lead to workers’ resistance, the co-operative aspect of the labour process has also been emphasised (Edwards, 1979). Although employers have considerable powers, such as the right to hire and fire, and expect *reasonable* instructions to be obeyed, they are ‘at the same time *dependent* on [the] labour force’ (Hyman, 1975: 25). For Edwards (1986: 5), the ‘structured antagonism’ in the employment relationship reflected the contradictions employers and workers faced. Employers require ‘commitment and initiative’ from workers but accept that ‘constant supervision is impossible’ (Hyman, 1975: 25). Employers’ dependence on their workforce increases as work processes become more technically complex and work roles become more strategic (*ibid*, p. 25). As Thompson and Vincent (2010) observed

...capital, in order to constantly revolutionize the work process, must seek some level of cooperation from labour. The result is a continuum of possible situationally driven and overlapping worker responses – from resistance to accommodation, compliance and consent (p. 48).

Generally, employers will organise production in such a manner that worker challenges to managerial prerogative are minimised. Despite this, conflict remains ‘inherent within this situation’ as ‘the struggle for control’ is continuous as the ‘social and technical conditions of production’ constantly change (Nolan, 1983: 301). Employers may pay higher wages to encourage workers to expend greater effort but this is ‘a tactical decision’ in the face of competing pressures (*ibid*, p. 302). Market fluctuations force managers to remove restrictive working practices, ones previously regarded as ‘acceptable’ (Terry, 1983: 77). According to Edwards (1995), workers suffered if their employer did not generate a surplus. However, while it might be in workers’ interest that a surplus is created ‘this should not disguise the fact that they are exploited’ (p. 17). To minimise conflict at work, workers’ exploitation must be hidden. Otherwise, ‘If the exploited were to see that they were exploited, they would resent their subjection and threaten social stability’ (Cohen, 1978: 331).

Conflict is not always visible (Thompson, 1989: 244) and takes various forms, both individual and collective (Edwards, 1986). Conflicted employment relationships are most evident when workers go on strike. However, workers resistance is often ‘solitary and hidden’, sometimes expressed as ‘slacking off or intentionally sabotaging work’ (Edwards, 1979: 14). A range of individual worker behaviours, such as absenteeism, quitting, damaging work

equipment and reduced effort, have been viewed as unorganised work conflict (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 34). Going absent can be expressed in terms of individual worker decisions to report sick and the collective ‘mass sickie’ (*ibid*, p. 35). Further, ‘irony, ambivalence, bitching, gossip and cynicism’ have been viewed as ‘covert or hidden forms of resistance’ (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015: 193). Workers’ attendance is explored more fully in Chapter 3. Before then, the following section outlines the relevance of labour process concepts to understand the meaning of workers’ absence from work.

2.3 Braverman and Labour Process Theory

Braverman (1974) developed Marx’s labour process analysis within a twentieth century context, where a shift from traditional factory based manufacturing towards office based work had taken place. Braverman described how capitalism constantly revolutionised the labour process and forms of labour control. Setting the scene for later discussion of SAP implementation within the context of changed workplace control regimes, Braverman’s ‘degradation of work’ thesis and the debates it stimulated are now explored.

Braverman shared Marx’s view that the employment relationship was asymmetrical. The employment contract reflected employers’ dominant position; workers were compelled to sell their labour power and had no control over what was produced or methods used (Hyman, 1975: 22-4). Braverman (1974) accepted that management’s essential function was its control over the labour process. Braverman suggested that, despite full employment, rising living standards and technological improvements, the discontents of the 1960’s represented a fundamental dissatisfaction with work and its organisation (p. 14). Employers put forward various remedies, such as job enlargement, job enrichment, job rotation, team working, partnership, bonus and profit sharing schemes, and new production methods. However, while such strategies might reduce work conflict they did not eradicate it. Braverman stated that managers were not interested in employee welfare and were only concerned with absenteeism, turnover and lost productivity when profitability was threatened (*ibid*, p. 36).

Braverman regarded F. W. Taylor’s ‘scientific management’ as the all-pervasive ‘quintessence of capitalist management’ (Wood and Kelly, 1988: 176). For Braverman, ‘management under capitalism...reached its purest expression under Taylorism’ (*ibid*, p. 177). Taylor (1947) stated that craft workers’ specialist technical skills and knowledge limited managerial control. Aided by managerial incompetence, Taylor believed workers’ ‘slacking’ or ‘soldiering’, led to a ‘morally appalling’ waste of resources, especially time. Taylor abhorred

workers' attempts to regulate the pace of work (Rose, 1988: 26). Viewing trade unions with hostility (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004: 433) and believing that work groups values and norms encouraged soldiering, Taylor sought to 'isolate [workers], as far as was possible, from their workmates' (*ibid*, p. 432). To regain control over work processes and reduce 'inefficiency and arbitrary managerial prerogatives' (Rose, 1988: 28), Taylor sought to redesign jobs so that tasks were broken down into discrete parts, reducing skilled craft-work to unskilled or semi-skilled work. Taylor proposed that the specialist and technical aspects of jobs, the *thinking* part (performed by managers and technical experts), should be separated from the *doing* part (performed by labourers).

Braverman suggested that Taylorism led to a 'degradation' of twentieth century work. By reducing the skills required to complete a job, employers increased their power over workers, and in so doing, achieved their broader aim of increasing workers' exploitation (Spencer, 2000: 224-229). Although, Taylor's scientific management met resistance from some managers (Hyman, 1987: 32) its methods were widely adopted, and as Braverman observed, were extended from manufacturing industries to white collar settings. Automation, new technology and new management techniques led to many workers losing control over their work pace and becoming deskilled as jobs became dull and routine. Many workers felt trapped in jobs where opportunities for creative thinking became more limited (Terkel, 1972). Lukács (1971) observed that Taylorist work processes ate into a worker's 'soul' so that 'even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it' (p. 88). Although Weber (1978) viewed bureaucratic organisation as a rational administrative system, in the absence of counterbalancing positive social relations, workers often found such environments dehumanising (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 16).

2.3.1 Braverman's Critics

Braverman's degradation thesis was critiqued by writers who were also influenced by Marx's analysis (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977) but 'reached different substantive conclusions', particularly regarding the nature of managerial control (Thompson, 1989: 2). For instance, Friedman (1977) suggested that there was no single trend towards direct control as Braverman proposed. As well as practising direct control, managers also pursued 'responsible autonomy' strategies through job enrichment and quality circles, whereby workers are encouraged to say how production can be improved. According to Friedman, management's loosening of direct workplace control increased their dominance as workers' resistance was reduced, (p. 48). The responsible autonomy strategy sought to encourage labour power

flexibility 'by giving workers leeway and encouraging them to adapt to changing situations beneficial to the firm'. This necessitated managers granting 'workers status, authority [and] responsibility' so that their loyalty was won to the organisation's 'ideals ...ideologically' (*ibid*, p. 50).

Burawoy (1979) explained why workers seemingly facilitated their own exploitation, becoming involved in game playing activity which resulted in them unknowingly co-operating with management. Managers 'manufacture consent' through the introduction of piece rates, internal job mobility and collective bargaining. Piece rates led to an illusionary belief that workers were 'making out' as they competed with each other to surpass production targets. Changing over time, shop-floor cultures develop around such behaviour. Eventually, workers become 'sucked into' a 'distinctive set of activities and language' which takes 'on a language of their own' (*ibid*, p. 64).

Historically, Edwards (1979) identified three modes of workplace control. Firstly, from 1880, 'simple control' existed through direct hierarchical organisations. Secondly, emerging around 1900, there was 'technical control' through factory continuous flow production methods. Finally, following 1945, there was 'bureaucratic control' in which relationships between managers and workers were governed by formal rules and procedures that were generated from impersonal bureaucratic structures (pp. 18-22). Bureaucratisation (Weber, 1978) was an essential feature of capitalism, necessary for rational planning and coordinating of economic activity (Thompson, 1989). In large, hierarchical, modern corporations, management control is enforced through 'form[s] of subordination and discipline' (Storey, 1983: 101).

Inspired by Foucault (1977), post-structuralist writers argued that, like Marx, Braverman's work was weakened by its alleged downplaying of workers' *subjectivity*, characterising individuals 'as the personification of economic categories' (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 538). It was claimed that Braverman's 'determinist edifice' viewed workers as lacking agency (*ibid*, p. 546). Instead Knights and Willmott argued that 'contrasting...with previous forms of power' such as labour exploitation, there now existed 'self-disciplining *subjectivity*' in 'modern technologies of power'. Here, individuals constrain themselves (*ibid*, p. 550), attached to their 'own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982: 212).

Potentially leaving labour process theory redundant, other post-modernist writers argued that developments in the modern economy have negated the Marx's law of value (Negri, 1987; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009). For instance, Hardt and Negri (2000) argued that

'modernization' represented by Taylorist and Fordist production methods had 'come to an end' (p. 285) and was replaced by 'informationalization', where service and information technology industries dominate economies. Hardt and Negri extended Foucault's (1977) idea of the disciplinary society into 'a 'society of control', wherein 'the whole social body is conscripted and consumed within the machinery of power' (Thompson, 2005: 77). For Hardt and Negri (2000), 'informationalization' has led to fundamental changes in the quality and nature of labour with implications for how work is organised: 'In an earlier era workers learned how to act like machines both inside and outside the factory... Today we increasingly think like computers' (*ibid*, p.291). Hardt and Negri suggested that computerisation led to the emergence of 'immaterial labour', where labour has become more abstract and less concrete, removing workers further from the object of their labour.

Earlier, Negri (1987) suggested that the working class was recomposing itself into a new class that was able to act 'directly across the entire span of the working day', comprising both production time and reproduction time which were 'now in parallel and on equal terms' (p. 68). It was claimed that labour was 'no longer reducible to a variable part of capital' (Mandarini, 2005: 205). According to Negri (1987), the 'mass worker' was being replaced by the 'social worker', representing 'socialised labour power', that was 'abstract, social and mobile' to the degree 'that it subjectivises itself around its own concept of time, and a temporal constitution of its own' (*ibid*, p. 61). Hardt and Negri (2000) argued that new technologies allowed workers to use their brains and to network with others to create value, ensuring that they were no longer dependent on employers for work (p. 294).

2.3.2 Discussion

Thompson (2005) argued Hardt and Negri theorisation was 'theoretically and empirically absurd' as 'capitalist forms of ownership and control still provide the context in which commodities are exchanged' (p. 83). This affects all work organisations, even those in the high skill knowledge economy. Thompson (1989) noted the weakness of theoretical stances which counterposed one form of control against another. A wide range of management techniques and organisational forms are utilised to ensure 'overall' control of the labour process (p. 115). To make profits, managers use whichever strategy is the most effective. The labour process is the means to an end rather than an end in itself. As Hyman (2001) observed, while often producing contradictory responses, management had multifaceted roles, 'coordinating and planning a complex and often baffling productive operation', simultaneously acting as 'agents of discipline, control and disruption to employees' established status' (p. 185).

Edwards (1984) argued that employers organised production ‘to minimize the workers’ opportunities for resistance and even alter worker’s perceptions of the desirability of opposition’ (p. 93). Employer control strategies, whether in Edwards terms, ‘simple’, ‘technical’, or ‘bureaucratic’, reflect different responses to different labour markets and different product market demands. As Edwards stated, ‘Their goal remains profits: their strategies aim at establishing structures of control at work’ (*ibid*, p. 93).

Although accepting that ‘real changes are taking place’, Smith and Thompson (1998: 552) suggested that the ‘new paradigms’ which were transforming the contemporary workplace, such as flexible specialisation, post-Fordism, lean production and new management techniques, did not invalidate labour process theory, ‘merely’ it was ‘outdated’ and required renewing. New ways of working placed an emphasis on workers’ commitment and ‘working smarter not harder’ (*ibid*, p. 555). However, lean production techniques (Womack, Roos and Jones, 1990) encompass many traditional elements of Taylorism. Instead of decentralising workers’ control over the labour process, lean systems centralised control. Rather than liberating workers, new management systems and technologies have led to workers feeling more disempowered, more controlled and more exploited (Danford, 1996, 1999; Stewart, Richardson, Danford, Murphy, Richardson and Wass, 2009).

Further, workers are now subject to increased scrutiny at work. In call centres, the ‘assembly line in the head’ (Taylor and Bain, 1999: 107), Taylorist methods and techniques are prevalent (Baldry, Bain and Taylor, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 2004). Call centres control, monitor and measure every aspect of workers’ performance, even toilet breaks (Bain, Mulvey, Watson, Taylor and Gall, 2002). Also, ‘McDonaldization’, emphasising rational efficiency, calculability, predictability and control (Ritzer, 1993), has led to workers becoming deskilled in dehumanising conditions (Ritzer, 1996: 294).

To conclude this section, given the thesis’ focus on trade union responses to strict SAP implementation, it should be noted that Braverman (1974) has faced criticism ‘for a failure to account’ for the significance of workers’ resistance to management control (Thompson, 1989: 213). The strength of Braverman’s analysis was its emphasis on the control aspect of the labour process, locating it within the changes brought about by monopoly capitalism (Littler, 1982: 34). However, Braverman has been criticised for his ‘failure to discuss actual patterns of worker resistance’, ignoring ‘the inevitable contradictions within all strategies of control’ (*ibid*, p. 34).

Likewise explanations which suggest that ‘new forms of control’ based on commitment have neglected ‘the process of contestation’ (Smith and Thompson, 1998: 559). Hardt and Negri (2000) claimed that capitalism had been transformed, shifting the focus of their analysis away from production processes to new settings where they argued traditional employer-employee relations were obsolete; if workers no longer face exploitation, they no longer needed to resist. Instead, an underlying assumption of the thesis is that the employment relationship remains exploitative and that conflict, although often hidden, remains an essential feature of the contemporary workplace. Accordingly, the thesis seeks to restore the ‘missing subject’ of workers’ agency to labour process study (Thompson, 1989: 237). Thus, the dyads of resistance and control remain relevant to comprehending changing employer-employee relations as ‘new areas of accumulation’ are ‘constantly innovated within capitalism through its international expansion and technological dynamism’ (Thompson and Smith, 2009a: 260).

While the Foucauldian frame of reference provides insights by emphasising subjectivity, the thesis is based on the premise that objective and subjective factors intersect in a dialectical way. Rather than defining subjectivity in post-structuralist terms as *self-identity* (how individual workers in particular workplaces feel about or perceive their situation), the thesis asserts that workers’ behaviour is best understood with reference to its interconnection with the wider political economy.

2.4 Theorising Work Attendance

This section explores the significance of workers attendance and non-attendance at work.

2.4.1 Workers’ Absence and Labour Indeterminacy

As stated previously, the employer-employee relationship is indeterminate; when employers purchase workers’ labour power they have to ensure that they transfer workers’ capacity to work into actual effort so that over the course of the working day, sufficient output is produced of the desired quality, without waste (Hyman, 1975: 24). Smith (2006) introduced the concept of the ‘double indeterminacy’ of labour power in relation to workers’ ‘mobility power’ when, frustrating production, they quit jobs. Similarly, as Taylor *et al* (2010) suggested, it may be possible to view workers’ attendance at work as an additional aspect of labour indeterminacy: ‘After all, employers’ ability to realise workers’ potential to create value is predicated upon their actual attendance, which is partial, contingent and cannot be taken for granted’ (p. 273).

When employers award sick pay, labour indeterminacy is heightened as sick workers' wages continue to be paid. Employers continue to purchase workers' labour power but workers are not present to take part in the labour process and are thus absent from the process of creating value. Simply put, when workers are absent from work, employers cannot exploit their labour power. Workers' absence from work signifies unplanned, additional costs and labour utilisation inefficiencies which employers are forced to address through absence control strategies.

2.4.2 Work Intensification, Workers' and Capitalists' Time

In recent decades, capital accumulation pressures have led to work intensification and extensification (Green, 2001). As Kelly (2005) observed, 'employers have successfully sought to squeeze more effort out of employees...both within the working day, leading to complaints of being pressured and overworked, and through extending the working day itself' (p. 289).

Earlier, Marx's (1990) theory of surplus value suggested that profitability lay in the capitalist's ability to control workers' time. Thompson (1967) observed that workers 'experience a distinction between the employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see that it is not wasted' (p. 61). As previously stated, Marx defined value as socially necessary labour-time (Harvey, 2010a: 133). Marx (1990) suggested that the time workers spend at work is the sum of the time required to replace the value of their labour power *and* that taken to produce surplus value. According to Marx,

Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist (*ibid*, p. 342).

The time workers spend at work is contested by labour and capital. Typically, workers want to work the minimum hours necessary to satisfy their needs, while employers wish them to work beyond this to create surplus value (Hyman, 1975). As Marx (1990) stated,

The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and, where possible, to make two working days out of one. On the other hand ... the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length (*ibid*, p. 344).

To survive, competition between employers forced them to seek ways to exploit workers further.

Marx understood the importance of workers' opposition to the lengthening of the working day (Harvey, 2010a: 138). Paradoxically, while factory legislation limited the working day, greater labour intensification ensued as 'capital threw itself with all its might...into the production of relative surplus-value' (Marx, 1990: 534). As there were limits to how far the working day could be extended, mechanisation increased labour productivity, dramatically raising output. Full labour power utilisation required 'a closer filling up of the pores of the working day' (*ibid*, p. 534). For example, a ten hour day contained greater labour power than was previously expended in a twelve hour day. As Beynon (1999) observed, the central aspect of intensification was ensuring that 'more labour is squeezed out in a given time' or that 'the porosity of the working day is closed up as more labour gets squeezed into it' (p. 109).

As employers purchase workers' labour capacity for a fixed time period, they must ensure every minute is used fully productive (Harvey, 2010a: 142). As Marx (1990) stated, 'moments are the elements of profit' (p. 352). Marx (2008) observed how 'the pendulum of the clock' became crucial to measuring workers' activity:

'Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time's carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day' (p. 57).

Time shifted from its 'qualitative, variable, flowing nature' into 'an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'' (Lukács, 1971: 91). Time discipline becomes an essential feature of the nineteenth century factory system (Thompson, 1967; Pollard, 1968). Employers viewed any time spent at work not producing value as unproductive and expected workers to come to work each day and perform with the same 'strength, health and freshness' (Marx, 1990: 343). However, Marx's study of factory inspector reports highlighted labour intensification's harmful effects on workers' health (*ibid*, p. 542). Mechanisation resulted in work becoming routine and repetitive, leaving workers bored and with limited opportunities for creativity and self-expression. According to Marx, factory work weakened the worker's 'nervous system to the uttermost...and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity'. Although it lightened work, mechanisation became 'an instrument of torture' as it did not 'free the worker from the work', instead it 'deprives' it 'of all content' (*ibid*, p. 548).¹

¹ For Marx (1844), when workers become wage labourers they experience alienation, not only do they become separated from their labour and lose job control, as work is an essential human activity, they become separated from themselves. Their labour becomes *external* to them, negatively affecting their life spirit; work 'mortifies his body and ruins his mind'. As soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague' (*ibid*).

Working time remains a present-day conflict issue. In the 1980s, Conservative Governments' deregulation policies removed statutory protection and weakened collective bargaining arrangements which regulated work hours (Deakin and Morris, 2005: 307). Although the European Parliament's Working Time Regulations provided some protection, the time workers spend at work remains highly contested. Since the 1990s, 'bell to bell' working has become common in some sectors of the economy (Danford, 1998). Employers' refusal to pay workers for travel and cleaning up time, lunch or toilet breaks represents managerial attempts to reduce the porosity of the working day; ensuring workers are paid only for the hours that they are directly engaged in work activity (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 62).

2.4.3 Work Attendance and Discipline

There is a temporal aspect to the capitalist mode of production (Jessop, 2003). Time is carefully measured and regulated as a result of its connection to value creation (Harvey, 2010a). As Benjamin Franklin famously stated, "time is money". Industrial capitalism introduced new ways of working which, necessitating regular attendance brought about a shift in working time measurement and workers' attitude to work attendance (Thompson, 1967). Previously, in feudal or early capitalist societies, there was a notion of working time as 'task orientation' (p. 60). Workers' activity was governed by the rhythms of the seasons and by the weather. In early capitalism's putting-out system, workers worked at home, allowing them to control the labour process (Callinicos, 1983: 99). Engels observed that handloom weavers

'...did not need to overwork; they did no more than they chose to do, and yet earned what they needed. They had leisure for healthful work in garden or field, work which, in itself, was recreation for them' (Engels, 1844: 17).

Instead, under industrial capitalism, time became a 'currency' which was 'not passed but spent' (Thompson, 1967: 61). Whilst previously work was 'irregular, subject to the rhythms of nature and the needs of the particular task' it moved to becoming 'constant and measured, working to the whistle...until a task is completed' (Swain, 2012: 39). The labour process was 'progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations', resulting in the worker losing contact with the product of their labour with their work 'reduced to the mechanical repetition of a specialised set of actions' (Lukács, 1971: 88). As mechanisation and rationalisation intensified, the time necessary to complete work tasks was transformed 'from a merely empirical average figure to an objectively calculable work-stint that confronts the worker as a fixed and established reality' (*ibid*, p. 88).

Since the Industrial Revolution, the need to win and re-win workers' acceptance of the need to attend work on a regular and punctual basis has been a perennial employer problem. Workers may accept that they have a general duty to attend work, but actual attendance is something employers cannot take for granted (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Taylor *et al.*, 2010). The observance of 'Saint Monday', whereby workers customarily took Mondays off work, continued throughout the nineteenth century (Thompson, 1967: 73-4). Employers encountered difficulties recruiting a reluctant workforce into the new factories which were often linked to prisons, workhouses or orphanages (Pollard, 1968: 189-192). Once workers entered the factories, employers had further difficulties maintaining a disciplined workforce. Often fines and corporal punishment were used to force acceptance of factory life's rhythms (*ibid.*, pp. 216-226). Employers used the 'proverbial stick' and 'proverbial carrot' to create 'a new ethos of work order and discipline' (Storey, 1983: 218). Until the Masters and Servants Act's (1823) repeal in 1875, absconding from work and refusing to perform work duties were punishable by three months' imprisonment (Deakin and Morris, 2005: 21).

Establishing a strong work ethic necessitated workers accepting 'in some degree, the 'rightness' of the prevailing order' (Storey, 1983: 100-101). Repression was not sustainable in the long term. Managerial prerogative had to be accepted to facilitate the bringing together of previous free labour in purposive activity, to reduce costs and create profit (*ibid.*: 100-102). Also, at a time when there was an expansion in the use of clocks and watches, the early school system and non-conformist religion instilled the idea of time discipline amongst workers (Thompson 1967). However, while 'the calculation and commodification of working time' was necessary for 'the imposition of work discipline', it remained central to workers' struggles over the working day's length throughout the twentieth century (Arrowsmith and Sisson, 2000: 287-8), encapsulated in "fair pay for a fair day's work" demands. While employers have instilled in workers an acceptance of their duty to attend work regularly and punctually, 'the employers' victory was never complete' and 'workers' time discipline has remained partial and problematic' (Noon and Blyton, 2007: 83).

2.4.4 Modern Work and Working Time

In the 1980s, futurologists speculated that technological advances would introduce a new work paradigm that abolished menial tasks, increasing leisure time (Hatherley, 2012). However, in 'post-bureaucratic' organizations, workers are envisaged as working for 'the market or its alter ego: the customer' rather than 'the rigid regulatory framework of the organization' (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson and Lundberg, 2011: 191). In the 'time environment' of work,

‘Time is no longer a yardstick for work – it is instead something to fight against, something to be vanquished’ (*ibid*, p. 192).

Lean production has led to ‘workers’ time and action’ being more restricted (Klein, 1991: 62). According to Fleming (2013), contemporary workplaces foster ‘a specific type of anomie – the feeling that one is languishing in a dead-end job and leading a life not worth living’ (p. 52). In modern capitalism, the boundaries between work and non-work time have become increasingly elastic. Over the last thirty years ‘the ever-increasing working day has turned into an ever-longer working week’ (*ibid*, p. 51). Although average hours worked has fallen since the 1980s, many workers work long hours (Philpot, 2010). Long hour cultures are prevalent in organisations which operate on a 24/7 basis to cope with increased competition (Burke, 2009: 167-168). Many public sector workers reported that they were too busy to take holidays (Macauley, 2014). Experiencing technology overload, low levels of panic and guilt (Houghton-Jan, 2008), email and mobile phone users are in ‘perpetual contact’ with their employer ‘regardless of time and location’ (Bittman, Brown and Wajcman, 2009: 673). In one survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents spent, on average, two hours and 18 minutes each day working on mobile devices after work (*Working Mums Magazine*, 2012).

Crary (2013) stated that the average North American adult’s sleep was 6.5 hours each night, falling from 10 hours at the beginning of the twentieth century (p. 11). 24/7 living was symptomatic of ‘a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning. It is a time that no longer passes, beyond clock time’ (*ibid*, p. 8). For Crary, this ‘renders plausible, even normal, the idea of working without pause without limits’ (*ibid*, pp. 9-10); in ‘the globalist neoliberal paradigm, sleeping is for losers’ (*ibid*, p. 14). Far removed from Semler’s (2004) vision of work being a ‘Seven Day Weekend’ where workers had ‘freedom, liberation and choice’ (Fleming, 2013: 53), long working hours, technology overload and sleep deprivation, typify ‘overflowing’ work extensification (Jarvis and Pratt, 2006) and the ‘boundaryless’ (Moen, Lam, Ammons and Kelly, 2013) of the ‘new social economy’ (Sayer and Walker, 1992). Workers in high status stressful jobs (Schieman *et al*, 2006) experience time strain, ‘the felt difficulty of fulfilling time obligations’ (Moen *et al*, 2013: 81). Balancing work and non-work activities, workers have to manage ‘the multiple clockworks of the lives’. Previously, employers controlled the time when workers were at work, and workers were free to choose how they spent their non-work time. Now, workers ‘must decide when they are *not* working; most of the time they sense pressure to engage in or at least

be available for job-related tasks as the logics governing their behavior have shifted' (*ibid*, p. 82).

The increased use of flexitime breaks down the rigidity of working at a specific time and place. Rather than 'fixed shifts unchanging from month to month, the working day is a mosaic of people working on different times, on more individualized schedules' (Sennett, 1999: 57). Although flexible working has been envisioned as the 'liberation of working time', workers have become subject to stricter electronic monitoring, ensuring that they are fully productive at all times (*ibid*, p. 58-9) and not 'cyberloafing' (Wagner, Barnes, Lim and Ferris, 2012). Previously, when workers ended their work shift they removed themselves from the labour process until the next working day. But now, when a worker reads an email while travelling to work, their labour becomes available to their employer. However, although capital's accumulation logic seeps through into 'every waking moment of an employee's day' (Ross, 2004: 52) contradictions emerge. While workers respond to flexible working with increased effort (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010) or adopt adaptive strategies (Moen *et al*, 2013: 83), the potential for resistance emerges. As Berg *et al* (2004) observed, collectively organised workers can make gains from flexible working (pp. 346-7).

2.5 Discussion

The *time*, *timing* and *tempo* of work (Adam, 1990) are all inter-related and shape workers' experiences of their working time and more broadly their working lives (Noon and Blyton, 2007). Within *Capital*, Marx (1990) explained how commodification and valorisation transformed the labour process, identifying labour power as the source of value and surplus value. Accumulation pressures drove employers to extend the working day and intensify work, harming workers' health. Since the nineteenth century working day struggles, the time workers spend at work has been contested. Experiencing work intensification and extensification (Green, 2001), workers are now required 'to expend more effort and to work longer hours in jobs that are often less secure' (Kelly, 2005: 299). Further, in the face of increased global competition and service demands, employers have sought greater flexibility regarding the structure of the working day and shift patterns (Carnoy, 2002: 134-5; Hinrichs *et al*, 1991: 3).

However, employers cannot take for granted workers' motivation to work. Monetary incentives are commonly offered to gain workers' commitment. The HRM literature emphasises the importance of job satisfaction, enrichment, mutual gains, and work 'autonomy, mastery and purpose' as important motivating factors (Atzeni, 2014b: 164). Nevertheless, while modern

workplaces have undergone massive transformation and many jobs have become more skilled much work remains low skilled and routine (Jakopovich, 2014: 11-15). Although workers' skill levels have increased, there is no evidence that workers are exercising greater control over their work.

Within capitalism, exploitation of labour power remains crucial. The employment relationship is indeterminate as the employment contract does not specify how much effort workers will expend. Employers still face the perennial problem of transforming workers' capacity to work into actual output (Hyman, 1975: 24). This remains management's essential function. Like quitting, workers' absence for work presents employers with a 'double' indeterminacy problem (Smith, 2006) as their labour power cannot be used, even although wages are paid. This becomes acute when productivity pressures are greater. To survive, employers must ensure their employees are at work and fully productive. However, as discussed previously, managerial attempts to exercise greater control at the frontier of control often fosters resistance (Edwards, 1979: 16). Working time has become a 'contested terrain in the reorganisation of post-industrial society' (Sirianni, 1991: 232). As will be seen later in the thesis, the introduction of strict attendance management policies led to trade union mobilisation to resist their implementation.

2.6 Summary

This chapter outlined the relevance of labour process theory to the thesis, including key concepts such as labour indeterminacy, the structured antagonism between capital and labour, the frontier of control, the effort bargain, competitive accumulation and work intensification. Then, it reviewed Marx's writings on the labour process, Braverman's (1974) 'degradation of work' thesis and subsequent debates, considering how management control regimes attempt to achieve control over labour to facilitate the creation of surplus value. Of relevance to the thesis, is labour process theory's 'capacity to connect the workplace to a broader political economy' (Thompson and Smith, 2009b: 923). The focus on the labour process illuminates the various forms of managerial control regimes, enabling a critical appraisal of management purpose (Hyman, 1982: 93). Further, this chapter located employers' concerns about workers' absence within wider aspects of productivity and time discipline. Next, the following chapter reviews the contemporary attendance literature and examines employer attendance management strategies. It considers how productivity and cost pressures have forced public sector employers to take action to control workers' attendance.

Chapter 3: The Sickness Absence Phenomenon

3.1 Introduction

The absence literature straddles several academic disciplines including economics, sociology, psychology, social-psychology, organisational theory and management science. Edwards and Scullion (1984) stated that many studies are ‘managerialist’ (p. 549). Often, different disciplines attempt to find causal links, promoting their respective cures (Chadwick-Jones, 1981). According to Chadwick-Jones,

...health specialists will advocate health programmes; management experts tend to advise creative leadership activities, supervisory controls, or job enrichment; psychologists suggest reinforcement-learning and behaviour modification methods translated into monetary incentives of various kinds (*ibid*, p. 258).

However, Evans and Walters (2002) stated that ‘very little research’ has been undertaken into workers’ perceptions of absence policies (p. 96). Underpinning the thesis is the view that a deeper theoretical understanding of sickness absence, and its meaning for both workers and employers is required, one that takes account of the conflicted nature of the employment relationship and changing managerial control strategies. Nevertheless, before exploring further the sociological literature on workers’ absence which, rooted in labour process theory (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), was introduced in Chapter 2, alternative economic and psychological perspectives are examined as they permeate managerial and government sickness absence discourse. Then, the factors which drive the shift to stricter SAPs are explored. Next, consideration is given to whether government and employer concerns about workers’ sickness absence constitute a ‘moral panic’ (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 271). Finally, public sector sickness absence, employer strategies and the impact of modern work on workers’ health are examined.

3.2. Economic Perspectives

3.2.1 Absence Costs

Traditionally, economists have focused on the *costs* of absence to organisations and the economy, viewing sickness absence as a measure of lost effort or lost labour productivity (Olsson, 2009: 208). According to Bevan and Hayday (1998), sickness absence results in lost output, disruption, reduced efficiency, reduced quality and lost opportunities (p. 1). Lost output occurs when absent workers are not replaced or their work is undertaken by ‘less efficient’ ones (Allen, 1981: 78-9). Unexpected absence was seen as diverting managerial resources from ‘more productive endeavours’ (*ibid*, pp. 78-9). In some sectors of the economy, absence

accounted for a 5 per cent reduction in available working time (Bevan, 2003: 5) and 9 per cent of annual UK employers' salary costs (*ibid*, p.11). There are claims that sickness absence is the largest single source of lost productivity (Baker-McClear *et al*, 2010: 312).

Dilts, Deitsch and Paul (1985) argued that the elimination of 'excessive absenteeism' was 'a necessary first step to ensure a more productive society' (p. *iv*). According to these authors, while society's growth and development was previously constrained by 'mankind's...mastery of the physical sciences', future progress was limited by a failure to 'motivate and direct the workforce effectively' (*ibid*, p.11). Similarly, Abramovitz (1981) claimed that, in the United States in the 1970s, declining work effort, 'symptomized by absenteeism' (p.7), contributed to falling productivity, threatening welfare spending and the consensus which supported the mixed economy (*ibid*, pp 5-7). The OECD (2003) suggested that low and falling labour utilisation was the reason for many European countries' poor economic growth. According to Bonato and Lusinyan (2004), low labour utilisation was caused by workers' sickness absence and union negotiated shorter working weeks. European average sickness absence levels, averaging 2.8 per cent between 1995 and 2003, concealed wide differences between countries (6 per cent in the Netherlands, 5.2 per cent in Sweden and 3.9 per cent in the UK) (p. 4).

In 1987 the CBI estimated that sickness absence cost the British economy £5 billion per annum (CBI, 1987), a figure that rose steadily until 2010 when it reached £17 billion before falling to £14 billion in 2013 (Table 3.1). *Personnel Today* (2017) reported that annual absence costs were £18 billion.

Table 3.1: Sickness Absence Costs

SURVEY YEAR	ABSENCE COSTS (billions)	SOURCE
1987	£5 bn	CBI (1987)
2001	£10.7 bn; £12 bn	CBI/PPP (2001), CIPD (2001)
2004	£11.6 bn	CBI (2004)
2005	£12.2 bn	CBI (2005)
2006	£13.2 bn	CBI (2006)
2008	£13.2 bn	CBI (2008: 16)
2009	£14 bn	Vaughan-Jones and Barham (2009)
2011	£17 bn	CBI (2011)
2012	£17 bn	CBI (2012)
2013	£14 bn	CBI (2013)
2014	£16 bn	<i>Personnel Today</i> (2015)
2017	£18 bn	<i>Personnel Today</i> (2017)

The annual CIPD absence surveys provide estimates of average employee costs (Table 3.2). Although yearly fluctuations are evident between 2004 and 2016, the general trend indicates workers' average sickness absence costs have been reducing since 2009. There was a large fall in the average employee costs (per annum) between 2009 (£692) and 2010 (£600). Although this figure increased in 2011 (£673), in 2015 it fell sharply (£554), reaching its lowest level in 2016 (£522).

Table 3.2: UK Sickness Absence Costs 2004-16 (CIPD Surveys)

SURVEY YEAR	EMPLOYEE ABSENCE COSTS (pa)	SOURCE
2004	£588	CIPD (2004a: 4)
2005	£601	CIPD (2005: 3)
2006	£598	CIPD (2006: 2)
2007	£659	CIPD (2007: 2)
2008	£666	CIPD (2008: 2)
2009	£692	CIPD (2009: 2).
2010	£600	CIPD (2010: 4)
2011	£673	CIPD (2011: 6)
2012	£600	CIPD (2012a: 5)
2013	£595	CIPD (2013: 6)
2014	£609	CIPD (2014: 6)
2015	£554	CIPD (2015: 4)
2016	£522	CIPD (2016: 4)

3.2.2 Economic Causes

Economists have attempted to explain individual worker decisions to go sick. In the neo-classical labour supply model, absenteeism was seen as a conscious economic decision (Thomas, 1980). Thomas accepted that illness affected attendance, but suggested that there was a discretionary element to most absence decisions. Going absent was a marginal economic labour supply decision as individuals' 'decide daily on the work or non-work alternative, depending on which gives the highest utility' (Andren, 2004: 3).

Allen's (1981) 'labour-leisure choice' theory claimed that individuals make rational 'cost-benefit' choices about reporting sick. It was suggested that the need to work is viewed as competing with other alternatives. In most jobs there is little flexibility regarding when work is performed. Working patterns are often not adjusted to suit individual workers. Allen hypothesised that absences allowed workers to increase their leisure time, or reallocate the work/leisure balance across time, without reducing working hours. By going sick, a worker

offset the need to renegotiate their contract or search for a new job (Allen, 1983: 381). However, going sick imposed a cost to workers in terms of promotion or lost wages. Assuming that workers went absent when the benefit of doing so outweighed costs, Allen (1981) suggested that employers could reduce absenteeism by making work schedules more flexible and by increasing the cost of going sick, through recruitment screening, changing occupational sick pay (OSP) and attendance bonus schemes (pp. 77-78).

Barmby, Sessions and Treble (1994) highlighted the effect of 'efficiency wages' which are paid higher than the market equilibrium wage to encourage effort and reduce absenteeism. Workers with higher wages have more to lose if they quit their job and cannot find similarly paid work elsewhere. Barmby *et al* claimed that 'shirking' and absence costs could be reduced if wage rates were kept higher than sick pay rates.

For Carlin (1989), 'shirking' was those activities that were 'known to be *improper*' by employers and employees which imposed 'relatively modest current period costs' on organisations (p. 63). A broad range of behaviours were encapsulated within this definition, including lateness, reporting sick when well, and excessive coffee breaks and personal telephone calls. Utilising a 'games rhetoric approach', Carlin explained why some employers tolerated 'shirking' and others did not. Carlin suggested that when the costs of dismissing and replacing workers were high 'a rational employer will not punish ordinary shirking' (*ibid*, p. 72). However, Lazear (1981) suggested that employers could deal with 'shirking' by acquiring a 'tough' reputation through dismissal (Carlin, 1989: 72). According to Ireland (1989: 75) when viewed as a fringe benefit, in lieu of wages, certain types of 'shirking' may increase organisational productivity. High status workers with higher productivity were subject to different work rules (e.g. over personal use of the office photocopier) than lower status workers: 'In such a context, an attempt to treat shirking equally-regardless of worker productivity-would eliminate some of the advantages of status and the ability to demonstrate status' (*ibid*, p. 78).

Thus, managers wishing to influence sickness absence rates faced a dilemma. Cracking down on skilled workers' absences could result in those workers reducing their effort. However, treating them differentially could create resentment amongst other workers. Pfiefer (2010: 69) suggested that, compared to lower paid workers, higher paid workers took fewer days off work as they did not feel underpaid.

Although accepting that illness prevented workers attending work, Thomas (1980) suggested that most absences were discretionary, concluding that earnings related sickness

benefit spurred workers to take certified absences (p. 58). Scoppa (2010: 503) stated that ‘moral hazard’ occurred when workers were ‘induced to take days off, gaining a wage without providing any effort’. Barmby, Orme, and Treble (1991) suggested that the higher sick pay was, the longer the absence was likely to be. Askildsen, Bratberg and Nilsen (2002) questioned ‘whether generous insurance not only compensate for sickness and disability but also induce such outcomes’ (p. 1). Except for serious illnesses, Scoppa (2010) argued that absence costs should be borne by workers rather by employees, employers or taxpayers. The public policy and managerial implication of many economic studies, that a tougher approach to workers’ sickness absence was necessary, found expression in government policies and management action.

3.3 Psychological Perspectives

Similar to economic theorists, some writers from a psychological perspective have suggested that workers’ attendance decisions are based on individual desire to maximise desired outcomes (Nicholson, 1977; Steers and Rhodes, 1978).

Hill and Trist’s (1953, 1955) ‘adjustment to work’ model viewed accidents at work, quitting and ‘voluntary’ absence as individual reactions to stressful work situations. Quitting was a permanent withdrawal from an organisation while absenteeism was temporary. After examining Rotherham steel workers’ work records, Hill and Trist (1953) suggested that ‘accident prone’ workers were also more likely to go absent. For Hill and Trist, the quality of the worker’s relationship with their employer affected the propensity to go absent and to be involved in accidents. They argued that ‘absence cultures’ developed within organisations when new employees learned workplace norms regarding how absence was managed. Accepting Hill and Trist conceptualisation of absenteeism as a temporary withdrawal from work, Knox (1961) suggested that absentees were a transitional group between regular attendees and leavers. Absenteeism was seen as an intermediate condition between integration and separation (p. 426).

However, Nichols (1994) suggested that Hill and Trist’s theorisation blamed accident victims and failed to consider the underlying reasons why work accidents occurred. Studies (Castle, 1956, Beaumont, 1979) failed to support Hill and Trist’s hypothesis that there was a link between accidents and absenteeism. Despite this, Hill and Trist’s insights have influenced organisational theory, for instance regarding how workplace socialisation created absence cultures (Nicholson, 1977: 233).

To enable it to be tackled, later studies attempted to identify the single cause of absence (Evans and Walters, 2002: 29). Porter and Steers (1973) suggested that there was a strong

relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism and quitting. Arising from job dissatisfaction, Porter and Steers' 'pain-avoidance' model viewed absenteeism as a flight from the workplace. It was claimed that satisfied workers were less likely to leave. Nicholson (1977: 233) doubted whether the links between job satisfaction and attendance were clearly established. Evans and Walter (2002: 29) accepted that job satisfaction was a factor affecting attendance but it was not *the* single causal factor.

Rather than offer single causal explanations, other writers have put forward multi-variate explanations (Nicholson, 1977; Rhodes and Steer, 1978). For instance, Nicholson (1997) attempted to explain both absence and attendance, observing that 'most people, most of the time' attend work regularly on 'automatic pilot', and 'the search for the causes of absence is a search for those factors which disturb the regularity of attendance' (*ibid*, p. 242). Before going absent, workers overcame an attendance 'inertia'; normally they 'attend work regularly without any conscious decision-making' until events forced them to make choices. Nicholson claimed that attendance levels were affected by the extent to which workers depended 'upon the regularities of organizational life' (*ibid*, p. 246). Several factors determined an individual's organisational attachment such as their personal characteristics, orientation to work, work involvement and the nature of the employment relationship (*ibid* pp. 246-9). Nicholson proposed an absence-attendance continuum and the interplay of factors predicted absence frequency across occupational groups (*ibid*, pp. 250-52).

Steers and Rhodes (1978) rejected the view that absenteeism and turnover shared common antecedents, and was primarily caused by job dissatisfaction. They stated that work attendance was related to '(a) an employee's motivation to attend and (b) an employee's ability to attend' (*ibid*, p. 392). Motivation was influenced by workers' affective responses to the job situation and various internal and external 'pressures to attend' (*ibid*, p. 397). Thus, it was important how workers felt about factors such as job scope, role stress, work group size, leader style, co-worker relations and promotion opportunities.

Steers and Rhodes made a distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' absence (*ibid*, p. 400). Even when an individual wanted to come to work and was highly motivated to do so, 'unavoidable' random factors such as illness, accidents, and transport problems limited attendance (*ibid*, p. 398). While some factors affecting workers' decisions and ability to come to work (such as their health) were beyond their control, others (such as organisational factors) were not. However, certain factors affected attendance more than others; one worker 'may be intrinsically motivated' to come to work 'because of a challenging job', while another 'may

have a distasteful job' yet attends work for financial reasons: 'Both employees would attend, but for somewhat different reasons' (*ibid*, p. 401).

Although Steers and Rhodes (1978) work stimulated further research (Brooke, 1986), the model's complexity limited studies (Burton, Lee and Holton, 2002: 162). Later, introducing 'equity and exchange' theory, Rhodes and Steers (1990) developed their model by stating that individuals expect a fair exchange between what they bring to a job (e.g. skills, knowledge, commitment) and reward (e.g. pay, benefits, job satisfaction). When they feel they are getting less than they put in, they reduce their input by giving less of their time and go absent.

Implying that managers should focus on conscious voluntary absence decisions rather than involuntary absences (for reasons outwith the worker's control), Steers and Rhodes' work have influenced management practice (Torrington, Hall and Taylor, 2005: 320-322). Erwin and Iverson (1995: 14) suggested that organisations should address those factors which influenced voluntary' absence, such as job design and work environment. However, psychological approaches which focus on individual morale or motivation have been criticised for downplaying the significance of 'genuine', health related and unavoidable sickness (Bevan, 2003: 19). Ill health is believed to be a significant cause of long-term sickness absence (James, Cunningham and Dibben, 2002: 84). Simply put, most workers go sick because they are ill.

Chadwick-Jones's (1981) social-psychological approach attempted to overcome the limitations of psychological theories which viewed absenteeism as an individual worker's response to their work environment. Absenteeism was viewed as a complex form of social exchange between work groups and management, determined by workplace and organisational norms, rather than individual attitudes or motivation. Absence levels were an aspect of the informal contract between workers and their employers ('part of the package'); 'to reach agreement on a new absence norm' required 'concessions, offers and counter-offers between management, unions and employee representatives' (p. 261). If management removed the 'benefit' of reporting sick, without offering a *quid pro quo*, they faced union opposition as this would be seen as an attempt to alter the employer-employee balance of exchange (*ibid* p. 252). In similar terms, work and organisational psychologists identified workers' perceptions of unfair treatment (Boer de, Bakker, Syroit, and Schaufeli, 2002), high performance work practices and burnout (Kroon, Voorde van de and Veldhoven van, 2009) as factors which affected attendance. According to Virtanen, Vahtera, Nakari, Pentti and Kivimaki (2004), mutual rights and responsibilities with respect to sickness absence were part of the *psychological contract* between employer and employees. While core employees received

welfare state benefits and protection, workers in flexible and precarious jobs experienced difficulties accessing such rights. Virtanen *et al* suggested that workers' 'sick role' and absence behaviour was affected by their labour market position. Thus, workers' sickness absence was viewed as 'a health-related activity which is constructed in social situations' (*ibid*, p. 1226).

3.4 Sociological Explanations

Blue Monday, how I hate Blue Monday
Got to work like a slave all day (Fats Domino, 1956)

Behrend (1951) proposed a 'Blue Monday' index which showed that workers' absence from work peaked at the start of the week. This finding contradicted Baldamus and Behrend's (1950) hypothesis that, 'owing to cumulative fatigue' absence 'should be expected to increase from Monday to Friday' (p. 831). Instead, Baldamus and Behrend found that the opposite occurred and concluded that morale rather than fatigue might be responsible for higher post-weekend absence (Vahtera, Kivimäki and Pentti, 2001). Both Baldamus (1957) and Behrend (1957) conceived of the concept of the 'effort bargain', suggesting that 'Workers will have an upper limit to the amount of exertion they will put out and employers a lower limit to the level of exertion that they will tolerate without firing a worker' (pp. 505-6).

Behrend stated that in workplaces there was 'concealed bargaining about effort intensity' and postulated that if 'more output means more effort' it was 'possible to conclude an effort bargain' where the worker agrees to increase their output in return for higher wages (*ibid*, p. 506). Baldamus (1957) put forward the idea that workers were able to exploit tight labour market conditions through restricting 'output, working to rule, strikes [and] increasing absenteeism'. However, if the labour supply was 'abundant' workers 'gradually adjust their expectations' and absenteeism was reduced (p. 197). The 'effort bargain' implied that management attempts to increase workers' effort might result in increased absence levels. Consequentially, 'management controls would be ineffective beyond certain limits as workers responded to perceived contraventions of the fairness of the effort bargain through non-attendance' (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 272). Thus, absence was viewed as an 'expression of management controls and employees' accommodation to them' (p. 272)

Within the sociology of work, writers (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Kendal, 2010: 437; Negri, 1987) have viewed absence, either as 'a reflex reaction to alienation', 'a purposeful form of resistance', or a form of organisational misbehaviour (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 271). Exemplifying the former, Gooding (1970) reported that

Detroit car workers' absenteeism was higher on undesired shifts, and amongst newer and younger workers. By staying away from work, workers expressed their job dissatisfaction. The car workers' desire to escape work was particularly noted at the end of the working day. Workers' 'deep dislike of the job' was such that at the end of shifts they 'stampede out the plant gates' and 'sometimes endanger lives in their desperate haste to be gone' (Gooding, 1970: 258). A former Flint General Motors worker observed that absenteeism was highest at the beginning and end of the working week: 'Fridays was as an unspoken Sabbath for many of the workers. Paychecks in their pockets, the lease was temporary loosened'. Often, getting 'a jump on the weekend was...a temptation too difficult to resist' (Hamper, 1992: 47).

Negri (1987) viewed absenteeism as a spontaneous worker response to exploitation and alienation. For the 1960s 'mass worker', against a background of intense class struggle, the 'heightened forms of mobility, of absenteeism, of socialisation of the struggle' represented 'in increasingly socialized forms, an attitude of struggle against work, a desire for liberation from work', whether it was alienating factory work or wage-labour in general (p. 44).

Hyman (1989) challenged managerial claims that workers' action was irrational. Hyman suggested that a range of workers' behaviour, including strikes, overtime bans, work-to-rule, labour turnover, sabotage and 'taking a day off to stay in bed or to go fishing', were rational and purposeful. However, Hyman accepted that some forms of conflict were 'more rational than others' and some 'may be counterproductive' (p. 99).

In the last two decades, the phenomenon of the *mass sickie* has been observed. For instance in 1997, 2000 British Airway workers reported sick during a dispute with their employer (Taylor and Moore, 2015: 83). Since then, Airline workers at Alitalia (in 2003), Turkish Airlines, Air Canada and Air India (all in 2012) have adopted similar tactics (Ayre, 2003; *Morning Star*, 2012; Gall, 2014: 216). Such actions echo nineteenth century trade unions' usage of the 'nameless weapon' of labour turnover control (Webbs, 1897: 168-9). However, while highlighting the innovative strategies workers sometimes use against hostile employers, the *mass sickie* does not appear to be a widespread phenomenon beyond the air industry, or in occupations where there is no legal right to strike (Gall, 2014: 216), such as Detroit teachers (Sky News, 2016). Nevertheless, there have been occasional reports of its use elsewhere, for instance by Australian bus workers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2007).

Other writers have seen absenteeism, low morale, lack of motivation (Hussain, 2000: 159), decreased productivity, resignation, transfers and sabotage (Sims, 2002: 345), as expressions of

workers' resistance to organisational change. As Sims stated, workers may attempt to avoid change through lateness or reporting sick: 'Through their absence, they are not trying to have the change reversed as much as they are trying to avoid the change or delay its implementation' (*ibid*, p. 345).

Edward and Scullion (1982) rejected the view that workers' sickness absence was *simply* a form of resistance to exploitation or a response to job dissatisfaction. Edward and Scullion studied managerial control regimes in different industries, concluding that workers' meanings of going absent were related to how strictly work rules, including attendance policies, were implemented. Workers' decisions to go sick, like quitting, were viewed as workers' informal response to employer controls over the labour process. Although unorganised, going absent was part of workers' 'conscious strategy to further their own interests' (p. 103).

Edwards and Scullion suggested that the social organisation of work explained why absenteeism became an expression of conflict in particular situations. While they accepted that there was a societal aspect to behaviours such as 'sabotage, absenteeism and labour turnover', they did not view them 'as the direct products of class relationships' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: 23). Instead, Edward and Scullion (1982) argued that a more concrete explanation of workplace behaviour was required which explored the dynamics of work relationships in each workplace and considered the intensity of managerial control strategies and the form that they took. They found that workers who had most job control were less likely to go sick. Alternatively, workers who had the least control were more likely to view going absent to escape work pressures as acceptable behaviour. In their study, intense managerial control within the clothing factories, where there was little collective organisation, was associated with 'widespread...one day absences' (p, 107).

Thus, going sick was viewed as an individualised worker response to management control when collective action was not possible. Nevertheless, similar to the 'Magic Roundabout lads' in Beynon's (1973: 148) study who organised a rota to take Fridays off work, Edwards and Scullion (1982) observed workers with high job control arranging to go absent for several hours without reporting sick (*ibid*, p.102).

According to Edwards and Scullion, variations in sickness absence patterns between jobs, workplaces and industries was a result of multifaceted interactions between particular managerial control regimes, custom and practice and work organisation (*ibid*, pp. 274-7). While accepting their contribution to labour process theory, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) stated that

Edwards and Scullion over-estimated the importance of managerial regimes. Ackroyd and Thompson viewed ‘absenteeism, pilferage, soldiering, sabotage and vandalism’ all as different forms of organizational misbehaviour (p. 1). They observed that management defined which organisational behaviour were deemed problematic and which was not, noting that workers’ absenteeism was viewed as an ‘appropriation of time’ (*ibid*, p.75) while managers’ absence was regarded as a ‘time perk’: ‘if a manager is not to be found it is assumed that there is a good reason for it. If a shop floor worker is absent it is assumed there is...no good reason for it’ (*ibid*, p. 76).

For Ackroyd and Thompson, absenteeism and other forms of misbehaviour were organisationally generated. Managers found it very difficult to clamp down on such misbehaviour as they were workers’ expressions of how they perceived work (*ibid*, p. 2). Increased management control activity resulted in the emergence of ‘new kinds of work limitation behaviour’ (*ibid*, p. 95). For instance, workers’ use of humour was viewed as a form of subversive resistance (*ibid*, pp. 99-120; Taylor and Bain, 2004).

In the early 1990s, Edwards and Whitson (1993) detected increased employer concerns about attendance but concluded that ‘absence control policies are rarely made a major issue by employers, and many workers may be no more than dimly aware of it’ (p. 13). However, in the contemporary workplace, going sick displays different meanings for workers as the frontier of control has shifted in managements’ favour (Taylor *et al*, 2010). Since Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), employers have attempted to reduce organisational misbehaviour by closing down ‘appropriation of time’ loopholes. Over the last decade there has been a shift towards stricter attendance management with increased use of Bradford style triggers, warnings, disciplinary action and dismissal (Taylor *et al*, 2010). While Edwards and Scullion (1982: 102-117) found assembly workers organising informal rotas to allow workers to take unauthorised absences and reported that managers viewed this as a safety valve which prevented more disruptive discontents (Edwards and Scullion, 1984: 555), Taylor *et al* (2010) claimed that there is now evidence that workers, fearful of the sack or losing sick pay, are coming to work when ill. Changed workplace regulatory regimes have reduced workers’ ability to find ‘leisure in work’ (Edwards and Scullion, 1982: 17) or escape work pressures (Kendall, 2008: 437) by going sick. Previously, when staffing levels were higher, workers’ absence did not ‘necessarily threaten the organisation of work’ (Edwards, 1986: 46). Now, in the contemporary workplace, ‘changes in the structure and nature of work’, and the introduction of ‘leaner management systems, have

made voluntary absence and turnover a more pressing problem for managers today' (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 10).

3.5. Discussion

The economic and behavioural psychological literatures shared positivism's concern with *prediction* where 'quantitative modelling and statistical analysis' was viewed 'as the only legitimate type of research method' (Mingers, 2006: 202). Both literatures share, most explicitly in Rhodes and Steers' (1990) model, *rational choice* and *social exchange* theoretical assumptions. As Scott (2000) observed, 'Economic action involves an exchange of goods and services; social interaction involves the exchange of approval and certain other valued behaviours' (p. 129). Within this framework, individual social behaviour was viewed as being primarily motivated by maximising rewards over costs; social phenomenon was the aggregation of such behaviours. However, Scott argued that such 'methodological individualism' (*ibid*, p.127) failed to explain how the social norms and social structures affect behaviour; for instance 'the co-operation of individuals in groups, associations and other forms of joint action', (*ibid*, p.131).

While economists' perspectives on absence have been influential, questions remain whether rational choice explanations adequately explain workers' behaviour. It remains unclear whether individual behaviour is solely based on rational self-interest and the pursuit of individual utility maximisation. Bourdieu (1988) reminds us social agents are limited to what extent they can be involved in making carefully calculated, rational choices: 'The conditions for rational calculation almost never obtain in practice where time is scarce, information limited, alternatives ill-defined, and practical matters pressing' (p. 783). Individuals mostly 'do the only thing that is to be done' (*ibid*, p. 783) as often the choices workers have are restricted ones. Perspectives which focus on workers' calculative intent neglect this.

Instead, the sociology of work stressed structural explanation (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Edwards and Whitson, 1993). Accordingly, any explanation of the sickness absence phenomenon which does not fully consider the sociological significance of modern work and working lives will fail to capture its complexities. The relationship between an individual worker and his social and work context is crucial to understanding sickness absence. However, this analysis requires to be linked to a wider political economy. The economics literature highlights employers' cost pressures. These are heightened at times of economic crisis. Further, lean production methods have resulted in staffing levels being set at minimum levels. In such a

situation the impact of workers going sick become magnified. Just one worker going sick can cause significant disruption to work processes when shift rotas lack slack (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 10). Heightened by austerity, changed work regulation has resulted in both employers and government focusing on workers' attendance at work.

3.6 Problematising Workers' Sickness Absence

They just need their backsides kicked...if you're off for inordinately long and you can't justify it, then you get your pay docked, David McNarry, UKIP Member of Northern Ireland Assembly, (Crawford, 2014).

Although strongly expressed, this comment is emblematic of generalised negative attitudes to sick workers. This section considers the factors which have driven SAP changes and explores whether media, government and employer concerns about workers' absence from work approximate a 'moral panic' (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 271).

3.6.1 Drivers for Change in Attendance Management

Bevan and Hayday (1998) then reported that 'most organisations' appeared to view 'the health of their employees as being something private to the individual and absence from work due to illness as being both unpredictable and uncontrollable' (p. 1). Such a view is far removed from employers' current focus on sickness absence (Taylor *et al*, 2010). Nonetheless, employer concerns about workers' attendance have varied historically. During World War One when labour was in short supply, workers' absenteeism was viewed as problematic (Douglas, 1919; Frankel, 1921). Thereafter, interest in workers' absence waned until the Second World War when management and unions recognised it was 'one of the most important problems' industry faced (Noland, 1945: 504). Wartime absence rates averaged 4 per cent and ranged between 15 to 20 per cent in some industries (*ibid*, p. 504).

In the 1980s, employers looked at absence costs again (Edwards and Whitson, 1993: 6-7). The control of employees' sickness absence became a central HRM concern. Attendance management stopped being the 'dull backwater' at the 'welfare end of personnel management' (Bevan, 2003: 7). In the last three decades several factors have driven the shift towards stricter attendance management, including the pressure to reduce costs and maximise labour utilisation in competitive labour markets (Bevan, Dench, Harper and Hayday, 2004: vi; Robinson, 2002: 7); increasing international competition, increased unemployment persons and globalised production (Gründemann, 1997: 29-30); increased sick pay costs (Rae, 2005:4); and an increased emphasis on employers' duty of care towards their employees (Bevan *et al*, 2004: 7).

Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989: vi) warned that high absence levels threatened ‘company profitability’, putting ‘the very survival of the enterprise at risk’. Since the 1980s, ‘intensified product market competition’ generated ‘pressures to reduce unit labour costs’ (Hyman, 1987: 26). According to Silver (2003), increased global mobility of capital created an unorganised international labour force, leading to a weakening of union power and a ‘race to the bottom’ (p. 3) which directly impacted on workers’ wages and conditions. Hypermobility of capital also had indirect effects, reducing individual states’ ability to protect employment rights. Traditionally, ‘the right to take a sick leave without losing one’s job or income’ had been seen as ‘one of the cornerstones of welfare in modern Western employment societies’ (Virtanen *et al*, 2004: 1226). However, Silver (2003) suggested that states which preserved ‘social compacts’ with their population ‘risk being abandoned on masse by investors scouring the world for the highest return’ (p. 4). According to Gründemann (1997), countries which have high levels of social security expenditure ‘threaten to price themselves out of the international market’ (p. 13). Sickness absence reduced the available labour force, increasing medical treatment and social security expenditure costs.

Productivity and public expenditure pressures forced national governments to take action to reduce social welfare provision and profit maximisation constraints (Silver, 2003: 4). To ‘a varying degree and at varying speed’, OECD countries transformed their social security and sick pay schemes (OECD, 2010: 96). Some introduced stricter sickness and disability benefit entitlement criteria and reduced sick leave payments (Askildsen *et al*, 2002: 1). Governments changed legislation to shift the responsibility for sickness absence and health costs from the state to individual employers and employees (Gründemann, 1997: 9). In Britain, the Statutory Sick Pay Act 1994 (National Archives, 2011) abolished employers’ rights to recoup sick pay costs. The legislation provided a financial impetus on employers to take action to reduce sickness absence levels. In turn, employers passed onto individual workers the costs of going sick by restricting their entitlement to OSP.

Firmly rooted in NPM (Hood, 1991, 1995), New Labour’s welfare reform and public services modernisation was viewed essential to the UK achieving its international competitive advantage (Mooney and Law, 2007: 6). In 1998, Gordon Brown, (then) Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated that for productivity reasons, urgent action was required to reduce sickness absence levels (HM Treasury, 1998). The *Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety and Productivity* took the view that workplace absence and productivity affected the country’s

‘productivity and competitiveness as a player in the global economy’ (Work Foundation/ Cabinet Office/ DWP/ HSE, 2006: 2).

For New Labour, successful modernisation required a changed relationship between the individual and the state. Brown (2000) rejected the ‘old and misguided view’ of a ‘left command and control view of government which mistakenly equated public ownership and a public bureaucracy with the public interest’. Instead, Brown argued that New Labour would address social and economic injustice ‘not by insisting on rights without responsibilities, but by asserting the responsibility of the individual’ (p. 2).

This ‘Third Way’ (Giddens, 1998) emphasis on responsible citizenship reflected the general approach New Labour adopted towards welfare reform. Strict attendance controls fitted comfortably within its modernising policy framework, which attempted to improve service quality and tightly monitor standards (Bach and Winchester, 2003). The government’s message was clear: to raise productivity and enable the UK to compete successfully in global markets, workers had to take responsibility for their attendance at work.

This emphasis on individual responsibility permeated public sector SAPs. Within the NHS, it was stated that a model policy should highlight ‘the standard of attendance expected of the employee’ and, as ‘employees are paid to attend work’, this must be acknowledged as ‘the norm’ (NHS, 2010: 10). It was stated that responsibility for complying with clearly stated absence procedures should lie with the employee; ‘failure to carry them out without good reason may result in disciplinary action’ (*ibid*, p.10).

Under New Labour, Dame Carol Black’s (2008) review of sickness absence and workplace health concluded that ‘for most people of working age, work - the right work’ had positive health and well-being benefits. Alternatively, ‘for most people, worklessness is harmful’ (Black and Frost, 2011: 4). Black felt that General Practitioners (GPs) had an important role in reducing absence costs, ensuring that workers on long-term sick leave returned to work sooner. In 2010, the GPs traditional sick-note was replaced by the fit-note. Doctors were asked to give advice on what aspects of an individual’s job they could perform. Black and Frost, accepted that these proposals pressured sick workers to return to work but thought that this benefited them, employers and the taxpayer (*ibid*, p.4). Nevertheless, the fit note has received criticism, particularly from employer organisations (EEF, 2015: 6). While a GP could assess a worker’s fitness, they faced difficulties assessing their readiness to return to a specific workplace as they

lacked knowledge of its work processes, policies and procedures, and the practicalities of arranging a changed role or changed location.

3.6.2. A Moral Panic?

In the 1980s, against a background of high unemployment and weak labour markets, employer concerns about sickness absence returned and were amplified in subsequent decades. Taylor *et al* (2010) argued that a new ‘moral panic’ surrounds workers’ sickness absence: ‘Popular discourse has it that malingering is endemic in ‘sick note Britain’, with workers ‘swinging the lead’ or...taking ‘duvet days’ (p. 270).

The *sickie* was characterised as absences from work which are *non-genuine* (un-related to illness or other ‘legitimate’ reason). The CBI (2009) estimated that 15 per cent of sickness absence fell into this category. Britain was perceived to be a nation of malingerers who, inflating the numbers who claimed incapacity benefit, too readily went sick with bogus stress conditions. In particular, public sector workers were perceived to contribute to this problem (TUC, 2005). However, British workers’ sickness levels were not high by international standards (Cabinet Office, 2004: 2). One survey found that UK employees’ sickness absence rate (5.5 days each year) was lower than the European average (7.4 days) (*People Management*, 2009). Paradoxically, employer attendance concerns have risen as, evidenced in annual CIPD survey reports, absence rates have fallen (Table 3.3). Between 2002 and 2008, the average number of sick days each employee took ranged between 8 and 9.1 days, per year. However, between 2009 and 2016, the average number of sick days that each employee took was lower, ranging between 6.6 and 7.7 per year.

Table 3.3: Falling Sickness Absence Rates (CIPD)

YEAR	DAYS/ %	SOURCE
2002	9 days, 4.4%	CIPD (2004b: 25)
2003	3.9%	CIPD (2004b: 25)
2004	9.1 days, 4.0%	CIPD (2004a: 4)
2005	8.4 days, 3.7%	CIPD (2005: 3)
2006	8 days, 3.5%	CIPD (2006: 2)
2007	8.4 days, 3.7%	CIPD (2007: 2)
2008	8 days, 3.5%	CIPD (2008: 2)
2009	7.4 days	CIPD (2009: 2)
2010	7.7 days	CIPD (2010: 4)
2011	7.7 days	CIPD (2011: 5)
2012	6.8 days	CIPD (2012a: 5)
2103	7.6 days	CIPD (2013: 6)
2104	6.6 days	CIPD (2014: 6)
2015	6.9 days	CIPD (2015: 4)
2016	6.3 days	CIPD (2016: 4)

The Engineering Employer Federation (EEF) also surveys sickness absence levels annually (Table 3.4). It concluded that the average fall in rates between 2007 and 2009, of 6.7 days to 5.6 days for each worker, was linked to the global recession and the state of the UK economy (EEF/ Unum, 2010). Since 2010, sickness absence levels have levelled out at a consistently lower level, falling to 5.1 days on average for each worker in 2014.

Table 3.4: Falling Sickness Absence Rates (EEF)

YEAR	DAYS/ %	SOURCE
2007	6.7 days	EEF/ Unum (2008)
2009	5.6 days, 2.4%	EEF/ Unum (2010)
2010	5.0 days	EEF/ Westfield (2011)
2011	5.1 days, 2.2%	EEF/ Westfield (2012: 7)
2012	5.3, 2.3%	EEF/ Westfield (2013)
2013	4.9 days, 2.1%	EEF/ Jelf (2014: 9)
2014	5.1 days, 2.2%	EEF/ Jelf (2015: 9)

Countering employers concerns about absence costs, the TUC (2005) asserted that many workers came to work when sick. According to Ashby and Mahdon (2010), the productivity costs of workers coming to work when ill outweighed absence costs. The TUC's 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' campaign (TUC, 2011) highlighted the amount of unpaid work undertaken by British workers during the recession, at a time they faced intensified and extensified work pressures. The TUC (2010a) estimated that in 2009, five million British workers worked unpaid overtime which, if paid, totalled £27.4 billion (£5,402 per person). The TUC reported that public sector workers were more likely than private sector workers to work unpaid hours.

Taylor *et al* (2010) argued that employers tend to make no distinction between genuine and non-genuine illness, viewing all absence as illegitimate and a target for disciplinary action. Unlike previous employer attempts to clamp down on workers' absence, strict attendance management now signified 'a sustained managerial offensive' that was not episodic or cyclical (p. 271).

3.7. Public Sector Sickness Absence

A commentator railed against the 'stubbornly high level' of public sector absence as 'malingering civil servants' were 'persistently' reporting sick (*Personnel Today*, 2006: 14). This view typifies a popular perception that public sector workers were regularly swinging the lead as they repeatedly took sick days. Although the gap is falling, there are claims that public sector sickness absence levels are higher than that in the private sector. A CIPD (2016) survey

found that public sector workers take three days more absence each year than private sector workers (p. 8).

NPM led to the introduction of market and commercial philosophies and practices into the public sector including greater financial accountability (Pollitt, 1993). Since Gershon's (2004) £20 billion public sector spending review, UK public services have focused on minimising labour costs and maximising labour productivity (p. 5-7). Government policy emphasised the linkages between sickness absence control and public sector productive time efficiency drives (Cabinet Office/ DWP/ HSE, 2005: 2). Tight absence policies became central to employer cost control and performance management strategies. Maximising attendance at work was viewed essential for increasing public sector labour productivity (Bevan, 2003: 7). Pursuing 'economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (Thornley, Ironside and Seifert, 2000), the Government set strict attendance targets which became a key performance indicator (KPI) of an organisation's Best Value regime (Cabinet Office, 2004: 27). In Scotland, reduced absence was one aspect of the Efficient Government Initiative to deliver £1 billion public sector budget savings (UNISON Scotland, 2006).

However, when factors such as organisation size, and workforce age and gender are taken into consideration, the difference between public and private sector absence rates was small (HSE, 2005). There was evidence that private sector sickness absence is under recorded and public sector workers were more likely to come to work when ill (*ibid*). Public sector workers' short-term sickness absence was lower than the private sector level but their long-term absence was higher (TUC, 2005: 5). Within the public sector, stress was the main cause of long-term absence (CIPD, 2016: 15), largely as a result of the nature of work which required high levels of contact with people (HSE, 2005: 1). High NHS sickness absence levels were strongly correlated with deprivation and the workforce's low grade profile (Audit Commission, 2011: 1).

According to Labour Research, 'the onset of recession and the widespread threat of job cuts have resulted in a significant change to the profile of sickness absence' (LRD, 2010). Within the context of public sector cost saving and efficiency pressures, public sector workers' attendance at work has become highly contested. Trade unions have highlighted the negative impact of sickness absence and attendance policies on trade union members (PCS, 2008; UNISON, 2011a). In 2007, a motion to UNISON's Brighton conference viewed 'Draconian' sickness policies as an attack on workers' conditions (UNISON, 2007: 4). Similarly, a motion agreed at Unite's 2014 conference stated that the union was 'appalled' at the rising trend of sick workers who were 'forced to attend work as a result of employer pressure and draconian

policies' (Unite, 2014: 26). According to a delegate at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy's conference, 'harsh' NHS disciplinary policies were leading to a 'growing culture of presenteeism' (CSP, 2016). A Society of Radiographers survey of union reps found that in four-fifths of workplaces 'staff are coming into work when they are ill' and 'around half' of absence policy changes led 'to the deterioration in the quality of working life for vulnerable staff groups' (Dumbleton, 2011: 1).

Against a background of office closures, redundancies and increased workloads, a PCS union official explained how sickness absence and performance issues intertwined, giving rise to high stress levels as the employers' performance management regime 'arbitrarily' imposed a 'must improve' score onto ten per cent of each team's workers (Chapman, 2016: 13). West Lothian UNISON expressed concerns that public expenditure cuts had a negative impact on their members' health and wellbeing at a time the council imposed its 'Draconian' absence policies (Harbinson, 2016). Trade union concerns about SAP implementation was a mobilising factor in industrial disputes at Kirklees Council (BBC, 2010), Revenue and Customs (PCS, 2011) and Quarriers (UNISON Quarriers Branch, 2011) as employers linked changes to wages and conditions with new attendance procedures. In Edinburgh, UNISON's threat to boycott changes to their employer's SAP eventually resulted in a mutually-agreed policy being implemented (Edinburgh City UNISON, 2012).

3.8 Attendance Management Strategies

Influenced by industrial psychology, a practice-based management literature has developed over the last thirty years. According to Barmby *et al*, 1991, management strategies relied on industrial psychologists' research 'mixed with folk wisdom and a generous seasoning of experience in the field' (p. 215). Spurgeon's (2002) literature review found no evidence to support established absence management practice which was 'derived from consensus rather than evidence': 'If rigorous evidence-based methodology is applied to this field it is difficult to discover the basis for the avocation of current best practice' (p. 39).

Spurgeon found little evidence that organisations undertook systematic evaluation of their absence policies (*ibid*, p. 40). Sharing the economic literature's concern with costs and productivity, the management sickness absence literature has concentrated on absence control and attendance management (Scott and Markham, 1982; Wagner and Bankshares, 1990). According to Bevan *et al* (2004), the management literature focused on 'the absentee worker rather than the direct workplace consequences of absence and its management' (p. 3).

However, several writers have highlighted the indirect cost of sickness absence. Robinson (2002) stated that unscheduled absence was like ‘a stone dropped into a still pond’ and its ‘impact ripples outward in ever-widening circles, affecting the organization at several levels’ (p. 7). Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) claimed that workers ‘resented’ having to cover sick colleagues’ work, ‘especially’ if ‘there was no valid reason’ for the absence (p. 18). According to Dilts *et al* (1985), workers who are moved about to cover absences became disgruntled (p. 21). In addition to the direct costs of sickness absence benefits, an indirect ‘price’ was also ‘paid in temporary labor costs, reduced productivity, lower product quality...customer service, and potential lost revenue’ (*ibid*, p. 7).

Typically, sickness absence is viewed negatively within the management literature, usually framed in terms of control and operational effectiveness (Bevan *et al*, 2004: 4). Workers’ absence is often seen in pejorative terms. The use of the term absenteeism reinforces a management view ‘that individuals have a psychological disposition towards absence or, put another way, indifference towards attendance’ (Bevan and Heron, 1999: 4). Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) observed that the use of the term *absenteeism* implied ‘a habitual behaviour, something akin to an addiction’ (p. 41). Unless checked, sickness absence was viewed as a contagious disease that could spread through an organisation to harmful effect ‘whenever a company fails to inoculate itself through the use of sound management practices’ (Levine, 2008).

Although sickness absence rates are at historically low levels (ONS, 2017), employers have utilised a broad range of strategies. According to Spurgeon (2002: 3), good practice entails accurate recording, monitoring absences, training managers, early contact with absent workers, trigger points, return to work (RTW) interviews and case reviews. Policies tended to focus attention on a worker’s specific absence rather on organisation or work context factors.

In 2013, an Employee Benefits Health survey of 376 HR and benefits professionals (Table 3.5) found that RTW interviews were the most commonly used absence strategy (81 per cent). Front line managers’ (FLMs) interventions (74 per cent), and work-life balance/ flexible-working policies (67 per cent) were also widely used (Betteley, 2013: 20). Less than half (48 per cent) used disciplinary procedures. About a third of respondents stated that they did not have an absence management strategy in place (*ibid*, p. 20).

Table 3.5: Employee Benefits Research Strategies

Return-to-work interviews (formal or informal)	81%
Early intervention by line managers	74%
Work-life balance/flexible-working policies	67%
Rehabilitation to long-term sick	63%
Access to care (on-site, through healthcare benefits, occupational health)	62%
Provision of absence statistics to line managers	53%
Disciplinary procedures	48%
Health promotion/education	46%
Limiting the number of sick days on full pay	34%
Making workplaces an attractive place to be	32%
Absence record as determinant of selection for redundancy	15%
Waiting period before occupational sick pay is payable	13%
Attendance-related bonuses	12%
Avoiding the recruitment of poor attendees/ pre-recruitment medicals	11%
Using an external absence monitoring service	8%

Source: Betteley (2013: 20)

3.8.1 Benchmarking and Monitoring

Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) proposed a seven step ALIEDIM (assess, locate, identify, evaluate, design, implement and monitor) approach through which ‘companies could achieve a real competitive edge’ (*ibid*, p. ix). According to Huczynski and Fitzpatrick, ‘the measurement of absence is a necessary first step in its elimination’ (*ibid*, p.25). In addition to measuring, Evans and Walters (2002) stressed the importance of costing, monitoring and benchmarking absence data:

Measuring helps an organisation understand the nature of its absenteeism; *costing* quantifies its impact on the bottom line and the potential savings to be achieved from absence reductions; *monitoring* ensures that there is up-to-date information on where absence rates are going...and *benchmarking* provides information on where an organisation stands against comparators, and helps to set targets and objectives for an absence management programme (p. 26-7).

Measuring absence was viewed as an important first step in understanding the nature and scope of an organisation's absence issues (*ibid*, p. 3). Askilnden *et al* (2005) stated that, combined with punitive action, the monitoring of workers' absence signified a common sense no-nonsense approach to managing attendance:

...workers will shirk less, and work harder, when the employer monitors the workers, when the likelihood of being discovered in shirking is increasing, and when punishment is hardened (p. 1088).

Benchmarking enables organisations to compare their performance with their competitors. Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) claimed that benchmarking has 'a dramatic effect on management's thinking', leading to the 'previously accepted performance being critically appraised' (p. 23-4). Ferguson, Ferguson, Muedder and Fitzgerald (2001) suggested that benchmarks 'should be readily determinable, easily tracked, and consistent across the firm, and not easily manipulated by the employee' (p. 38).

However, while benchmarks allow organisation to compare performance, they can also pressurise workers to improve their attendance as they compare themselves with each other. According to Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989), work group norms encouraged attendance, making sick workers 'feel guilty about being absent' (p. 134). Inevitably, within organisation absence levels will vary and internal benchmarks can lead to some workers being targeted. Exemplifying this, Yorges (2007) suggested that an organisation's absence distribution resembled a bell-shaped curve. Most workers (the 'Occasional Offenders') are located in the middle tail, while smaller numbers of 'Perfect Attenders' and 'Rule Benders' (who have the highest absence) are found in the upper and lower tails. Yorges suggested that a targeted approach was required for each grouping and recommended 'Rule Benders' should be handled 'individually and firmly' (*ibid*). However, if the 'Rule Benders' were dismissed, other workers would fall into this category as the bell-curve is recalibrated.

3.8.2 Triggers

Management use of triggers to decide action has been controversial (Moir, 2006: 19). The Bradford Factor which gives additional weight to the frequency of repeated short-term absence has been widely used (DWP/ ACAS, 2010: 7). Here, the spells of absence squared are multiplied by the number of days the worker is absent (Perrett and Lucio, 2006: 7). A worker with 8 absence spells totalling 8 days will have an index score of $8 \times 8 \times 8 = 512$. Another worker with two absence spells totalling 40 days will have an index score $2 \times 2 \times 40 = 160$. The

worker who scores highest, thus more likely to face action, is the one with more spells of absence even although they have been absent less.

While there is a managerial belief that long-term sickness absence are more likely to be genuine (Marchington and Wilkinson 2002: 342), under-pinning the Bradford approach is an assumption that short-term absence are more likely to be bogus. However, despite its widespread use, concerns have been raised about its empirical basis (Perrett and Lucio, 2006). Although trigger points are commonly used, many organisations which utilised them reported higher or unchanged absence levels (ACAS, 1994). According to Evans and Walter (2002), workers soon established which policy rules were ‘part of management rhetoric’ and can be ‘ignored’ (p. 47). Further, workers could avoid action by staying on sick leave for a longer period, as long-term illness was more likely to be accepted as genuine (Nicholson, 1976). Also, as Marchington and Wilkinson (2002) stated, ‘setting a trigger of, say, 10 days may encourage individuals to take 9 days off’ (p. 342).

UNISON (2014) expressed concern that employers used triggers to ‘penalise’ disabled workers, to ‘weed’ out ‘troublemakers’ and workers ‘surplus to requirements’ or ‘unaffordable’ (p. 11). Bradford attendance management schemes are believed to treat women unfairly as many gender specific illnesses, ‘such as morning sickness, menopausal related illnesses, menstrual health related illness and others’ generally occur for short periods (UNISON, 2011b). Women’s higher absence levels are associated with their low status and physically demanding jobs, amplified by caring roles (Horder, 1999). Instead of being ‘an automatic pathway to formal capability or disciplinary proceedings’, UNISON (2014: 12) argued that triggers should alert managers that occupational health support and ‘workplace adjustments’ were necessary, such as amended duties and altered hours.

3.8.3 Front Line Managers

A characteristic feature of NPM has been the simultaneous centralisation of decision making and decentralisation of operational responsibilities (Carter, 2004: 137-8). Devolving HRM functions allowed FLMs to take responsibility for day-to-day personnel decisions (McGuire, Stoner and Mylona, 2008; Renwick, 2002). Following personnel management trends, FLMs were encouraged to play a central role in managing attendance (Evans and Walter, 2002: 58-60; Torrington *et al*, 2005: 322) as they could ‘identify and influence some of the causes of absence and, indeed, to manage the consequences’ (Bevan and Heron, 1999: 4). Absence could be reduced if FLMs had primary responsibility for managing attendance (Berry,

2006: 11). Good relationships between managers and workers were important in reducing sickness absence levels. However, poor communication and lack of employee involvement increased sickness absence and quitting (DWP/ ACAS, 2010).

Managerial pressures placed contradictory demands on FLMs, as they struggled to cope with top down initiatives, supporting staff and meeting customer expectation (Harris, 2007; Henderson and Seden, 2004). Even although their presence may ‘spread contagious disease’, ‘to set a good example’, managers felt pressures to attend work when unwell, (Baker-McClearn, Greasley, Dale and Griffith, 2010: 314). Dunn and Wilkinson’s (2002: 245) study found FLM’s ‘muddling through’ as they attempted to implement SAPs in an ad-hoc way. Cunningham, James and Dibben (2004) suggested that there were tensions within organisations between support and productivity concerns, particularly where lean, work intensified policies were pursued. They found that FLMs lacked expertise in dealing with long-term absence cases and received limited support from personnel and occupational health services. Also, some managers were uninterested in managing absence which they regarded as a personnel role (p. 287-8).

3.8.4 Return to Work Interviews

According to the EEF (2007), RTW interviews are used by employers to find out why an employee is sick, establish on-going health problem, discourage casual absence and assist their return to work, overcoming any barrier which prevents this (p. 32). RTW interviews are normally conducted by the worker’s FLM (Evans and Walters, 2002: 64), giving employers an opportunity to identify the cause of the absence (Russell, 2008: 31). Customarily, such interviews highlight the importance employers place on workers’ regular attendance, conveying the message that their ‘absence was noticed and that they were missed’ (Evans and Walters, 2002: 64). Evans and Walter expressed concerns that some organisations’ RTW interviews took on the status of a disciplinary hearing. Nevertheless, they believed that workers should be given ‘clear targets for improvement’, advised that their attendance will be monitored, and informed of ‘the possible disciplinary consequences of failure to improve’ (*ibid*, p. 64).

3.8.5 Case Management and Total Absence Management Strategies

The case management approach to managing attendance is described as a holistic ‘collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy’ which attempts to meet an individual’s health needs (NICE, 2009: 41). This approach is said to be more focussed than a trigger based warning system and allows employers to act in a co-ordinated way ‘bringing together quickly the views of everyone who has a role to play in managing the

absence' (EEF, 2007: 55). It was envisaged that this would include the line manager, senior manager, HR officer, the employee and union rep (*ibid*, p. 55). According to Spurgeon (2002: 42), the case management approach is generally more effective on longer term illness.

The commitment of senior managers to drive through change and take ownership of SAPs was believed to be crucial to their success (EEF, 2007: 4). Ferguson *et al* (2001) suggested that organisations should pursue 'total absence management' to 'eliminat[e] duplicative processes across units and improve[e] overall HRM efficiencies, particularly through an integrated benefits approach' (p. 36). According to Ferguson *et al*, this approach considers all absences from work including work injury, disability, sickness, personal time and holidays: 'A day absent from work is a day absent from work' (*ibid*, p. 41). Irrespective of the reason for the absence, workers are encouraged 'to return to productive work as soon as possible' (*ibid*, p. 41).

Total absence management echoes Total Quality Management's concepts of continuous improvement and employee commitment, mobilising the whole organisation towards the creation of a workplace regular attendance culture. For instance, Robinson (2002) advocated the establishment of a centralised intake system which employees could call if, for any reason, they wished time off (p. 8).

3.8.6 Wellbeing and Discipline

In the last decade, the prevalence of musculoskeletal conditions and high stress levels has raised the promotion of employee health and *wellbeing*. Shifting the emphasis of absence management away from *absence control* towards the *encouragement of attendance* (Bevan *et al*, 2004: 4-5), this is 'a more proactive model which includes measures to help employees become healthier' (EEF, 2007: 5). The wellbeing approach focuses on employees' health, 'rather than the particular effects of ill health in terms of absence from work' (Edwards and Greasley, 2010: 26). This approach raises questions about the quality of jobs and work organisation on workforce health (*ibid*, p.26). It is suggested that treating workers with respect, allowing them to be involved in decision making, fosters greater organisational commitment which results in lower absence (Macleod and Clarke, 2009). Increased employee engagement improves 'morale and performance (the 'psychological contract')' and reduces 'absenteeism and turnover', resulting in 'improved organizational performance' (Terry, 2010: 276-7). Employee consultation, good physical working conditions, teamwork, training, job redesign, and equal opportunity, bullying and harassment, health and safety policies contribute to improving organisational health and attendance (DWP/ ACAS, 2010: 15).

However, there are concerns that employers are quicker to invoke disciplinary absence management procedures than pursue rehabilitative policies (Dibben, James and Cunningham, 2001; James *et al*, 2002, 2006). Strict attendance policies, which emphasise punitive disciplinary action, jar with wellbeing policies which emphasis assistance and support, rather than punishment. Moir (2006) suggested absences caused by genuine illness should not be seen as problematic. According to Moir, when HR acted as ‘the sickness inquisition’, regarding absence as ‘taboo’, SAPs failed to create ‘a positive culture that fosters wellbeing’ and encourages attendance (p. 19). Sending out contradictory message, policies are often couched in sympathetic terms but actual implementation focuses on formal warnings (Dibben *et al*, 2001: 12). Workers have found stressful those SAPs which offer ‘a knuckle duster in one hand and a glass of water and a cup of tea in the other’ (*ibid*, p. 17).

3.8.7 Control, Discipline and Rights at Work

Worker cooperation and discipline is ‘essential’ for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2010b). Employers utilise a wide range of methods, strategies and techniques, both rewarding and punitive, to achieve discipline (and self-discipline):

Indiscipline and lack of cooperation on the part of labor is a perpetual threat that needs to be overcome either by co-optation and persuasion (the creation of quality circles, the mobilization of company loyalties and pride in work) or by coercion (threats of job loss or in some instances physical violence) (*ibid*).

Although the thesis is not set within a Foucauldian frame of reference, Foucault (1977) provided some insight into disciplinary regimes, suggesting that effective discipline is based on ‘constant supervision’ so that ‘everyone’ is in ‘full view of the observer’ (Rose, 2008: 527). While confirming to rules is essential for workplace discipline, the imposition of punitive sanctions causes ‘fear, resentment and hostility in the punished person’ (*ibid*, p. 528). Punitive, universally applied SAP implementation can be viewed as an extension of employer controls, sending out the message to workers that their attendance is constantly monitored. In Foucauldian terms, disciplinary SAPs signify an all-pervasive ‘multiple, automatic and anonymous power’ network (Foucault, 1977: 176).

Pre-Donovan (1968), unless challenged by strong union organisation, employers had ‘unlimited power to discipline individual employees’ (Gennard and Judge, 1997: 175). Subsequently, the Industrial Relations Act in 1971 established the employment tribunal (ET) system where workers could seek legal address for workplace wrongs. Nevertheless, in *International Sports Company Ltd v Thompson* (1980), an Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT)

upheld employers' rights to dismiss workers whose attendance did not improve, providing certain criteria were met, namely, that a 'fair review' took place, the employee was able to state their case and 'appropriate warnings; were given (ACAS/ HSE / CIPD, 2006: 15). Workers with underlying medical issues can face dismissal on *capability* grounds (*ibid*, p. 14). ACAS advised employers, whether there was an underlying medical condition or not, that they should clearly state to the worker the need to improve their attendance, what improvement is required and the consequences if this did not occur:

If there is no improvement, the employee's length of service, performance, the likelihood of a change in attendance, the availability of alternative work, and the effect of past and future absences on the business should all be taken into account in deciding appropriate action (*ibid*, p.15).

If employers have properly investigated the illness, consulted with the employee, and followed their organisation's disciplinary procedures they could legally dismiss the worker, concluding 'enough is enough' (*ibid*, p.16).

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (amended by the Equality Act in 2010) offered dismissed workers some protection if their employer did not consider their medical history (EEF, 2007: 21). When a worker has a recognised disability, employers are duty bound to make 'reasonable adjustments' to working arrangements (Monaghan, 2005). However, following *Monmouthshire County Council v Harris (UKEAT/0332/14/DA)*, the protection offered to workers on long-term sick leave was weakened. Further, an EAT (*McAldie v Royal Bank of Scotland Plc (2008) ICR 1087*) took the view that even although it accepted that the employer was responsible for the claimant's absence (as a result of no longer allowing them to work from home), the decision to dismiss was reasonable as the adjustment would not have assisted their return to work (*UNISON in Focus*, 2016: 28).

Workers often find it difficult to understand why they are being disciplined for their sickness absence, giving 'rise to grievances' and contributing 'to a poor employee relations climate' (EEF, 2007: 21). Harsh attendance sanctions can have a negative effect on employee morale and result in absence problems becoming 'more obscure and intractable' (Perrett and Lucio, 2006: 13). The positive 'healthy coping behaviours' aspect of short-term absence which prevents long-term absence is often ignored by employers (Kivimäki, Head, Ferrie, Shipley, Vahtera and Marmot, 2003a: 368). Strict policy implementation forces workers to come to work when unwell, reducing their work effort (Ashby and Mahdon, 2010). Presenteeism results in workers being 'present in body, but...not producing' (Bolton and Hughes, 2001: 41). Additionally, punitive policies can lead to the development of low trust cultures which send out

the message that workers ‘are not to be trusted; that vulnerability is unacceptable; that conformity is required’ (Horder, 1999: 267).

Traditionally, management have seen attendance as a control issue unrelated to workers’ health and safety. According to Perrett and Lucio (2006), attendance policies do little to ‘identify and treat the causes of absence and are instead too often focused on the symptoms’ (p. 21). Often organisations implement SAPs without examining the circumstance and underlying reasons for workers’ absences. Horder (1999) believed that employers’ reticence to address rehabilitation stemmed from their reluctance to address the work organisation and work context issues which contribute to ill health. Trade unions have campaigned for a more sympathetic approach to sick workers (TUC, 2005). Horder (1999: 267) suggested that an alternative absence management strategy was necessary, one which researched the causes of absence, carried out stress audits, provided a safe working environment where health and safety policies were followed, and offered workers access to occupational health and support services.

3.9. Modern Work and Workers’ Health

Sickness absence and workplace health are inter-linked. Paradoxically, at the same time as employers have tightened workplace attendance regimes and government has encouraged action to drive down absence costs (Black, 2008), the HSE workplace inspection framework has been weakened (Grayling, 2011: 4-5). Concerns have been expressed that in some sectors of the economy, organisations give less priority to workplace health and safety (Brown, 2002).

Employers’ focus on sickness absence ignores the costs of occupational ill health, injury and death. The TUC observed that ‘workplaces are dangerous places’ but risks are ‘often downplayed by the selective use of statistics’ (TUC, 2010: 1). Although workplace fatalities are falling (down to 151 in 2009/10), the TUC estimated that 15,000 workers die each year as a result of work-related cancers and 4,000 from lung disorders such as emphysema caused by conditions at work. Each year, over 1,000 workers are involved in fatal accidents while driving at work. According to the TUC, ‘Using the most conservative estimates at least 20,000 people die prematurely every year because of occupational injury or disease, but the real figure could be nearer twice that’ (*ibid*, p. 2).

Affecting 1.2 million workers, the HSE (2010a) estimated that 24.6 million working days were lost to work-related health and 4.7 million to workplace injury (p. 4). Although work injuries are falling, there has been an increase in work-related illnesses related to new jobs and work methods, musculoskeletal disorders such as back, neck and shoulder pain, and work-

related mental health problems (TUC, 2010: 2). It is estimated that 415,000 workers became unwell as a result of work-related stress (HSE, 2010b).

White and Beswick (2003) concluded that there was an association between long hours and fatigue, and on physical health and stress (p. 18). According to Virtanen, Ferrie, Singh-Manoux, Shipley, Vahtera, Marmot and Kivimäki (2010), British civil servants who worked 10-11 hours a day had an increased sixty percent risk of heart disease. Workers who work long hours may have insufficient time to recover and find unwinding difficult. They may also be more likely to work when ill. In Japan the *karoshi* (death from overwork) phenomenon has been legally recognised by government (*Economist*, 2007). Taylor *et al* (2010) suggested that a vicious circle existed: micro-management and intensified work pressures contributed to workers ill-health, yet workers felt unable to report sick to restore their health. These workers ‘remain at work when sick or return prematurely, thereby potentially exacerbating their condition’ (p. 282). Countering the view that post-industrial society had eliminated unsafe working conditions, many workers ‘come to work, despite their illness, while others are on long-term sick-leave’ (TUC, 2010: 2). Further, a million workers are ‘still suffering the ill-effects of work after they retired or left’ (*ibid*, p. 2).

Nichols (1997) rejected the traditional Robens approach to health and safety which assumed that profit and healthy workplaces were compatible. Instead, Nichols rooted his analysis of health and safety within the political economy of capital accumulation, a process which ‘constantly reshapes the industrial and occupational landscape’, creating new industries and occupations, destroying or modifying existing ones. According to Nichols, these transformations determine workers’ ‘life chances through injury’ (p. 99). For Nichols, the regulation of health and safety was ‘an outcome of the struggle between labour and capital’ (*ibid*, p. 100) as productivity concerns forced employers to compel workers to work harder, closing down the ‘pores of the working day’ (*ibid*, p. 109). Instead of freeing workers’ time, the introduction, implementation and adoption of new technologies has generalised work intensification. In modern organisations, ‘the silicon chip plays an equivalent role’ to that previously ‘performed by the stop watch in Scientific Management’ (Wilmott, 1995: 96). Negatively impacting on workers’ health, Lean production methods have resulted in ‘an even more intensified form of Taylorism’ (Johnson, 2004). Flexible and temporary workers experience poorer health than ‘mainstream’ workers (Benach and Muntaner, 2007; Kivimäki, Vahtera, Vahtera, Jirtanen, Elovainio, Penitti and Ferrie 2003b). Job security worries result in poorer physical and mental health (Ferrie, 2001; Ferrie, Shipley, Stansfeld and Marmot 2002).

Writers contended that the psychosocial work environment affects workers' health and attendance (Kristensen, 1991; Karasek, 1990; Theorell *et al*, 1998). Karasek (1979) suggested that high psychologically demanding jobs with low work control created 'job strain', leading to workers reporting high stress symptoms. North, Syme, Feeney, Shipley and Marmot's (1996) study of British civil servants suggested that increasing workers' control over the psycho-social work environment 'improve[ed] employees' health and well-being', ensuring that workers become more productive and reduce absence costs (p. 339).

Team working was believed to offer workers more autonomy, promising 'smarter, not harder' work which is 'more effective and more fulfilling' (Sewell, 1998: 397). However, by taking on the responsibility for getting the job done, the team's workers' work effort is intensified (*ibid*, p. 401). It has been argued that the 'flexible' modern workplace harms workers' health in ways which fall out-with current International Classification of Disease (ICD-10) (Rantanen, 2002). Baldry, Bain and Taylor (1997) suggested that Taylorist labour processes in noisy, high temperature, open-plan offices, negatively affect workers' health. Workers can 'be pushed to the physical limit' when they have little

'...control over both work and working environment and where intensification of the labour process takes place in a working environment that is incapable of supporting it' (p. 537).

The expanding health and social care sectors have brought new health risks such as latex allergies, back, and needlestick injuries (Maville and Heurta, 2013: 449). Call centre workers face acoustic shock (HSE, 2008). In recent years the effects of *good* and *bad* jobs on workers' health have been considered (Vaughan-Jones and Barham, 2009). According to the WHO (2008), good jobs provided 'financial security, social status, personal development, social relations and self-esteem, and protection from physical and psychosocial hazards' (p. 5). Alternatively, 'poor quality, low paid and insecure jobs...may be no better for health than unemployment' (NICE, 2009).

3.10 Summary

This chapter explored the economic, psychological, and sociological attendance literatures. It also examined the wide range of employer control strategies. Paradoxically, employer concerns about absence costs rose (£14 billion in 2009) at a time when health and safety legislation was weakened and larger amounts of unpaid overtime was worked (£27.4 billion in the same year). Absence control sends out a clear message of managerial authority (Edwards and Whitson, 1989: 24; Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002: 241). Workers' attendance at work is often

a contested issue of at the frontier of control (Edwards and Scullion, 1982: Edwards and Whitson, 1993). However, since Edwards and his colleagues' work the frontier has shifted in employers' favour. At a time of austerity, the pressures on employers to reduce labour costs have intensified. Not only must employers maximise workers' labour power, they are also driven to take action to maximise workers' attendance. Cost control pressures are particularly acute within U.K. public services. In the pursuit of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Thornley *et al*, 2000), public sector managers must ensure that their employees attend work regularly. It is in this changed context that sickness absence control is considered.

Chapter 4: The Public Sector Labour Process and Austerity

4.1 Introduction

As the case study is set within a public sector context and focuses on the experiences of workers in current, former and related local government organisations, this chapter considers the relevance of labour process theory to the study of work organisation within the state (Carter, 1997: 65). Firstly, this chapter examines the state's role in capitalist society, in both its national and local forms (Cockburn, 1977). Secondly, it considers the extent to which NPM's introduction of commercial and market methods into the public sector (Hood, 1991, 1995) replicate private sector employment relations. Thirdly, this chapter explores the public sector labour process, considering to what extent public ownership has changed the nature of public sector employment relationships. Finally, the closing sections examine the impact of austerity on the economy, concluding with a specific focus on Scottish local government.

4.2 The State, Capitalism and the Market

There are competing perspectives on the role of the state. From a unitary and pluralist standpoint, the state is viewed as an impartial *umpire* which for the *common good* or *good of the economy*, acts in the *national interest* and sets the rules which frame capital-labour relationships. From this perspective, whenever management-union conflict arises, the state intervenes to adjudicate on the relative weight of competing claims or interests. Hayek (1991) argued that trade unions were 'above the law' so the state had a duty to intervene and restrict their freedoms. For Hayek, inflation and employment issues were 'inseparable' from the 'problem of excessive' trade union power (p. 319). In the 1980s, such thinking permeated throughout the Conservative Government's 'step by step' (Wedderburn, 1989: 15) anti-union legislation which restricted 'privileges' (*ibid*, p. 10), such as the closed shop.

Alternatively, classical Marxism viewed the state as the 'executive committee' which managed the ruling classes' 'common affairs' (Marx, 1848). Hyman (1975) argued that the state was not neutral. Instead, it abstained 'in favour of the dominance of capital' (p. 148). Hyman observed that when employers' dominance was challenged, as in the 1960s, 'direct intervention was prompt', abandoning voluntarism (*ibid*, p. 148).

Maily, Dimmock and Sethi (1989) suggested that the state 'should be understood in terms of its relations with capitalism' and how 'its relative autonomy is deployed to reproduce, regulate and even modify capitalist social relations' (p. 2). According to Maily *et al*, the state

takes on different roles that ‘shift through time in detailed forms relatively independent of each other’ (*ibid*, p. 2). Crucial to understanding the state’s role was a comprehension of the ‘balance of class forces generally within a given society’s historical conjuncture’ and ‘the more narrow relations within that society’ (*ibid*, p. 2).

The period following World War Two was described as ‘embedded liberalism’ (Polanyi, 1944). There was optimism that the Keynesian revolution challenged free market orthodoxy, which ‘if left to its own devices’ would destroy society (p. 64). Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) suggested that by replacing free market mechanism, state planning and public ownership had ended capitalist crisis: ‘the objective laws of the market which ruled in the actions of the entrepreneurs and tended toward catastrophe’ had ‘gone’ (p. 38). Similarly, Crosland (1956: 27-32) argued that capitalism had been transformed, with the disappearance of absolute property rights, market dominance and profit maximisation. In Britain a social-democratic consensus supported the Welfare State, full employment policies and joint-regulation at work (Devine, 2006). Full employment and progressive taxation was thought to have reduced poverty and inequality (Hindness, 1987; Savile, 1957). The state was regarded as the ‘model employer’ (Mailly *et al*, 1989: 6).

Against a background of generally rising living standards, Crosland (1956: 515) claimed that Britain was on ‘the threshold of mass abundance’. Economic power had now passed to politicians who were ‘certainly’ no longer ‘the pristine class of capitalists’ (*ibid*, p. 29). Similarly, Burnham (1941) took the view that the Managerial Revolution had weakened capitalists’ power. For Weber (1978), mirroring large capitalist organisations’ structures, the ideal type ‘rational-legal’ bureaucratic state was the most efficient and rational way to organise society. Capitalist development needed a nation state with a rational legal system and efficient administration (Allen, 2004: 114). Rejecting the impartial umpire view of the state which mediated competing interests, Miliband (1969), argued that the state had been captured by the capitalist class. Many of the lines between the public and private sector had become blurred and individuals moved between each with ease (pp. 110-113).

Instead, Poulantzas (1973) stated that the state had ‘relative autonomy’ as it was not directly under capitalist control and had some freedom to act. Poulantzas suggested that the state was capitalist as a result of its functions, and its attempts to frustrate working class self-organisation (McNaughton, 2008: 6). According to Block (1980), although not all state actions reflected capitalist interests, the state *generally* acted in capital’s interest, developing ‘a *modus vivendi* that is highly favourable to the owners of capital’ (p. 230). Block contended that although state

managers were ‘generally restrained’ from challenging capitalist property rights, ‘the exercise of state power has largely been used in ways that strengthen the capitalist accumulation process’ (*ibid*, p. 230). In the face of global competition, public sector managers are compelled to act to ensure the state’s prosperity, ‘secur[ing] conditions conducive to capital accumulation’ (Harris 1996: 45). ‘Business friendly’ government assists capital accumulation at the national level, through implementing favourable tax, legislation and economic policies, and locally, through grants and planning permissions.

The state performs many functions. For instance, in difficult economic times it acts as a demand regulator. As Edwards and MacEwan (1970) asserted, ‘such regulation does not eliminate unemployment but simply reduces it to levels which are not system threatening’ (p. 138). The state also played a role in labour de-commodification, providing welfare benefits to reduce workers’ market dependency. Further, the state had a protective role, ensuring that minimum employment standards were maintained (Dundon and Rollinson, 2011: 171).

Developing Poulantzas and Gramsci theories, Jessop (2008) rejected the view that the state automatically supported capital accumulation, instead viewing it as a social relation which balanced social forces. Jessop believed that the Fordist/ Keynesian *welfare* state had been transformed into a Post-Fordist/ Schumpeterian *workfare* state. The post-war welfare state developed alongside a growing Fordist system. Post-Fordism was characterised by technological developments, the internationalisation of capital and a shift in the nation state’s priorities to make it internationally competitive (Jessop, 1999, 2002, 2003). Such developments have implications for an individual’s relationship to the state and how public services are provided. According to Jessop (1999), the workfare state ‘subordinates social policy to the demands of labour market flexibility and employability’ and to ‘structural or systemic competitiveness’ (p. 355). While the ‘Keynesian Welfare’ nation state protected its citizens’ social rights, the ‘Schumpeterian Workfare post-national regime’ provided ‘welfare services that benefit business and thereby demote individual needs to second place’ (*ibid*, p. 355).

In Britain, Thatcher’s Conservative Party election victory in 1979 confirmed that the post war settlement was over. Reaganism and Thatcherism shaped global employer-trade union relations for subsequent decades (Haverty-Stacke and Walkowitz, 2010: 1). Monetarist economic policies, mass unemployment and anti-union legislation were fundamental to the Thatcher Government’s offensive on organised labour (McBride, 1986: 300). Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, all mainstream political parties in Britain accepted neoliberal policies, controlling inflation, and introduced public service privatisation, deregulation and labour

flexibility (Callinicos, 2015). As Mair (2013) stated, ‘the issue of planning versus markets has been settled - for now - in favour of the markets’ (p.72). Within the neoliberal model, with its roots in neo-classical economics, competitive markets were essential for growth and development, and were perceived as ‘the only rational means of organising economic activity’ (Davidson, 2010a: 5-7). As Standing (2011) stated, ‘everything should be done to maximise competition and competitiveness, and to allow market principles to permeate all aspects of life’.

Miliband (1987) viewed neoliberal attempts to reduce the state’s role in social and economic life as ‘class struggle from above’ (p. 336). Bonefield (2010) argued that the neoliberal state’s main aim was to assist business interests and weaken working class organisation. Neoliberalism sought to intensify exploitation in a more ruthless and relentless search for profits (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009a: 4). According to Standing (2011), labour market flexibility meant ‘transferring risks and insecurity onto workers and their families’. Retreating from Keynesian economics following the 1970s economic crisis, policy makers embraced neoliberal policies, perceiving them essential to restoring profit levels and capital accumulation. The need to compete in global markets resulted in corporation demands for tax reductions and deregulation (Davidson, 2010a: 23-4). Provided sufficient profits were made, employers in the post war boom period accepted high wages. However, by the end of the 1960s, attacks on workers’ wages and the ‘social wage’ took place (*ibid*, p. 27).

In recent decades, in the face of widespread privatisation, the regulatory state has emerged, providing ‘minimally adequate services’ (Callinicos, 2015: 9). Regulatory agencies ‘are generally kept at arm’s length from elected politicians’. At the same time, central banks, rather than elected politicians, increased their control over macro-economic programs, favouring monetary policies that regulated interest rates and the money supply, rather than fiscal policies which controlled taxation and public spending (*ibid*, p. 9).

Whitfield (2012: 13) stated that the ‘corporate welfare state’ was ‘emerging as neoliberal policies continue[d] unabated’. The corporate welfare state has ‘fewer assets to manage’ as resources ‘are increasing leased or sold to the private sector’. Workers are transferred to private companies, and state organisations make more use of private consultants (*ibid*, p. 13). Such developments have implications for democratic control of public services, in terms of service provision and funding. Under neoliberalism, local state agencies have become ‘state apparatus for governance, whilst simultaneously appearing to be remote’ (Paton, 2010: 205). Increasingly, services are run by experts, away from politician or public control.

Traditionally, local government service provision was viewed as a ‘technical’ and ‘administrative’ (Miliband, 1984: 131). However, within local government, power relations interact ‘with different interests naturally concerned to use it to their advantage’ (*ibid*, p.131). Although local government has been a site of struggle against vested interests since the nineteenth century, central government, through its ‘large arsenal of financial, administrative and coercive means’ (*ibid*, p.139) has ensured that local government’s budgetary discretion is extremely limited.

4.3 Public Sector Commercialisation and Marketisation

Marx (1990) observed that capitalism turned everything into a commodity which had its price: ‘everything becomes saleable and purchasable...Nothing is immune from this alchemy, the bones of saints cannot withstand it’ (p. 229). As Lukács (1923) stated, capitalist rationality and calculation ‘embrace[d] every aspect of life’. For Harvey (2005: 33), neoliberalisation meant ‘the financialization of everything’. As the public sector is not impervious to such pressure, this section examines the penetration of market and commercial methods and practices into its domain.

Since the New Right’s rise in the late 1970s, the idea that market mechanisms were the most efficient way to allocate resources has dominated. Earlier, public choice theorists suggested that public sector managers sought the creation of large bureaucratic empires, without regard to efficiency (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). Public choice theorists believed that ‘the bigger the budget, the higher the bureaucrat’s salary, status and power’ (Whitfield, 2001: 21). Accordingly, without market discipline, organisations provided more services than were required. Providing the rationale for government privatisation and outsourcing policies, public choice theorists argued that ‘all but a few essential public goods should be produced by the market’ (*ibid*, p. 22).

In similar terms, neo-classical economists assumed that the public sector generated greater X-inefficiencies (whereby an organisation fails to make the most economic use of its resources) than the private sector does (Leibenstein, 1966). According to Haskel and Sanchis (1995), profit maximising private sector companies ‘insist[ed] on a high level of effort’ than the public sector (p. 314). Alternatively, public sector organisations had ‘broader social objectives in mind’ so accepted ‘lower levels of effort’ (*ibid*, p. 314). The Right argued that bureaucracy and professional autonomy encouraged X-inefficiencies as workers, particularly those with greater

work task and work allocation discretion, survived within large bureaucratic organisations by rigidly following rules and procedures (Law and Mooney, 2007: 26-33).

To address this, the Right took the view that privatisation saved money and encouraged managerial innovation. In the 1980s, the Conservative Government minister, Nicholas Ridley suggested that, in local government, the ‘enabling’ council should “meet once a year to award contracts, have lunch and go away again for another year” (Leigh, 2000: 306). When outsourcing was not possible, ‘Conservative governments introduced proxies for market mechanism’ (Corby and Symon, 2011: 11). By introducing private sector business methods which focused on economy and efficiency, NPM transformed public service organisations (Hood, 1991, 1995; Pollitt, 1993).

Neoliberalism and ‘global’ competitive pressures ensured that the public sector reform process, first initiated by the Thatcher Government, continued over subsequent decades. During these years, the public sector has been in ‘crisis and decline’ as it became increasingly fragmented in the face of a rising managerialism as successive UK governments modernised public services (Symon and Corby, 2011: 229-336). For Giddens (1998), New Labour’s Third Way was a middle path between the market and state socialism, pursuing policies which were ‘neither laissez-faire nor state control and rigidity’ (Blair, 1998: 27).

The Third Way found expression within New Labour’s ‘modernising agenda’ which championed increased performance monitoring and targets, placing the consumer at the centre of service delivery, and changing its labour processes (Cabinet Office, 1999; Corby and Symon, 2011: 14-15). New Labour extended the Conservative’s Public Finance Initiative (PFI) and introduced a commissioning, rather than provider, model for public service delivery. Although the subsequent Coalition Government’s policies represented a significant break from those pursued by New Labour, it remained ‘wedded’ to neo-liberalism, ‘encapsulated’ in its ‘plans to increase competition through greater private sector provision of public services’ (*ibid*, p.16).

Whitfield (2012) suggested government marketisation and privatisation policies meet several objectives. Firstly, they provided ‘new opportunities for accumulation’, creating markets as ‘government functions and service provision’ were transferred to the private sector’ (p. 1). Secondly, they reduced the state’s role in public service provision, transferring ‘power from the state to capital, from employees to employers and from service users to private contractors’. Thirdly, they transferred ‘risk and responsibility to individuals’. Fourthly, although the state’s role was diminished, ‘tax breaks, subsidies, contracts and regulatory concessions’

secured 'corporate welfare' (*ibid*, p. 2). Above all, the creation and promotion of markets took priority over 'best value, equalities and social justice' (Whitfield, 2006).

Although full convergence with the private sector has not taken place, deregulated bargaining, increased local manager autonomy and new HRM techniques have resulted in the public sector becoming more business orientated (Bach *et al*, 2009: 307). Associated with the introduction of market methods was the shift away from joint-regulation at work as managers asserted their managerial prerogative and attempted to 'manage without trade unions' (Armstrong, 1996: 761).

NPM transformed public sector labour processes (Colley, 2011), as public sector managers ran 'service delivery units *as if* they are businesses' and utilised private sector HRM techniques (Seifert and Ironside, 2001). To reduce labour costs, public sector managers competed for 'funding streams' and they were placed under intense pressures to meet tight centralised regulatory audit frameworks and output based KPIs (Gill-McLure and Seifert, 2005: 261-2). However, public sector managers have fewer options than private sector managers to cut costs, as they cannot close any part of their business, diversify or adjust prices (Thornley *et al*, 2000: 140). As labour costs account for seventy per cent of public sector spending (*ibid*, p. 148), public sector managers must 'minimise' labour costs and 'maximise' workforce effort while simultaneously meeting externally set performance standards (Seifert and Ironside, 2001).

Public sector modernisation has left its workforce less skilled and with worse conditions (Bach, 2012; Carter *et al*, 2013). They experience more inequality, more insecurity, higher workloads, weaker union representation while facing job loss, pay freezes, changed conditions, pension attacks and increased work pressures (Bach, 2012; Seifert and Ironside, 2001). Workers with non-managerial values felt the public service ethos which motivated them was being eroded as lower graded workers jobs became routinised and check-list driven (Thornley *et al*, 2000).

Austerity has further driven local government outsourcing (Connolly, 2016). In recent years, a 'new workplace tyranny' (Taylor, 2013) has emerged as employers introduced performance management techniques which increased workload pressures (Whitfield, 2012: 3). Post-Gershon (2004), forced 'to make their assets sweat' (Mather *et al*, 2005: 6), public sector managers have pursued full labour utilisation. Continuous improvement lean strategies and techniques were introduced in Health (CIPFA, 2007: 95) and the Civil Service (Carter, Danford, Howcroft, Richardson, Smith and Taylor, 2010, 2011, 2013). However, as Carter *et al* (2013)

observed, lean-type processes has negatively impacted on workers' psycho-social health as they struggle to cope with increased work demands (pp. 16-18).

To conclude this section, in the pursuit of efficiency, economy and effectiveness, commercial and market pressures have been introduced into the public sector. These pressures set the context for public sector employers taking action to ensure workers attend work regular and are fully productive (Audit Commission, 2011: 1; Cabinet Office, 2004: 27).

4.4 Public Sector Labour Processes

This section examines public sector labour processes. As non-profit criteria have customarily determined public sector work organisation and purpose, 'translating to the public arena a theory concerned with the extraction of surplus value for the purposes of private accumulation' has been difficult (Smith, Knights and Wilmott, 1996: 2). While 'the public sector is not immediately involved in the exchange between capital and labour', private sector principles were introduced into its labour processes. Although public sector organisations are not driven by profit they provide services which benefit capital. Increasingly work is organised in such a way 'as if labour was there to generate profits' (*ibid*, p. 2).

Corby and White (1999) suggested that the main difference between public and private sector employment relationships, more significant than the absence of profit and the presence of strong public sector union organisation, was 'the all-important dimension of political power' (p.3). The source of the state's political power is multi-faceted with a complex web of interactions between politicians, parliament, local government, councillors and voters (Corby and Symon, 2011: 4). Fredman and Morris (1989) observed that the state is not dependent on employees' productivity for income. It was subject to democratic processes which introduced forms of accountability which private corporations did not face. Public sector employment relationships are played out bureaucratically, 'built on hierarchy rather than ownership of capital' (Corby and White, 1999: 4). Because public service income is derived from taxation rather than profits, political considerations rather than market imperatives, place limits on marketisation (Fredman and Morris, 1990: 152-3).

According to White (2011), an important difference between the private and public sector is how the terms of the effort-bargain are rewarded. Traditionally, public sector employment personnel policies have emphasised 'careers, equity of treatment, and recognition of service' rather than financial incentives and staff competition (p. 87). Consequentially, wages and conditions were based on clear grading structures, service related pay-progression and

collective bargaining (*ibid*, p. 87). However, since the 1990s, the ‘public sector ethos’ (Lethbridge, 2011) which underpinned public sector employment relationships has been eroded as a result of privatisation and outsourcing (Hebson *et al*, 2003), spending restrictions, public sector pay freezes and pension changes.

According to Carter (1997), ‘in many areas of state employment, the purpose of work is not the expansion of capital but the fulfilment of need’ (p. 67). Nevertheless, Carter observed that capitalism’s accumulation priorities determine what needs should be prioritised and how they were met. Although not directly engaged in generating surplus value, many public sector functions and activities are carried out to ensure that the private sector makes profits (Ironsides and Seifert, 2000: 11; Miliband, 1987: 329).

Burawoy (1985) argued that there was a dialectical relationship between the state and its labour process’ development. Burawoy suggested that the modern state regulated the labour process while, simultaneously, struggles within workplaces shaped the state’s development. The state was ‘an ensemble of apparatus with their own distinct labour process’ (p. 254). Some nationalised industries produced commodities; some like the police and law produced and reproduced social relations; others like education and welfare services socialised the costs of creating the next generation of workers; while other former public services, such as post and telecommunication, assisted accumulation. The state, through legislation and economic policies, set out the framework for employment relations throughout society and was itself an employer. Carter (1997) suggested that while public sector workers terms and conditions are affected by political processes which ‘obscure and inhibit’ the law of value they do not negate it (p. 67).

Further complicating an understanding of the public sector labour process, are the dichotomies between productive labour (wage-labour which created surplus value) and unproductive labour (which did not lead to the self-expansion of capital and instead consumed surplus value), and between manual and white collar workers (Ramsay *et al*, 1996: 39). However, Marx (1990) recognised the difficulties delineating the ‘productive/ unproductive labour’ boundary (Schwartz-Weinstein, 2010). Further, the boundaries between the private and public sectors are hard to disentangle. Although not directly engaged in creating profit, public sector workers’ indirectly assist capital accumulation as their labour benefits private companies.

Marx (1990) observed the school teacher ‘belaboring the heads of his pupils’ whilst working ‘himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school’ (p. 644). According to Marx, a teacher was productive because they received a wage for their labour. Marx asserted

that the concept of a productive worker was above all a social relation ‘with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital’s direct means of valorization’, more important than the relation between the worker’s activity and its utility. Therefore, so long as capital is laid out to create surplus value, it is immaterial whether a worker works in a ‘teaching factory’ or ‘sausage factory’ (*ibid*, p. 644), a state enterprise, public-private partnership, or private enterprise (Law and Mooney, 2007: 44). Albeit indirectly, public sector workers facilitate surplus value creation as their labour transform the ‘raw material’ of patients, claimants and students, temporarily removed from the workforce, into labour power that enters (or re-enters) the valorisation process (*ibid*, p. 44).

The 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow highlighted the complex linkages between the public and private sector, exemplifying how public sector organisation outlay capital and a range of public sector workers are involved in providing opportunities for private sector profit creation. While Council owned ALEOs provided security (Community Safety Glasgow), and cleaning and catering services (Cordia), Glasgow 2014, a partnership between local councils and the Scottish Government, awarded publically funded contracts to a consortium of multi-national companies who employed workers (directly or through sub-contacting) to build the Games infrastructure, and provide administrative, technical and consultancy services (Gray and Paton, 2015: 389; Mckenna, 2014).

4.4.1 Public Sector Jobs

Carter (1997) suggested that concepts such as ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ should not be mechanically imported into the public sector labour process. Although differential wage rates were an important indicator of public sector workers’ class position, so too was the level of their job control and work autonomy. Carter suggested that an analysis of job and sector ‘hierarchies of control’ (*ibid*, p. 66) was necessary to understand their class position, with some having greater freedom and autonomy than others. A social worker’s work experience is different from that of a teacher, and both are different from a nursery assistant’s. The different ways that these jobs have changed in the last decade arises out the complex, contradictory and changing nature of public sector employment (Law and Mooney, 2007). As Law and Money stated, ‘developments are uneven in and between different areas of the public sector, at times affecting different groups of workers in different ways’ (p. 24).

Similarly, Whitfield (2012) observed that public sector labour restructuring is not uniform as many services such as health, social care and waste collection ‘must be delivered locally’.

However, back office support services such as payroll and information technology ‘are more mobile and can be relocated’ (p. 3).

According to Law and Money (2007: 40), there is less direct job control within contemporary welfare services than envisaged within Taylorism. ‘Strenuous welfarism’ required workers to accede management agendas, resulting in multiple demands that they raise their work effort. This necessitated a shift from the traditional public sector bargain which traded low wages for reasonable workloads and conditions, to the imposition of greater ‘functional flexibility’ and work intensification, without commensurate wage increases.

Paradoxically, within some public sector jobs, such as nursery nurses, both up-skilling and down-skilling trends can be identified (McCafferty and Money, 2007: 165). Marketisation has led to social workers’ professional autonomy being undermined by routine tick-box assessments. Although social workers have become overwhelmed by top down driven bureaucracy and form filling their jobs have become more complex and demanding, requiring multi-roles and varied skills as they are overwhelmed with multi-tasks, reduced budgets, increased workload demands and greater social problems (BASW, 2013; Carey, 2003: 125).

There are constant pressures to cheapen public sector services’ *socially necessary labour time* so that the labour costs of providing services are reduced to bring them more in line with that in the wider economy (Law and Mooney, 2007: 44-5). Cost reduction goes hand in hand with increased management workforce control (Thornley *et al*, 2000: 140). However, public sector labour processes are contested with discontents ‘fuelled...by pay levels...work intensification, functional flexibilities and job insecurity’ (Law and Mooney, 2007: 34). Managerial attempts to intensify work have led to increased worker dissatisfaction and breakdown of trust as more work is taken on without increased reward (Whitfield, 2012: 131-2).

Many public services such as health and social care, where there is a high level of face-to-face, physical contact with service users (Twigg *et al*, 2011), require workers to go the extra mile and invest their ‘emotional labour’ into their jobs (Hochschild, 1983). The ‘body work’ nature of many health and social care jobs limits efficiencies (Cohen, 2011). There is a spatial and temporal aspect of ‘bodies working on bodies’ (Shilling, 2011: 336). As Twigg *et al*, (2011) stated,

Body work requires co-presence. Workers and the bodies they work upon must be in the same place. Moreover, they must be in the same place at the same time. This makes the times and places of body work relatively inflexible (p. 176).

Cohen (2011) suggested that worker-patient-service user ratios, fluctuations in service demands and the need to provide them directly to service users reduced potential savings. Further, many individuals have complex and diverse needs which make the standardisation and rationalisation of work tasks difficult. Consequentially, efficiency savings are not possible without ‘degradation in the treatment’ of workers and service users (p. 189).

4.4.1 Summary

This section explored the complex and varied public sector workers’ labour processes. While, profit criteria are generally absent from the public sector, many of the pressures that private sectors workers face are felt there. Although public sector workers’ labour processes differ from the private sector’s in terms of surplus value extraction, workers in both sectors face market and commercial discipline, extended control, increased performance management and work intensification. However, the nature of public sector labour processes often limit the potential for efficiency savings through increasing workloads, workforce reduction, and the standardisation and rationalisation of work tasks.

4.5 Austerity

As austerity looms large over this study, this section initially examines the economic crisis, followed by an examination of its impact in Scotland.

4.5.1 Austerity examined

Austerity has been viewed as a continuing aspect of neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2011; Roberts, 2016) adopted by governments in response to the 2008 financial crisis (Oxfam, 2013: 6; Torres, 2010: 228). As former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown said, this was the ‘first financial crisis of the global age’ (BBC, 2009). UK austerity measures have been unparalleled for the last 60 years (Asenova, 2015: 1). Austerity is a worldwide phenomenon (Stiglitz, 2012) with no end in sight (Winnett, 2012). While there has been intermittent evidence of economic recovery, a ‘social recession’ has gathered pace as welfare and spending cuts impacted on communities (CLES, 2014: 3). Globally, governments bailed out the banking system. In Europe, between 2009 and 2012, 4.5 trillion Euros (equivalent to 36.7 per cent of EU GDP) was spent propping up the banking system (European Commission, 2012). Despite Right ideologies which advocated reducing the state, financial institutions received vast government subsidies to guarantee their debt. Government subsidy was premised on the idea that banks ‘were too big to fail’ (Blyth, 2013: 6).

Representing ‘a huge redistribution of wealth from labour to capital’ (Bonefield, 2012: 54), governments worldwide imposed savage budget cuts to fund austerity measures, leading to the ‘most savage’ UK spending cuts ‘since the 1930s’ (Shaoul, 2011: 43). For austerity’s advocates, state spending cuts reduced high levels of debt; once business confidence was restored, credit and investment would follow, boosting growth and job creation (Blyth, 2013: 2; Oxfam, 2013: 10-11). It was claimed that spending cuts prevented market crowding out; capital would then be freed up for private sector enterprises. Eventually wealth would trickle down (Stiglitz, 2012: 6) throughout the economy. Instead, World Bank economist Branko Milanovic suggested that the 2008 economic crisis was caused by the rich’s inability to profitably invest their increased funds (Dorling, 2014: 59). Stiglitz (2012) argued that austerity resulted in poor economic performance, increased unemployment, low wages and greater inequality. Supiot (2010) likened governments’ subsidies to private markets, as the actions of ‘arsonist firefighters’ who ‘had sprayed petrol onto an engine which they had set alight in the hope of restarting it’ (p. 158).

Faced with a general profitability crisis, private sector organisations extended their reach into the public sector, increasing ‘the share of profit in the overall wealth of society’ (O’Farrell, 2014: 54). For instance, the multi-national outsourcing company Serco, with £4 billion of UK public sector contracts, grew by 1,200 per cent since 1994 (Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2012: 1).

Writers have debated whether the 2008 economic crisis was financial or systemic (Harman, 2009; Upchurch, 2011: 177). Roberts (2016: 64) drew the links between financial crisis and depression, stating that slumps occur when profits fall as ‘the cost of new investment in labor and new technology rises more than the profits gained’. This leads to a process whereby the weaker, loss making firms ‘begin to lay off labour, and stop investing. This downturn in employment and investment cascades through an economy, generating an overall crisis in production’. According to Roberts, this has implications for the financial system as investments or speculative debt liabilities ‘cannot be paid, and the profit crisis will trigger a financial crisis’ which then ‘brings about an even greater fall in production’ (*ibid*, p. 64).

Austerity has been associated with increasing inequality (Dorling, 2014; Picketty, 2014; Oxfam, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012). According to Stiglitz, the rich increased their wealth but this came ‘at the *expense* of those down below’ (p. 6). The top ten per cent richest persons in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the UK, increased their wealth while the poorest ten per cent fell (Oxfam, 2013: 12).

Mooney (2014: 7) contended that a ‘more critical, indeed deeper, understanding of austerity’ is required, suggesting that it ‘is not a neutral or technical strategy’, but one which changed the terms of the social contract between citizens and government. To re-establish ‘conditions for profit and wealth accumulation’ (*ibid*, p. 7), pension, wage, benefit and public spending cuts were introduced. In the last decade, to varying degrees, European governments implemented a wide range of austerity measures which cut welfare spending, froze wages, privatised services, deregulated labour markets, relaxed employment regulation, reduced workers’ rights and weakened collective bargaining (Oxfam, 2013: 10-11).

Elected in 2009, the Coalition Government intensified public spending cuts, reducing spending by 11.5 per cent between 2010 and 2014. It is estimated that between 2010 and 2018, 1.1 million UK public sector jobs will be lost (*ibid*, pp. 8-10). Between 2010 and 2011, public sector worker wage rates fell (Dorling, 2014: 80) and precarious part time and zero-hour employment which disproportionately affected the lowest paid rose (Boyd, 2014). Weakened collective bargaining and eroded rights at work increased workplace poverty as unions found it difficult to defend pay and conditions. According to de Beer (2012), workers struggled ‘to find work that pays enough – or provides enough hours – to lift them above the poverty line’ (p. 26).

In Britain, welfare reform and public spending cuts have affected the poorest and most vulnerable in society (Oxfam, 2013). It is estimated that by 2020, a further 2.7 million UK citizens will be living in poverty (Brewer, Browne and Joyce, 2011). Providing confirmation of austerity’s persistency, government spending projections suggested that ‘the worst is yet to come’ as ‘existing plans imply a further £26bn of cuts between 2016 and 2018’ (Whittaker, 2013).

4.6 Scottish Public Sector Reform and Austerity Spending Cuts

Since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999, Scotland has undergone major political change. Following the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliament elections, Labour and the Liberal Democrats formed coalition governments (Scottish Parliament, 2015). Since 2007, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been in office (*ibid*). In 2014, the Scottish independence referendum campaign was “the most seismic political event for a generation” (Carrell, Watt and Wintour, 2014). In campaign debates, social justice, albeit an “ambiguous, contested and challenged idea” (Mooney and Scott, 2012: 1), took centre-stage. Advocates of constitutional change envisaged it created possibilities for ‘a different kind of welfare settlement from that in

other parts of the UK', one which 'defend[ed] what remains of the post-war British welfare state in Scotland' (Mooney, 2013).

In Scotland, neoliberalism's march has been 'neither total nor wholly uncontested' (Gall, 2010: 2). Since taking office, the SNP government has 'positioned itself as the inheritor of the Scottish social democratic tradition' from Scottish Labour (Davidson, 2012). The SNP introduced free prescriptions, maintained free personal care for the elderly, refused to implement tuition fees, mitigated the Bedroom Tax's impact and opposed privatisation, policies once regarded as Old Labour. However, Davidson (2010b) stated that the divergences between Scotland and the rest of the UK should not be overstated as all major Scottish political parties have accepted neo-liberalism 'with only minor variations' (p. ix). Although there are important variations, public sector bodies in Scotland have pursued NPM philosophies and practices (Mackie, 2005) as they focus on 'effective public policy implementation, performance management, accountability and value for money' (Mackie, 2018: 83).

According to Mooney (2011), the SNP has pursued 'a neoliberal economic agenda' that promoted economic growth and the country as 'a competitive and lean 'Celtic Lion' economy' (p. 47). Despite claims that Scotland is the 14th wealthiest country in the world (ahead of France, Japan, the UK and Spain) (Scottish Government, 2014) and assertions that 'social justice is an essential part of Scottish life' (Mooney and Scott, 2012: 1), the country is affected by high levels of poverty (Bailey, 2014: 2). One million Scots, one fifth of the Scottish population, live in poverty (CPAG, 2014: 1). Since devolution, the income gap between rich and poor has steadily increased (Mooney, 2011: 46) and health inequalities have risen: males born in the poorest areas live 14 years less than those who live in the wealthiest areas (Aldridge *et al*, 2013). As in the rest of the UK, many Scottish workers experience poverty wages and zero-hour contracts (Boyd, 2014; Mooney, 2014).

In government, the SNP has emphasised its financial responsibility, working within UK government's spending limits. As a consequence, the SNP Government has placed an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. Exemplifying this, former SNP Finance Minister John Swinney stated that he wished "more for the same":

We can't spend money that we don't have....we have to find ways of providing the same levels of service but in a more efficient fashion... at the same cost (BBC Radio Scotland interview, 9th January, 2009).

Since the 2008 financial crisis, Scottish public sector budgets have continuously fallen, down 'nine per cent, in real terms' between 2009/10 and 2014/15 (Audit Scotland, 2014a: 9).

UNISON Scotland (2014a) claimed that ‘60% of the total revenue cuts’ were ‘still to come, with the deepest cut in 2016-18’ (p. 3). Benefit cuts resulted in Scottish claimants receiving £1.6 billion less income (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013: 8-11).

Providing essential public services, with a budget of £21 billion in 2013, Scotland’s 32 councils employed 204,500 workers (Audit Scotland, 2014b: 5). Local government spending in Scotland declined since 2011, to 1991 levels (Hastings, Bailey, Besemer, Bramley, Gannon and Watkins, 2013). With negative impacts on service delivery and workforce numbers, Scottish local government spending reduced by 11 per cent between 2009 and 2013 (*ibid*, p. 7). According to UNISON Scotland (2014), local government in Scotland has ‘borne the brunt’ (p. 4) of public sector job losses as 40,000 workers have left since 2007 (*ibid*, p. 7). Sending ‘stress levels soaring’, council workers faced ‘long hours and unpaid overtime’ (Audit Scotland, 2013a: 5) as service demands increased. Further, since 2008, local government workers have faced continued wage restraint (UNISON Scotland, 2014b) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Scottish Local Government Pay Awards 2008-17

Year	Pay Award
2008-9	3%
2009-10	2.5%
2010-11	0.65%
2011-12	0%
2012-13	0%
2013-14	1%
2014-5	1%
2015-16	1.5%
2016-17	1%

4.7 Conceptual Framework Summary

This chapter contextualised the theoretical framework which was outlined in the two preceding chapters that underpins the thesis. Chapter Two attested to the continued relevance of labour process theory to understanding contemporary employment relations. It viewed employer concerns about workers’ attendance as a managerial attempt to address the widening

indeterminacy gap that arises when workers take sick leave. Although ensuring that workers attend work regularly has been a perennial managerial concern throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it takes on new meaning at a time of austerity when employers are attempting to increase productivity and reduce costs. Thus, after reviewing the sickness absence literature and exploring employer attendance management control strategies, Chapter Three considered the cost and productivity pressures on employers to implement strict attendance policies during a period of changing workplace regulation in straightened economic conditions.

As the case study is set within a local government setting, this chapter developed this analysis further by exploring the relevance of labour process theory to the study of work organisation within the state. Beginning with an examination of the role of the state in capitalist society at both national and local levels, the following sections explored the impact of the introduction of market and commercial methods on public sector employment relations, changing its labour processes. While the important difference between the public and private sector labour processes is generally the absence of profits in the public sector, it is subject to intense competitive and commercial pressures to reduce labour costs, as often stated “doing more with less”. This necessitates public sector employers seek ways to extend control over its workforce, leading to changed roles, increased performance management and work intensification. With particular emphasis on Scotland, the chapter closed with consideration of austerity’s impact on the public sector. Such financial pressures lie at the heart of public sector pressures to take action to reduce costs and implement strict attendance management policies.

An underlying assumption of the thesis is that workers’ resistance is an essential aspect of the labour process. While the implementation of strict attendance management policies signified an assertion of managerial control, as will be evident in Chapter 9, employers also met resistance from workplace reps as they represented their members and maintained union organisation. As the thesis examines union organising efforts through the prism of workplace reps, the next chapter reviews the shop stewards and union organisation literature.

Chapter 5: Shop Stewards: Theory and Practice

5.1 Introduction

As workplace reps are the unit of research from which standpoint changing SAP implementation is examined, this chapter now reviews the shop stewards and union organisation literature where they, generically known as shop stewards, play a crucial role. Described by Brendon Barber, former TUC General Secretary, as the ‘unsung heroes of Britain’s workplaces’, over 200,000 reps volunteer ‘their time and energy for free simply to help and support their work colleagues’ (TUC, 2012: 2). They defend workers’ interests relative to employers and provide the crucial linkage between national union structures and union members (Darlington, 2010: 126). Being their ‘only contact’, for most union members shop stewards still personify the *union* (Goodman and Whittingham, 1969: 15).

Important studies of shop stewards’ organising activities emerged in the 1970s (Beynon, 1973; Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977), but less is known about how they are faring under the impact of austerity in the contemporary conditions of ‘intensified’ structural and ideological challenges (Moore, 2011: 2). Further, while there is an extensive literature on the factors which affect union recruitment (Bain, 1970; Bain and Elsheikh, 1978; Bain and Price, 1983), the shop steward’s role in influencing members’ decisions to join the union has attracted less attention (Pilemalm *et al*, 2001: 571).

Initially, this chapter takes an historic perspective on the development of shop stewards’ organisations, followed by an examination of their sociological significance. Providing the context for understanding the difficulties that shop stewards face in organising and representing their members, the nature of, and the reasons for, diminished union influence since Thatcher’s election in 1979 (Waddington, 2003: 214) are then explored. Considering what shop stewards actually do, their important contribution to union growth and renewal, and the tension between individual and collective trade unionism are then examined.

5.2 Historical Perspective

Although pre-dated by printing industry chapels, shop stewards’ roots can be traced to mid-nineteenth century trade unionism (Clegg, 1979: 19). Prior to the First World War, the shop steward was described as ‘a minor workshop agent’, elected by the ‘members of his craft in the shop or department in which he worked’ (Cole, 1923: 38). Their role was limited to recruitment, checking subscriptions, observing rules were followed and reporting periodically to the union

office (Goodman and Whittingham, 1969: 27). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, bureaucratic strains emerged in trade unions as they established national offices. As Draper (1978) indicated, ‘by the 1880s’ the trade union movement ‘was covered over with a bureaucratic crust that looked invincible’ (p. 110). In these circumstances, the Webbs (1897) viewed direct workplace democracy, centred on workplace delegates, as a counterbalancing safeguard against oligarchic tendencies within unions (Michels, 1915; Hyman, 1971).

In World War One the shop steward’s role expanded to becoming ‘a negotiator on workplace grievances’ (Cole, 1923: 42). During this period, the rank and file Shop Stewards Movement emerged amongst Clydeside and Sheffield engineering and shipbuilding workers. Here, shop stewards, working both inside and outside official union structures, organised militant action over skilled workers’ concerns about job ‘dilution’ (Hinton, 1973: 235-254). This movement, a ‘child of war’ (*ibid*, p. 23), lost its impetus when war ended. Although shop stewards’ organisation continued to develop in workplaces in the immediate post-war period, with recognition agreements in engineering (Cole, 1923: 72-3), trade unionism was adversely affected by the 1926 General Strike defeat and Great Depression, and did not revive until the mid-1930s (Goodman and Whittingham, 1969: 39-40; Upchurch, 2015: 197).

Following World War Two, against a background of post-war full employment, increasing union membership, a supportive legislative framework and favourable post-war consensus (McIvor, 2013: 207) union power increased. In the 1950s, the classical British shop stewards’ model emerged; then spread throughout the 1960s and 1970s to white-collar workers. The post war ‘golden age’ of collective bargaining (Brown, 2010: 259) was characterised by a ‘great upsurge’ of workplace union activity as ‘bargaining between shop stewards and management...developed on a scale previously unknown’ (Flanders, 1970: 44). Collective bargaining shifted from the national level to workplaces, resulting in the formalisation of industrial relations ‘through the development of written policies, procedures and agreements’ (Salamon, 2000: 211). Shop stewards conducted pay negotiations and ‘for greater say on managerial decisions’ over redundancies, discipline, overtime and other matters (Flanders, 1970: 44-5). During this period, workers were ‘raising their sights’ (*ibid*, p. 45) as unions sought to shift the frontier of control in their favour, challenging management’s prerogative, their ‘right to hire labour, allocate work and exercise discipline on the shop floor’ (Findlay and Mckinlay, 2004: 61).

In the 1940s and 1950s, trade unions could make gains without needing to go on strike (McIvor, 2013: 206-7). Despite this, union organisation was ‘uneven and patchy across the

economy' (*ibid*, pp. 209-10). However, even on Clydeside, where union strongholds such as Rolls Royce existed, many workers' employment situation was precarious (Findlay and Mckinlay, 2004: 56-7). Nevertheless, it was estimated that in 1961 there were 90, 000 collectively organised shop stewards in the United Kingdom (Clegg *et al*, 1961: 153) (Table 5.1). By 1968, the Donovan Commission, reported that there were 175, 000 shop stewards (Donovan, 1968: 25-6); their numbers 'accelerated' thereafter (Batstone, 1984: 79).

Table 5.1: UK Shop Stewards' Numbers

Year	No. of Shop Stewards	Source
1961	90, 000	Clegg <i>et al</i> (1961: 153)
1968	175, 000	Donovan Commission (1968: 26)
1978	>250, 000	Clegg (1979)
1984	335, 000	Charlwood and Forth (2009: 78).
1998	218, 000	Cully, <i>et al</i> (1998: 16)
2004	128,000	Terry (2010: 278)
2007	350,000	DTI (2007)
2009	200, 000	TUC (2009: 3)
2012	>200, 000	TUC (2012: 2)

In the 1950s and 1960s shop stewards in many industries exercised local autonomy to recruit and represent members, engage in decentralised employer or plant level bargaining over wages, terms and conditions, and take up health and safety issues (Terry, 1995: 204; Charlwood and Terry, 2007: 322). In 1960's workplaces, bargaining was 'largely informal, largely fragmented and largely autonomous' (Flanders, 1966: 552). While 'denying it any legitimacy', managers were forced to 'yield to bargaining power on the shop floor' (*ibid*, p. 555). 'Piecemeal and sectional' bargaining often took place 'remote from the control of full-time union officials or senior management', giving rise to 'unwritten understandings' and 'custom and practice' rules' (Hyman, 1979: 56).

Not only were shop stewards involved in workplace bargaining, they represented workers facing disciplinary charges, seeking 'removal or reduction of the sanctions proposed' (McCarthy, 1966: 12). Their activity led to 'dismissals' being 'changed to suspensions,

suspensions to admonitions, and admonitions to apologies' (*ibid*, pp. 12-13). Where there was little scope for bargaining over substantive issues, shop stewards could 'still maintain the elements of a negotiating position and find plenty of things to do', dealing with 'non-monetary issues' such as work task allocation, working conditions and disciplinary issues (*ibid*, p. 16).

During this period, shop stewards' organisation was described as a 'union within a union' (Beynon, 1973: 48), 'within, but often independent from, wider union structures' (Charlwood and Terry, 2007: 322). In the 1960s, 'the challenge from below' (Flanders, 1970) took place as upward wage pressures led to short, unofficial strikes (Flanders, 1966). Representing 'the greatest wave of industrial struggle Britain had seen since the 1920s', there were 13.5 million strike days in 1971 and 23.9 million in 1972, rising from five million strike in 1968 (Harman, 1988: 226). These were not generally 'strikes against the union' but ones where official union structures were 'largely irrelevant' (Turner, Clack and Roberts, 1967: 222). Here, the unions' 'formal, and therefore rather slower, process of constitutional union government' (McCarthy, 1966: 51) could not keep pace with immediate workplace democracy. Often 'wildcat strikes' (Gouldner, 1955), many lasting no more than a 'few hours' (McCarthy, 1966: 21), were settled before formal union procedures were initiated. Generally, their intention was 'demonstrative', indicating to management 'that something ought to be done and done quickly'. Usually workers returned to work once 'some assurance' was given that their grievance 'would receive immediate attention' (*ibid*, p. 21).

By the 1970s, shop stewards had become the 'non-commissioned officers' of a trade union movement 'on the front line of industrial conflict' (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 74). Then, in Britain's industrial relations 'jungle war' (Flanders, 1970: 46), shop stewards regularly found themselves in conflict with full-time union officials as they led rank and file inspired action to improve wages and conditions (Darlington, 2010: 129). During this period, 'employer control over the labour process was substantially eroded' (Hyman, 1979: 56). According to Purcell and Sissons (1983), many commentators viewed the unions' ability to 'veto' management proposals as 'a barrier to efficient production', responsible for manufacturing industry's declining 'competitiveness and profitability' (p. 101).

Donovan's (1968) inquiry identified as problematic the UK's formal and informal industrial relations bargaining arrangements (Hyman, 1975: 15). Underpinning the Donovan analysis was the premise that shop stewards benefited from managers' reluctance to avoid formal agreements and to bargain locally at the point of production. Managers and unions both sought autonomous and flexible bargaining relationships where 'imprecision and informality' was the norm, rather

than ‘detailed, comprehensive, and carefully written agreements’ (McCarthy, 1966: 26). In effect, both management and unions wished room for manoeuvre.

Brown’s (1972) exploration of custom and practice highlighted how workplace rules and norms developed. For Brown, managerial prerogative was ‘a concept of legitimacy’ (p. 50) which managers could never be certain that they could exercise. They often made concessions to strong workplace union organisation which sought to extend custom and practice into ‘areas hitherto assumed to be unilaterally controlled by management’ (*ibid*, p. 55). For expediency reasons, managers accepted custom and practice even when their position was relatively stronger, recognising that they could occasionally extend the frontier of control in their favour if the opportunity arose (*ibid*, pp. 56-7).

To neuter unofficial action, Donovan (1968) recommended that industrial relations should be reformed through arbitration and conciliation, and the introduction of formal grievance and disciplinary procedures (Upchurch, 2015: 196). Although joint consultation procedures were introduced, managers insisted that ‘in the final analysis’ they took ‘the final decision’ (Purcell and Sisson, 1983: 104).

Emphasising that the union’s interests ‘as a whole’ should transcend militant sections’ demands, union officials in the 1970s attempted to regain authority over workplace activity (Upchurch, 2015: 196). Hyman (1979: 58) argued that throughout the 1970s, a ‘bureaucratisation of the rank-and-file’ took place as unofficial or semi-official shop stewards organisations were brought into official union structures. A process of incorporation took place as employers, aided by increasingly more professionalised personnel officers (Batstone, 1980), recognised stewards’ organisations and allowed workplace reps facility time, offices and other resources (Terry, 1983: 70). While collective bargaining remained widespread, shop stewards became involved in an ‘ever-increasing load of individual representation through grievance and disciplinary procedures’ (Terry, 1995: 207-8).

It was estimated that by the end of the 1970s, there were over 250,000 shop stewards in the UK (Table 4.1), present ‘well beyond the ‘metal handling industries’ and other earlier strongholds’ (*ibid*, p. 68). ‘Virtually synonymous’ with union recognition, shop stewards were ‘all but universal’ in larger manual work forces and were spreading to white-collar areas (*ibid*, p. 68). However, following Thatcher’s election victory in 1979 industrial relations dramatically changed as an employer offensive took place (McIvor, 2013: 239). Before exploring the

transformed, post-1979 industrial relations scene, the shop steward's sociological significance is considered.

5.3 Shop Stewards' Sociological Significance

Shop stewards often play several, sometimes contradictory, workplace roles, navigating complex, dynamic relationships with trade union members, full-time union officers and management (Darlington, 1994: 28-33). Shop stewards have 'dual' workplace status; their 'low' employee status runs parallel to their 'high' workplace representative status (Salamon, 2000: 210). Accordingly, they face many challenges balancing the simultaneous pressures of representing their members, being an officer of their union and an employee (*ibid*, p. 215).

Kahn-Freund (1979: 5) described workplace based union organisation as a model of 'direct democracy' where decisions are taken collectively by members and shop stewards were expected to implement them. Although historically contingent upon post-war tight labour market, union strength and rising material expectations, Beynon's (1973) Ford Halewood factory study still has contemporary relevance, providing insights into 'shop-floor control, resistance and consent' (Darlington, 1994: *vii*). The shop stewards in Beynon's (1973) study were imbued with the strong collectivist outlook that lay at the heart of trade unionism. As Beynon stated, 'collectivism permeates the very fabric of relationships within the union and is imprinted upon the position of the shop steward' (p. 197).

Beynon highlighted the democratic and bureaucratic tensions that were inherent in shop stewards' relationships with their members. Although most shop stewards rarely faced re-election, their role as their members' 'collective mouthpiece' depended on them maintaining their confidence (*ibid*, p. 198). Unlike managers, shops stewards' authority and legitimacy derived from the workmates who elect them and 'subject' them 'to membership control on a continuous and close basis' (Terry, 1983: 71-2). To avoid losing a 'credible negotiating stance', stewards were required to be 'particularly sensitive' to their member's feelings (Beynon, 1973: 175) and strongly represent their views (McCarthy, 1966: 22).

Terry (1977: 79) observed that, in the process of formalising workplace rules, workers 'surrender' their 'bargaining abilities' to their representatives. Hyman (1975) suggested that trade unions can be 'transformed, at least partially, into an agency of control *over* their members' (p. 68). Similarly, Darlington (1994) reflected that in the 1970s, senior stewards at Birds Eye and Ford factories restrained workplace militancy by using 'their 'power for' union members as a 'power over' them' (p. 274). Rejecting the 'agitator theory' of shop stewards

(Darlington, 2006), Donovan (1968) said that it was ‘often wide of the mark’ to characterise shop stewards as ‘troublemakers’ as ‘trouble is thrust upon them’ (p. 28). Rather than ‘pushing workers towards unconstitutional action’, shop stewards were often ‘supporters of order’ who exercised a ‘restraining influence’ on members (*ibid*, p. 29).

Shop stewards embody workplace union democracy, but their effectiveness depends on their relationship with full-time union officers who provide information, bargaining support and official support for industrial action. According to Darlington (1994), this dependence increased when workers’ confidence to fight their employer was low (p. 31). Full-time officers sometimes pursue a cautious and conciliatory approach as a result of their social position (Callinicos, 1995: 17-18; Hyman, 1979: 55). Milliband (1982) described union officials as effort bargain ‘brokers’, balancing employers’ wish to purchase labour power as cheaply as possible with workers’ desire to sell their labour on the most favourable terms (pp. 55-6). According to Gramsci (1977), union officials were concerned with ‘industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs’ (p. 93). Perceiving militancy as a threat to stable collective bargaining arrangements, they have been described as ‘managers of discontent’, making ‘regular what might otherwise be disruptive’ (Wright Mills, 1948: 8). To ensure the unions’ continued security and survival, they oppose ‘actions which unduly antagonise employers or the state and thus risk violent confrontation’ (Hyman, 1979: 55).

Full-time officers ‘are neither *employers* nor *workers*’ (Darlington and Upchurch, 2012: 80-81). Their role would not exist without trade unions, so consequentially they have a material interest in preserving existing capital-labour relationships (*ibid*, p. 81). By contract, shop stewards’ wages are usually the same as the workers they represent; they are regularly elected, and can face redundancy and victimisation (*ibid*, pp. 80-81). In contemporary fragmented workplaces, shop stewards may not work alongside their members but their working lives generate a shared day-to-day understanding of workplace realities. From this, shop stewards wrestle ‘with trade unionism and the problem of leadership’ (Beynon, 1973: 208). As Beynon observed, ‘the steward acts and lives through his members’ (*ibid*, p. 187).

Shop stewards’ relationships with management are complex. Beynon (1973) found evidence of shop stewards mobilising union power to resist managerial control. Nevertheless, they were acutely aware that if they took things too far they faced management counter mobilisation. Their legitimacy with managers depended on them ‘controlling the membership’ (*ibid*, p. 140). Shop stewards could speak to union members about ‘absenteeism, poor performance [and] timekeeping’ in ways that foremen could not (Goodman and Whittingham,

1969: 205). Beynon (1973) suggested that shop steward attempts to curtail individual worker acts of 'defiance or laziness' emanated from the need to maintain collective unity and organisation rather than an acceptance of managerial goals (p. 140). However, they faced the danger of becoming 'socialised into an acceptance of management's views' (Salamon, 2000: 219). Shop stewards who were viewed by union members as being 'too close to management' and not prepared to defend workers' interest risked their disapproval (Terry, 2003: 270).

Management's recognition of the union's role in collective bargaining provides its legitimacy 'as the representative voice of workers' (Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 128). According to Batstone *et al's* (1977), management sought strong bargaining relationships with pragmatic 'leader' shop stewards, who were 'willing and able to lead their members', rather than 'populist' ones 'who typically lacked leadership, even though they might have considerable power' (*ibid*, p.177). 'Leader' shop stewards could be trusted to ensure that their members respected agreements reached. Batstone *et al* suggested that the 'informal chat', where 'confidential' information was shared 'off the record', was a central aspect of a strong bargaining relationship (*ibid*, p. 172). However, such relationships were developed for mutual advantage. This necessitated 'a broad balance of power' as there was 'little attraction' in one party giving the other 'confidences and support' if they had no power 'for little will be gained in return' (*ibid*, p. 171). McCarthy (1966) observed that 'the stronger [managers] felt a shop steward to be...the more likely they were' taken 'into their confidence' (p. 14).

Although set in an earlier period, both Beynon's (1973) and Batstone *et al's* (1977) studies highlight the 'radical dualism' (Hyman, 1989: 157) that lies at the heart of shop stewards' activity. The pressures to accommodate and even 'contain, control and manipulate members' reactions' existed simultaneously with 'the dominant tendency' of 'opposition and resistance to capital' (*ibid*, p. 158). As Hyman (1979) observed, trade unions cannot 'become wholly an agency of repressive discipline' as this would undermine its independence and members' loyalty. At the same time, they cannot 'be wholly autonomous' as this 'would render its activities and indeed its very existence intolerable to capital' (p. 60). Thus in some instances shop stewards mobilise to defend union members' wages and conditions, while on other occasions they seek compromise. According to Darlington and Upchurch (2012), unions' main objective 'within capitalism' is to improve 'the terms on which workers are exploited, not with ending that exploitation' (p. 80). As Gramsci (1919) argued, trade unionism was 'a reflection of capitalist society, not a potential means of transcending capitalist society' (p. 45).

Shop stewards' 'dualism' arises from the simultaneously contradictory, conflicted and cooperative, aspects of the capitalist labour process (Hyman, 1975). Capital accumulation requires the maximum extraction of surplus value from workers, transforming their potential labour power into actual labour. Thus, managers are constantly forced to find ways to reduce labour costs and intensify work. Simultaneously, while generally acknowledging management's right to manage, unions endeavour to place limits on management's authority at the frontier of control. The ensuing conflict over employment practices and work norms represents a crucial aspect of the 'structured antagonism' (Edwards, 1986: 5) that exists between labour and capital. In unionised workplaces, shop stewards are invariably drawn into conflict with management over the 'web of rules and agreements' (Batstone *et al*, 1977: 265) which frame daily work organisation.

However, the frontier of control is not firmly fixed but is 'a shifting line in a great mass of regulations' (Goodrich, 1975: 62), which both management and unions constantly seek to alter in their favour (Hyman, 1975: 27). There was a temporary aspect to formal agreements as changed economic conditions sometimes necessitated that they were 'reinterpreted' (Batstone *et al*'s (1977: 264). Formal agreements were often broken 'because the main aim of both workers and management is not to preserve them'; they were temporary 'means to an end' (*ibid*, 264). For shop stewards, procedures were 'a framework for *minimal* rights' which could be extended if managers acquiesced (McCarthy, 1966: 24).

Hyman conceived trade unions as 'the institutional meeting point' where workers, employers and the state's contradictory demands and interests are mediated and accommodated, 'a task which is at times virtually impossible' (*ibid*, p. 38). Consequentially, the state of shop stewards' organisation is fluid and ever changing as 'internal and external, material and ideological forces' impact on it (Darlington, 1994: 4). According to Darlington it is 'the ebb and flow of workplace power and shop-floor struggle' which changes 'the nature of stewards' organization' (*ibid*, p. 26). For Darlington, the fundamental tensions in shop stewards' relationships to management (between resistance and accommodation), to their members (between democracy and bureaucracy), and full-time officers (between independence and dependence), play out in the workplace. These 'cannot be viewed in isolation from these operating within other workplaces and within society more *generally*' (*ibid*, p. 33).

5.4 Under Neoliberal Assault

In the 1980s, shop stewards came ‘under pressure’ (Salamon, 2000: 212). The late 1970s were the high point of shop stewards’ power but since then the frontier of control has shifted in management’s favour. Following Thatcher’s election, trade unions faced a ‘concerted neo-liberal assault’ (Waddington, 2003: 214). Under neoliberalism, there was no safe space for trade unions as governments turned their backs on ‘voluntarism and collective laissez-faire’ (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009a: 12). According to McIvor (2013), ‘trade unions and strike activity’ were ‘critically undermined’ by ‘mass unemployment and a multi-pronged counter-offensive by big business, Thatcher and successive Tory governments’ (p. 239). As the industrial strength of workers was weakened by recession and job losses, falling union membership in manufacturing industries, anti-union legislation and employer demands for greater flexibility, there was a corresponding reduction in shop stewards’ power (Kelly, 2005: 295; Salamon, 2000: 212).

However, while private sector trade unionism declined throughout the 1980s, public sector trade unionism remained resilient, albeit it encountered difficulties in the face of hostile Conservative governments (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004: 148; McIvor, 2013: 239; Terry, 2010: 278). In local government, shop stewards were not officially recognised until 1969. However, in the 1980s shop stewards’ organisation expanded in public sector unions (Kessler, 1989: 181). By 1984, it was estimated that the number of workplace reps had risen from 317,000 at the start of the decade to 335,000 (IRS, 1987: 2) (Table 4.1). In mid-1980s, the typical shop steward was white-collar and was ‘more likely to be found in the public rather than the private sector’ (IRS, 1987: 2).

The Miners’ Strike (1984-5) and subsequent News International (1986-7) dispute were turning points for UK trade unionism. The government encouraged employers to exercise greater workplace control (Waddington, 2003: 216). While some employers sought collaboration (Purcell, 1989), incorporating shop stewards to avoid ‘outright confrontation’ (Salamon, 2000: 220), others pursued ‘macho management strategies’ (Storey and Sisson, 1995: 6), ‘managing without unions’ (Colling, 2003). In the changed politico-economic climate of the 1980s and 1990s, many employers viewed unions as ‘obstructive’ and a barrier to efficiency and corporate success in competitive markets (Terry, 2003: 267). Full time shops steward convenors found themselves isolated from their members (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004: 151), victimisation and de-recognition decimated union organisation in many industries (Danford *et al*, 2003).

Over the past four decades, union membership and density has fallen. Charlwood and Forth (2009) observed that since 1979 ‘union membership fell by 40 percent, collective bargaining coverage halved, and there was a loss of political influence’ (p. 75). In 1998, it was estimated that there were 218,000 shop stewards (Cully *et al*, 1998: 16); by 2004, the number had fallen to 128,000 (Terry, 2010: 278) (Table 4.1). It was claimed that union organisations became ‘hollow shells’ in many workplaces, recognised by management only when union cooperation was sought to implement workforce change (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2009: 57). Workplace union organisation was weakened as a result of general union decline and changes in the nature of work as traditional manufacturing industries waned (Terry, 2003: 264-5; Kelly, 2005: 295).

Internationally, strike activity levels have been low for the last thirty years (Gall, 2014: 210). In the UK, most ‘days lost each year have been in the public sector (92% in 2011)’ (CIPD, 2012b: 4). Over half of these strikes were of one day’s duration (*ibid*, p. 4). Unlike the late 1960s, when about 95 per cent of strikes were unofficial, most now depend on official support (Joyce, 2015: 137). According to Joyce (2015), workers’ heightened feelings of insecurity as a result of difficult economic conditions, job loss fears and restrictive anti-union legislation have contributed to a persistent low level of strike activity (pp. 129-134): ‘In every year since 1991 the number of strikes has been lower than the number of strikes in any year prior to 1991’ (*ibid*, p. 120).

Individualistic HRM-related practices, such as outsourcing and performance pay, presented difficulties for union organising (Upchurch, 2015: 192-3). Terry (2010) suggested that unitarist perspectives which advocated the importance of winning employee commitment to change were ‘silent on the issue of trade unions’ as they ‘presented a competing loyalty in the workplace’ (p. 276). Since the early 1980s, many employers viewed unions as ‘an illegitimate intrusion into the unified and co-operative structure of the workplace’ (Farnham and Pimlott, 1983: 53). Further, it was claimed that a cultural change had taken place at work (Torrington *et al*, 2005: 452) where labour-management conflict had been replaced by consensual, co-operative employer-employee relationships (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004: 790). Eschewing militant workplace based activity, *responsible* trade unionism suggested that unions should pursue pragmatic, compromising bargaining strategies which assumed common worker and management interests (Darlington, 1994: 3-4).

Employer attacks on union organisation continued under New Labour. However, while accepting neoliberalism, New Labour attempted to take the edge of Thatcherism’s harsher and confrontational aspects (Smith and Morton, 2006). According to McIlroy (2009a),

‘neoliberalism provided a solution to the crisis of the 1970s but it came at a price’ (p. 64). Efforts were made to assure the markets that New Labour’s economic policies were credible. Accepting the previous Conservative government’s spending limits, New Labour left intact their anti-union legislation, extended PFI schemes (*ibid*, p.65-82) and ‘business friendly’ (*ibid*, p. 69) policies became the norm. New Labour promoted social partnership (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009b: 101-111). Trade unions were envisaged as facilitating workforce acceptance of change, ‘lubricating’ the supply side of the labour market, rather than regulating it (McIlroy, 2009a: 86).

Kelly (2014) described the contemporary industrial relations framework as ‘benevolent despotism’; ‘Fuelled in part by recession, but also by the shifting balances of power between labour and capital’ (p. 191). Kelly suggested that its characteristic features (affecting the private and public sector to varying degrees) were wage cuts, occupational pension attacks, work intensification and working time changes. Further, there was an ‘increased use of zero hours contracts, a decline in employment security, dwindling management support for trade unionism’ and further weakening of collective bargaining (*ibid*, p. 191). Today, Britain has a lightly regulated labour market which, combined with major structural changes in the economy, low inflation, high unemployment and social democratic decline, weakened working class militancy. In such conditions, unions have found renewal difficult, with ‘bleak’ prospects for growth (Daniels, 2009: 275). Nevertheless, employers’ attempts to shift the frontier of control in their favour have generated widespread discontents (Upchurch, 2015: 201).

In the last decade, despite generally low levels of strike activity there have been several high profile disputes, such as those involving British Airways cabin crew (Taylor and Moore, 2015) , RMT rail and London Tube members (Simms, 2015), and Junior Doctors (2015-16). Further, during the 2011 Pensions Dispute, two and a half million public sector workers took part in coordinated strike action (Lyddon, 2015: 158-162). However, a simple focus on strike figures obscures less visible workplace conflict. As a result of their strategic position in the economy, certain groups of workers have been able to enforce their demands without taking strike action (Darlington, 2014: 119). In the last decade unions have taken action that did not involve striking (Gall, 2014: 219-220) and used industrial action ballots tactically to make limited gains (Joyce, 2015: 138). In 2011, although there were nearly 1,000 ballots, just 149 resulted in industrial action (CIPD, 2012b: 4). Further, as illustrated in the BESNA construction workers dispute (2011-12), high profile leverage campaigning techniques tactics were used to change employer behaviour (UNITE, 2012). Threats to employers’ reputations ‘can be quite

powerful' (CIPD, 2012b: 4), exemplified by Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union activists who forced McDonalds to reduce the use of zero hour contracts (Ruddick, 2016).

Now, having examined the contemporary realities of union organisation, the related issue of union growth and renewal is considered as it provides insight into the interplay between structure and agency, raising questions as to what extent reps are circumscribed by the circumstances they find themselves in, or conversely, are able to effect change and make a difference.

5.5 Structure and Agency: Trade Union Growth and Renewal

In the 1970s, mainstream industrial relations theorists emphasised the importance of *structural* factors on union growth. For instance, Bain's (1970) suggested that white-collar union growth depended on employer recognition, employer support for collective bargaining and employment concentration. Bain argued that these factors were inter-related; workers more likely joined a union if their employer recognised it but equally 'the degree of recognition' was related to the level of union organisation and public policy legal supports (p. 184). Bain and Price (1983: 20) concluded that government legislation between 1969 and 1979 encouraged collective bargaining, consequentially helping strengthen workplace union organisation and union growth. For Bain and Elsheikh (1978), union membership growth was affected by changing rates of prices, wages, unemployment levels and union density. It was suggested that workers more likely joined unions in inflationary periods (pp. 115-9).

Rather than *structural* factors, Waddington and Whitson (1995) emphasised trade union *agency* in explaining union growth and decline. Thus, what unions do becomes important in affecting their fortunes. For Waddington and Whitson, unions' effectiveness in the workplace was critical. They argued that 'the debate between decline and continuity' obscured how union activity affected prospects (p. 151). While accepting that some unions were weakened by industrial changes, Undy, Ellis, McCarthy and Halmos (1981) took the view that union growth was 'significantly affected' by their 'structure, government, policy and leadership' (*ibid*, p. 164). They claimed that (now former) unions such as the TGWU and ASTMS created 'the conditions for their own growth' (*ibid*, p. 166) when union leaders espoused a more militant bargaining approach. Conversely, Bain and Price (1983) suggested that the role of leadership was overstated as successful mobilisation required the presence of 'some irritant' which resulted 'in a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction' (p. 31).

For Waddington and Whitson (1997), *collective* reasons were ‘central to union joining’, more important than the *individual* membership benefits such as financial packages. Noting that union and non-union members differed little regarding their attitude to trade unionism, Waddington and Whitson concluded that ‘workplace activity is key to maintaining levels of unionization’. However, unions’ inability to make contact with, and support, potential recruits limited their growth (*ibid*, p. 518).

According to Darlington (2002), structural factors have to be considered in relation to ‘how social actors actually intervene’ within the circumstances they face. Darlington suggested that diverse forms of collective organisation and activity shape the differing ‘perceptions, intentions and strategies of the workers involved in particular workplaces’ (p. 96). Similarly, while McIlroy (2009b) accepted structural factors were important, he suggested that ‘union strength is also a function of human agency, the quality of leadership at all levels, from head office to workplace’ (p. 22). Such activity allowed unions to mitigate the difficult environment in which they operated and maximise opportunities. Suggesting that there is a dialectical relationship between agency and structure, McIlroy and Daniels (2009b) took the view that unions could improve their position by taking advantage of any opportunities that arose. Although often operating in unfavourable environments, they ‘cannot voluntaristically wish that context away. Possibilities are not determined by the current position...they are limited by it’ (p. 122).

For Edwards (1979), workplace conflict existed ‘within definite limits imposed by a social and historical context, yet this context rarely determines everything about work organisation’ (p. 15). As Marx (1852) observed, workers ‘make their own history’ but not in circumstances of their choosing, but ‘existing already, given and transmitted from the past’. Thus, while objective factors may limit union growth it does not *determine* possibilities (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009b: 122).

Over the last decade, debates on union renewal have focused on whether the *partnership* or *organising* models can halt decline (Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 138-140). McIlroy and Daniels (2009a) characterised partnership as ‘the application of management prerogative by other means’ (p. 14). In partnership, management and unions work together to ensure the organisation’s success. Often for job security promises, unions agree to flexibility and organisational change (Terry, 2003). According to Terry, partnership implies that ‘shop floor unions do not merely not object to change, but are actively involved in it’ (p. 280).

Salamon (2000) suggested that partnership ‘contains the seeds for a further weakening of unionism’ (p. 220) if shop stewards become detached from their members and end up policing agreements (Taylor and Ramsay, 1998). Undermining the ‘collectivisation of discontents’, partnership can create a ‘distance’ between ‘senior stewards’ and ‘rank and file’ members (Danford *et al*, 2002: 22) ‘pacifying’ them as ‘oppositional’ workplace activism is emasculated (Upchurch, 2009: 243). At a time when union resources are stretched, partnership can be a ‘distraction’ from organising and representing members (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009b: 109), weakening members’ resilience in the face of employer attacks (Darlington, 2014: 132). However, partnership may simply reflect the reality of weakened union power (Terry, 2010: 292), providing a forum for raising issues when they lack industrial strength.

Underpinning the organising model is a belief that workers join unions for protection at work. This runs contrary to the *servicing* model, popular with the TUC in the 1980s, which accentuated financial and legal benefits (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009b: 107). The organising model emphasises the importance of workers’ interest. Influenced by ‘mobilization theory’ (Kelly, 1998), it envisions the shop steward’s central role in identifying workplace grievances, persuading workers that they are being unfairly treated as a result of management action and encouraging support for collective action which is strong enough to resist management counter-mobilisation (p. 49). According to Kelly (2005: 286), unionisation is triggered when workers have a strong feeling of ‘injustice’ when legal or collective agreement rights and commonly shared values are broken. Injustices must be commonly felt and workers must blame their employer for their problems or take the view that they ‘can remedy them’ rather than ‘impersonal’ market ‘forces’ or ‘global competition’. Further, workers must ‘have a sense of agency’ that their collective activity ‘can make a difference’ (*ibid*, p. 286).

However, a necessary prerequisite for the actualisation of ‘collective action frames’ (Klandermans, 1997: 17) is the presence of union organisation, leaders who are ‘willing and able’ to lead members into action, a favourable ‘balance of power’, bargaining structures through which workers’ demands can be put forward and ‘minimal costs’, for instance, state or employer repression (Kelly, 2005: 286). According to Darlington (2014), even although shop stewards ‘do not in any sense *cause*’ the conditions which lead to conflicted relations they ‘play a crucial role in stimulating the awareness of grievances’, indicating how through collective action (which they propose and initiate) injustices can be rectified (p. 120). Several unions, the PCS, RMT, UNISON and Unite, have emphasised the central member mobilising role shop stewards play in building strong workplace organisation (Darlington, 2009: 131-2). However,

there are suggestions that the organising model must avoid top down approaches (Daniels, 2009: 270) and requires ‘an autonomous and organic resurgence in the workplace’ (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009b: 109).

Some academic writers are pessimistic about the prospects for trade union revival (Simms and Charlwood, 2010; Terry, 2003, 2010). According to Kelly (2005), with no evidence of union recruitment surges, organising model methods ‘have done little more than stabilize their membership in recent years’ (p. 300). Simms and Charlwood (2010) took the view that unions faced ‘seemingly insurmountable challenges’ in the face of unfavourable economic conditions which weakened their bargaining position, social change and their inability to adapt to change (p. 143). Employers’ withdrawal of legitimacy, workers’ pessimism about collective action, product market changes, new technology job loss (*ibid*, pp. 132-3), falling union recognition rates, difficulties recruiting reps in both new and established workplaces, and union activist redundancies (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 81-2) has hampered union organisation.

Davidson (2013) argued that changed employment patterns brought about by several decades of neo-liberalism has profoundly weakened organised workers’ resistance. Davidson’s argument chimed with earlier writers who argued that Thatcherism’s ideological sway fundamentally diluted working class collectivist values (Brown, 1990). Standing (2011) suggested that neo-liberalism has brought into being a new class ‘in the making’, the ‘precariat’, whose place in the labour market is characterised by job and income insecurity (p. 7). Standing stated that ‘adversarial and economistic’ trade unions were incapable of addressing the precariat’s social aspirations. Instead, a ‘new type of collective body’ was required, one which could engage in ‘collaborative bargaining’ (*ibid*, p.168).

However, Allen (2014) questioned whether it is possible to conceive of such a divide between full time and precarious workers, observing that workers in once secure and salaried jobs now faced insecure employment conditions (pp. 47-8). In North America, unions have organised previously thought unorganisable janitors, fast food and migrant workers (Moore, 2011: 129-132; Semeuls, 2012; Filipino Workers Network, 2016). In the UK, the union learning and equality reps agenda, and migrant worker unionisation offers potential for union growth and renewal, inspiring new activists, hitherto not previously active in trade unions (Moore, 2011).

Kelly (1998) found no evidence that union decline could be explained by declining worker grievances, increased trust in management, or a reduction in workers’ readiness to act collectively (p. 48). Kelly (2005) observed that ‘most workers join trade unions for instrumental

reasons', expecting the union to deliver benefits that they could not secure through their own individual actions (p. 286). Unions which cannot improve or defend their members' employment terms and conditions run the risk of losing members. Similarly, Darlington (2009) suggested that the principle reason why some workers did not join unions was because they 'are often viewed as simply not being effective enough' (p. 26). Darlington's study of the RMT on London Underground observed increased recruitment because the union won 'real and demonstrable improvements in pay and conditions' (*ibid*, p. 27).

Darlington (2010) highlighted the importance of workers' agency in building union organisation. While not disputing the structural limitations union activists faced, Darlington argued that shop stewards' 'activity and leadership' was critical 'to an understanding of the dynamics of mobilisation' (p. 26). Darlington suggested that union renewal should be measured in terms of improved collective bargaining success, stronger workplace organisation, increased militancy, the level of union democracy and 'the role of workplace activists as leaders', not just membership and recruitment figures (p. 27).

Darlington suggested that strong union organisation grew in periods of heightened strike activity. For Darlington, a pre-condition for union revival was the emergence of 'political trade unionism' where confident workplace reps combined their defence of members' rights with broader ideological questions (*ibid*, p. 133). According to Upchurch (2015), political trade unionism challenged union leaders' acceptance of market forces and the need for profitability (pp. 193-4). Trade unions' inability to overcome management ideology led to many reps accepting that factory closures and wage restraints were inevitable. Upchurch accepted that structural change in the economy, low inflation and high unemployment took the edge off union militancy. However, he claimed that the employers' offensive was creating a crisis of legitimisation of capitalist rule, fuelling systemic economic, social and political crises, thus generating the conditions for future, albeit unpredictable, industrial struggle (pp. 200-201).

Cohen (2006) argued that unions must take some responsibility for their lack of growth as they pursued top-down recruitment and merger strategies akin to 'rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic' (p. 154). Instead, Cohen stated that militant, rank and file approaches offered greater revitalisation potential (*ibid*, p. 153-4). For Cohen, reps were crucial to building workplace 'ramparts of resistance', structures that could 'survive defeat and build on victory' (p. 209). Cohen (2014) argued that even when union strength was at its lowest and least opportune juncture, 'a core of conscious activists' committed to building strong workplace organisation was 'always present' (p. 157). McAlevey (2016) proposed that union organisers

should identify ‘organic’ workplace leaders, drawing upon their personal strengths. Avoiding a top down approach, the union organiser is viewed as someone who supports, rather than organises, union members’ mobilisation activity. To gauge union capacity to win demands, an iterative process of ‘structures test[s], a mechanism to assess strike readiness’ (McAlevey, 2018) is enacted.

Implicit within Cohen’s (2006) and Darlington’s (2010) analysis is recognition that capitalist employment relationships are conflicted and generate struggle. While British trade unionism has been on the defensive for the last four decades, a long-term historical perspective suggests that previous low points were followed by resurgence, such as nineteenth century New Unionism (Draper, 1978: 110-114), the First World War Shop Stewards’ Movement (Hinton, 1973) and 1960s shop-floor militancy, often characterised by the emergence of independent, grass-roots organisation (Cohen, 2014: 143).

5.6 The Individual and the Collective

Within trade unions, there lies a perpetual tension between individual and collective activity (Moore, 2011: 42). Traditionally, unions have represented their members through collective bargaining (ACAS, 2011: 8; Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 126). However, since the late 1970s, as union membership has fallen, there has been a decline in its spread and scope (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 75). Since Thatcher’s assault on unions, the shop stewards’ representative role has been greatly reduced and their role in bargaining on substantial matters such as pay is much diminished (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009c: 140-141).

Changes in the nature of work have brought about a more atomised, individualistic work environment and collective employment rights have been weakened while individual rights have increased (ACAS, 2011: 8; Dickens and Hall, 2010: 317). In the last three decades, voluntarism has been replaced by a wide range of individual legal rights relating to diverse issues such as unfair dismissal, paternity leave and sexual orientation discrimination (ACAS, 2011: 8). Through legislation, government promoted greater individualisation of employment rights and increased legal restrictions on union action, encouraging ‘greater scope for the exercise of management prerogative within the workplace’. Paradoxically, this changed legal framework led to an increased focus on ‘rules, regulations and litigation’ (*ibid*, p. 8). In office, New Labour’s Third Way approach extended workers’ individual protection work but was more circumspect with regard to collective union rights; it sought ‘to domesticate, rather than exclude

workers' voice' by curbing 'militant trade unionism' and promoting 'co-operative trade unionism' (Smith and Morton, 2006: 405).

Historically, trade union activism has been defined in collectivist' terms, 'relating to a shared situation of employment rather than taken up as individual grievances' (Moore, 2011: 46). As Simms and Charlwood (2010) stated, 'unions have always faced the challenge of...identify[ing] issues and interests which affect as many workers as possible' (p. 126). However, while the representation of individual members may blunt union effectiveness, diverting activists away from recruitment and organising activity, it can also have the effect of strengthening union organisation. Beynon (1973) affirmed that unions were built on the 'dualism' of the dialectical relationship between individual and collective issues (*ibid*, p. 200). Union membership was mutually beneficial to both the member and union organisation.

For Moore (2011: 47), individual worker grievances can lead to activism and mobilisation when workers realise that the issues that they face are commonly shared. As well as being a collective expression of workers' interest, trade unionism also reflects the asymmetric nature of the employment relationship: 'Isolated individual workers have little bargaining power vis-à-vis their employers because the bargaining power of the two parties is vastly different' (Darlington, 2014: 115). By organising collectively, trade unions seek to redress the imbalance in the employment relationship and force employers to negotiate with them (*ibid*, p. 115).

Gall (2014) argued that individual and collective activity 'are better viewed as two ends of the same spectrum' with 'semi-individual and semi-collective' activity 'standing in between them' (*ibid*, p. 212). At times, individual worker actions can have a collective aspect. For instance, a successful individual member test case grievance can set a precedent which benefits other workers. Also, union members can lodge individual grievances *en masse* to highlight a collectively-felt grievance (*ibid*, p. 224; Moore, 2011: 57). In 2004, over half of the ET cases which emanated from workplaces of over 500 employees (and more likely to be unionised) resulted in changes to workplace procedures (Joyce, 2015: 139).

In the early 1980s, a shift away from the collectivised, procedural-based industrial relations model of the post-war decades to an individualised based HRM took place (Storey and Sisson, 1995: 227). Some commentators have suggested that a 'new' workplace attitude developed 'which eschews traditional collectivism and emphasises individual interest at the expense of class solidarity' (Danford *et al*, 2003: 2). Further, it is argued that collectivist values have been replaced by 'a drift to personalised rather than individualised contracts' and the idea that

workers should take responsibility for ensuring their employability through their own career and skill development (*ibid*, p. 3).

Nevertheless, there are limits to how far management can individualise employee relations. Business efficiency necessitates that employers adopt a common approach to workplace relations. At times, for strategic business reasons, employers may offer some workers higher wages than others (Nolan, 1983: 302). However, creating the conditions for union mobilisation and resistance to develop, capital accumulation pressures forces employers to constantly seek ways to increase labour productivity and reduce labour costs (Hyman, 1975). The ‘extension of managerial authority and intensification of work’ (Moore, 2011: 99) has led to an increase in individual worker grievances (Danford *et al*, 2003: 6). Across the public and private sectors, union reps reported ‘patterns of staff reductions, greater work pressures and increased workloads’ (*ibid*, p. 41). Performance management strategies and techniques, which seek to increase productivity and reduce costs, have fashioned ‘a new dominant mode of direct control over employees’ (*ibid*, p. 25). As Moore (2011) stated, although changes in work organisation and work regulation have taken place, ‘work remains a collective and not an individual process’ (p. 166).

According to Waddington and Kerr (2009), shop stewards on average received 6.2 hours per week facility time and undertook a further 3.4 hours of union activities in their own time (p. 39). Data from the WERS 2011 survey indicated that reps spent on average 13 hours per week on union activity. However, these are average figures ‘and 49% of union representatives spent less than 5 hours a week on their role’ (Wanrooy *et al*, 2013: 16). The shop steward’s role has become ‘more complex and more stressful’ as they struggle to cope with representing members who face greater work pressures against a changing legislative background (ACAS, 2008: 3): While previously shop stewards’ predominant activity was collective bargaining, ‘they are now increasingly being drawn into the role of individual representation and associated case work’ (*ibid*, p. 5).

Individual casework ‘has become a key part of what shop stewards do’ (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 89). The range of issues that reps have to deal with has increased considerably (ACAS, 2008: 3-4; Moore, 2011: 32). Shop stewards now spend most of their time on ‘welfare work, grievances and disciplinary cases’ (Darlington, 2010: 128). The 2011 WERS survey found that, commonly, reps spent most time on ‘discipline and grievances (66%), health and safety (62%) and rates of pay (58%)’ (Wanrooy *et al*, 2013: 16). Further adding to shop stewards’ workloads, the number of ET applications increased, ‘from about 29,000 per year at

the end of the 1980s to 189,000 in 2007-8' (Renton, 2009: 186). For Dix *et al.*, (2008), this increase was viewed as an indicator of increased workplace discontent and worsening employment relations, representing 'a new manifestation of the same conflict, previously voiced through collective action' (p. 11). Following the Coalition Government's introduction of fees in 2013, there was a dramatic reduction in tribunal applications, leading to concerns that there will be 'greater disharmony at work as disputes go unresolved' (Busby and McDermont, 2014: 1). Union concerns were expressed that tribunal fees were introduced 'to prevent workers getting justice and...detering workers from making claims' (RMT, 2014: 2).

Estimates vary about the current number of shop stewards. The TUC (2012b: 2) indicated that there were over 200,000 workplace reps (including health and safety reps and others) while the DTI (2007) stated that there were 350,000 (Table 5.1). Despite this, trade unions have found difficulties recruiting new shop stewards as their members were reluctant to seek election, resulting in increased pressures on remaining reps (ACAS, 2008: 3). In addition to their role becoming more complicated as a result in the growth of individual employment rights legislation, new statutory discipline and grievance procedures placed an increased obligation on reps and employers to settle issues within the workplace (*ibid.*, p. 5). At the same time, as the demands on reps increased, they have found difficulties securing time off to represent members (Mackay and Moore, 2009). In the public sector, reduced staffing levels and performance management pressures resulted in managers refusing reps facility time for activities judged not to meet core business needs. Consequentially, reps spent large amounts of their own time outside work on union duties (Moore, 2011: 34). Many reported that they did not feel adequately prepared to deal with the complex range of emotional and mental health difficulties which their members experienced adjusting to organisational changes (McKay and Moore, 2009). Describing the pressure reps felt under, a respondent in Moore's (2011) study stated that 'When you become a shop steward you are sort of like a doctor, your surgery's got to be open all the time...it's a job which never stops' (pp. 35-6).

5.7 Summary

This chapter provided an historic account on the development of shop stewards' organisation followed by an exploration of their sociological significance. This chapter also examined the difficulties that they have faced since 1979 in organising and representing their members at work as unions came under neo-liberal assault. Further, this chapter considered reps' important contribution to union growth and renewal, and the relationship between individual and collective trade unionism.

At the constantly shifting frontier of control, workers' struggles to ensure that work conditions were not entirely forced upon them find expression in their efforts 'to establish some element of counter control' (Darlington, 1994: 19). Here, shop stewards personify union organising activities to resist management attempts to extend the frontier of control in their favour. Shop stewards embody union workplace democracy but the continued support of their members necessitates that they effectively defend them members from arbitrary management powers. In doing so, sometimes experiencing the tensions between formal and workplace union democracy, they face management counter mobilisation and are often limited by the circumstances that they face. While 'accommodative and bureaucratic' pressures exist, so do 'those towards resistance, collective mobilization and democratic participation' (*ibid*, p. 4). Because of their unique role, mediating competing pressures at the frontier of control, shop stewards offer a distinctive perspective on employer-employee relations. Although they are less likely to be involved in collective bargaining, they remain crucial to protecting their members and articulating workplace grievances. The following chapter outlines the research methodology and methods used in which shops stewards are cast not only as active participants in defending workers' interests at the frontier of control but are witnesses to developments there.

Chapter 6: Research Philosophy, Methodology and Methods

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 detailed the thesis' research aims and research questions. This chapter outlines the research philosophy, methodology and methods that are used to address these. Initially, the thesis' critical realist (Bhaskar, 1978) ontological and epistemological positioning is put forward, followed by consideration of its research application. Then the case study methodology is outlined, followed by a description of the chosen case study and justification for choosing workplace union reps as the unit of research. Thereafter, the research methods and techniques, and the steps taken to analyse the data gathered are described. Finally, this chapter explores issues relating to insider research, axiology, bias, reliability, validity and research ethics.

6.2 Critical Realism

6.2.1 Critical Realism Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Gray (2004) stated that the 'nature and meaning' of philosophical stances are 'contested and debated' (p. 15). Researchers must navigate through a 'bewildering array of theoretical perspectives and methodologies' with terminologies which are often 'inconsistent (or even contradictory)' (*ibid*, p.16). During the 'paradigm wars' (Bryman, 2009: 517) of the 1970s and 1980s, methods, methodology, ontology and epistemology became confused and conflated. Therefore, it is important that the study's critical realist ontological and epistemological positioning is made explicit. With reference to alternative positivist and interpretivist philosophical stances, this section outlines its critical realist assumptions.

Crotty (1998) suggested that a researcher's theoretical stance (their ontology), their epistemology, their methodology (their strategy or plan) and methods must be logically linked (p. 3). A researcher's methodology influences their choice and use of methods (the techniques or tools used to gather data). Their methodology was influenced by their theoretical perspective. This in turn was informed by their epistemological positioning (*ibid*, p. 2-3). According to Saunders *et al* (2009), ontology relates to the 'nature of reality' and raises questions regarding researchers' assumptions 'about the way the world operates and the commitment held to particular views' (p. 110). Reed (2009: 433) stated that a researcher's ontology is their presumptions 'about the nature of the phenomena' that they are studying and what this means for how they study them. Accordingly, 'ontological assumptions are unavoidable' as they

provide the ‘set of foundational orientations’ that structure how the research is carried out (p. 433).

While a researcher’s ontological positioning is concerned with ‘*what is*’, their epistemology seeks to understand ‘*what it means to know*’, providing a framework for what sort of knowledge is accepted as ‘legitimate and adequate’ (Gray, 2004: 16). For instance, a researcher from a positivist standpoint envisions reality as *real* objects which have a physical presence and can be *objectively* measured. Positivists take the view that ‘credible data’ can only be gathered from directly observable phenomena (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 113). Alternatively, attaching importance to how social actors interpret ‘everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning [given] to these roles’, an interpretivist researcher is concerned with un-measurable feelings and attitudes (*ibid.*, p. 116). Thus, as Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000) stated,

...either the world is objectively and unproblematically available and capable of being known by the systematic application of the empirical techniques common to positivism, or it is not knowable objectively at all; and, in the place of claims to objectivity, we find only the idea that what is known is merely the product of discourses (pp. 3-4).

This choice led to researchers in alternative paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) taking the view that particular methods were *a priori* superior and had universal applicability.

According to Fleetwood and Ackroyd (2004a), critical realism was partly a ‘reaction to the radical scepticism and relativism that have been the fashion in much contemporary thinking’ (p. 1). Critical realism challenged post-structuralism and postmodernism, reconnecting with positivism’s traditional realist positioning which had had been put ‘on the back foot’ by the existentialist and phenomenological movements which critiqued its over-scientism and reductionism (*ibid.*, p. 2).

In the late 1980s, postmodernism challenged positivism’s theoretical premises and practical applications (Denzin, 1988: 432). Postmodernism rejected the modernist assumption that there was ‘an empirical world that can be studied objectively’ (Seale, 1999: 3) and that generalisations could be made from particular cases. According to Seale, such research led to researchers interpreting the social world in ways that did ‘not fit that world as it is constructed and lived by interacting individuals’. Instead, postmodernism claimed that ‘we live in a postmodern world of multiple realities and endless fragmentation of experience’. Therefore, researchers should aspire to provide ‘locally relevant, temporary accounts’ of the lives of the individuals who were being researched. In the postmodern paradigm, ‘no single account should dominate others’ (*ibid.*, p. 3).

Alternatively, critical realism was viewed as a ‘third way’ (Reed, 2009: 430) or ‘reconciliatory approach’ (Walliman, 2006: 20), suggesting that researchers did not have to choose between positivist *objectivism* and interpretative *subjectivism*. Critical realism acknowledges positivism’s view that there is a natural order in social events and discourse but does not accept that it can be *easily* observed. Critical realism rejects post-modernism’s perspective that the social world has multiple realities. It makes an ontological assumption that although the social world is complex and can only be partially known, reality can still be found, even if ‘it is difficult to apprehend’ (Easton, 2009: 128).

Critical realists do not claim to know the truth; they are concerned with finding out what is true, and how it can be found. Critical realism suggests that ‘social phenomena exists independently of us and our investigations’ but rejects the postmodernist view that reality is what we interpret it to be (Taylor and Bain, 2004: 276). As Sayer (2004) stated, ‘there is a world which exists largely independently of the researcher’s knowledge of it’ (p. 6). For instance, the labour market is a phenomenon which cannot be directly observed yet its workings affect millions of lives. According to Easton (2009), although a real world exists, ‘there is no way that such an assumption can ever be proved or disproved’. Critical realists make a performative assumption; ‘we behave...as if the world was real’ (p. 119).

According to Reed (2009), a critical realist researcher’s ontology has a ‘powerful and pervasive’ impact on how they undertake their research, determining how ‘the search for knowledge is to be undertaken and how the intellectual resources that it requires are to be deployed’ (*ibid*, p. 433). Critical realism is a meta-theory, regarding ‘philosophy as an underlabourer for the sciences, a producer of second order knowledge’ (Joseph, 1998: 75). Stressing ‘the primacy of being over thought’ (*ibid*, p.76), critical realists privilege ontological questions over epistemological ones, such as, what is the nature of the world and to what extent there is a real and objective world.

Critical realists take the view ‘that what we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly’ (Saunders *et al*, 2009: 115). They argue there are two steps to experience the world. Firstly, ‘there is the thing itself and the sensations it conveys’ and, secondly, ‘there is the mental process that goes on sometimes after that sensation meets our senses’ (*ibid*, p. 115). While positivists believe that reality is empirically observable, critical realists suggest that it can be interpreted through theoretical and practical work (Walliman, 2006: 20). Callinicos (2006) proposed that ‘Critical realism, like any metaphysics, is a priori theory, but its content is arrived at by reflection on the results of scientific inquiry’ (p.

161-2). In other words, critical realism puts forward a theoretical explanation regarding what reality consists of and tests it out through empirical study.

Critical realists take the view that a researcher's 'conceptualization is simply a way of knowing that reality' (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 18). To understand social phenomena, critical realist researchers explore the social structures at work 'that generate those social events and discourses' (Bhaskar, 1989: 2). According to Bhaskar, 'these structures are not spontaneously apparent in the observable pattern of events; they can only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences' (*ibid*, p. 2).

For Bhaskar (1978), scientific study is 'the systematic attempt to express in thought the structures and ways of acting of things that exist and act independently of thought' (p. 250). Therefore, a key critical realist concept is *actualism*, accepting that 'events occur whether we experience them or not' (Joseph, 1998: 78). Critical realists are also concerned with *causality* which is found in the 'nature of things, or objects' (Easton, 2000: 208). As Easton stated, 'gravity makes apples fall from trees. People build houses. Firms downsize. Individuals create personal networks' (*ibid*, p. 208).

According to Tsoukas (1994), critical realists explain patterns of events 'in terms of certain generative mechanisms (or causal powers) which are independent of the events they generate' (p. 290). Critical realists focus on 'the complex interplay' of these generative mechanisms which produces particular social phenomena (Reed, 2009: 432). Then a 'much deeper, more intensive, investigations into the mechanisms and conditions that generate and produce them' ensues. Allowing exploration of the dialectics of structure and agency, critical realism's focus on 'context-specific mechanisms' (*ibid*, p. 432). While ontologically and analytically separate, structure and agency interact in multifaceted ways to generate the mechanisms which change social organisations (*ibid*, p. 433). This contrasts with post-structuralism which takes the view that 'structure cannot be seen as determining action because it is not real and transcendent, but a product of the human mind' (Carter and Jackson, 2000: 41).

Instead, critical realism's *transformational model of social activity* explains agency and structure in non-deterministic terms. Bhaskar's (1998) viewed society as 'both the ever-present condition (material cause) and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency' (p. 215). Bhaskar viewed society as pre-existing and 'an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions' which are reproduced and transformed by individuals 'but which would not exist unless they did so' (*ibid*, p. 216). Thus, society was not the product of human activity.

However, society did not exist independent of peoples' actions. The relationship between individuals and society was mutual and the complex interplay transformed each. Although many factors define organisational structures, social actors 'act upon and transform' organisations (Joseph, 1998: 103). As Roberts (1999) stated, 'through practical human activity humans reproduce the very structures which in turn produce them' (p. 25). For instance, while shaping their lives, concomitantly, a call centre is shaped by those who work in it (Taylor and Bain, 2004: 276).

Critical realism takes the view that 'social structures are not reducible to the knowledge we have of them', yet also 'cannot be reduced to particular practices or rules' (Joseph, 1998: 77). Thus, in the thesis SAP implementation is viewed as being more than the application on an organisation's rule within its decision making processes. Instead, from a critical realist perspective, the thesis attempts a more profound and intensive explorations of the sociological, economic and political processes, both internal and external to the organisations studied, which result in stricter attendance management, and the competing roles of social actors (management, workers and union reps) at the frontier of control.

6.2.2 Critical Realism's Stratified Ontology

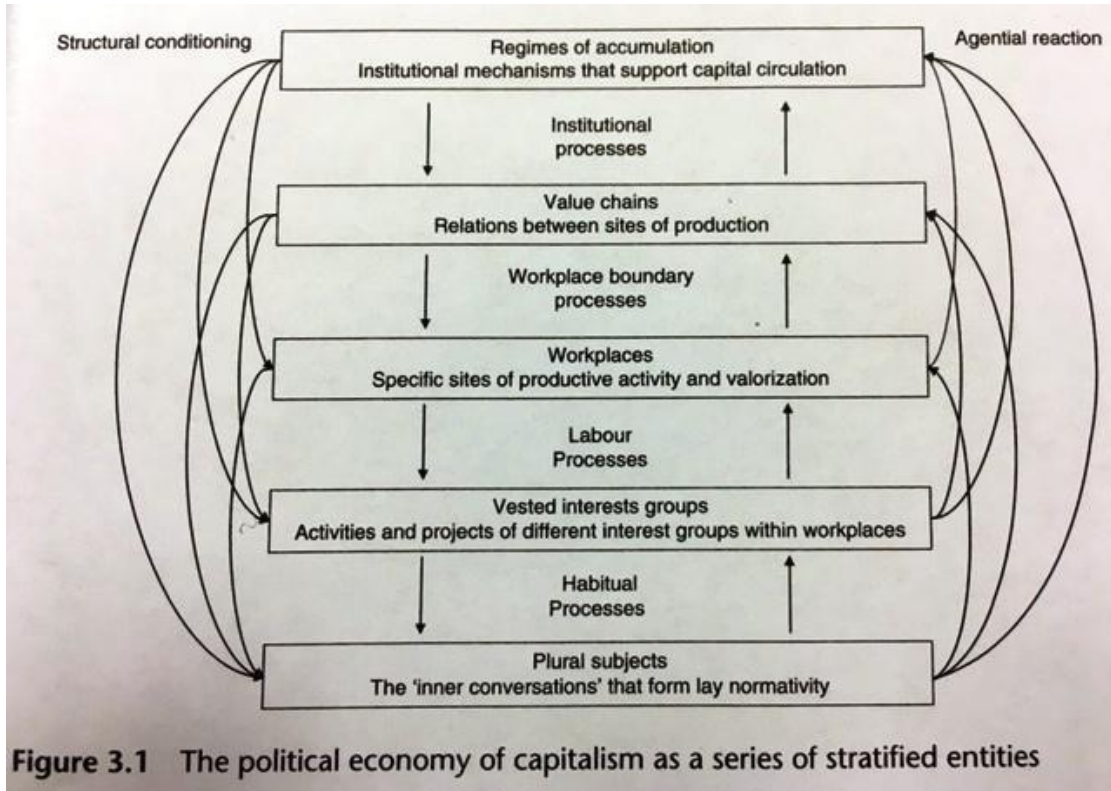
Bhaskar (1978) stated that critical realism's stratified ontology suggested reality exists in *real*, *actual* and *empirical* domains. The *real* consists of the 'unseen' mechanisms (e.g. labour market) that create events. The *actual* is where the events created by mechanisms in the *real* appear. According to Easton (2000), 'events can occur...without...being observed' but can be 'experienced by observers' in the empirical domain (p. 207). For Reed (2009), the interplay between the *real*, *actual* and *empirical* 'generates 'emergent' or new phenomena that are irreducible to those entities from which they originated' (p. 425). *Emergence* is a key critical realist concept whereby two or more features or aspects conjunct and gives rise to new phenomena (Sayer, 2000: 12). Eventually, emergent entities stabilise and endure 'to exhibit characteristics of social structures, institutions and social organizations' (Reed, 2009: 425). According to Joseph (1998), the structures and mechanisms 'operate in different ways, exercised or unexercised (as *tendencies*), and determine things in various combinations' giving the world a deep 'multi-layered character' (p. 79). For Callinicos (2006), 'uncovering one mechanism' begins, rather than ends, the research process as it 'leads us to postulate other mechanisms, and so on' (p. 170).

Critical realist researchers seek to decipher the complex way that the *real* and *actual* interact, that is how mechanisms operating in the *real* produce events in the *actual* (Easton, 2000: 208). Critical realists are interested in the ‘real, underlying and unobservable mechanisms that generate certain observable phenomena at the level of the actual and empirical’ (Reed, 2009: 435). Causal mechanisms in the *real* are at work ‘deep down’ and ‘may be dormant or inhibited by other mechanisms’ (Erbhar, 1988: 1). Countervailing mechanisms may cancel each other out and result in no events occurring, for instance, ‘managerial obsession with control’ may neutralise anticipated new technology efficiency gains (Tsoukas, 1994: 291). Critical realism explains why seemingly unpredictable events occur (Callinicos, 2006). According to Callinicos, the real is ‘sufficiently capacious to offer bizarre and surprising things’; occasionally new mechanisms are discovered ‘that completely change our understanding of what is possible’ (p.169).

Tsoukas (1994) suggested that management’s causal powers, namely, the ability to transform workers’ labour power into actual labour, the need to gain work workforce co-operation, and to pursue efficiency and effectiveness are found in the *real* (p. 299). In the context of this study, managerial SAP implementation is seen as a ‘dynamic and open-ended conjunction’ (Reed, 2009: 435) whereby cost and labour control pressures in the *real* produce events in the *actual*, such as employer policies and strategies, which lead to observable events, such as absence meetings, in the *empirical*.

Reconnecting to political economy, Thompson and Vincent (2010: 5) stated that critical realism’s ‘layered ontology’ offers much for labour process studies. As in Figure 6.1, the authors proposed a schema for understanding the inter-connections between regimes of accumulation, value chains, workplaces, vested interest groups and ‘plural subjects’ (upon whom vested groups’ agency impacts) (*ibid*, p. 63). Thompson and Vincent suggest that ‘each level is linked to the other via specific temporally emergent processes’ (*ibid*, p. 64). For example, institutional processes maintain economic stability by ensuring cycles of capital are perpetuated.

Figure 6.1: Thompson and Vincent's (2010) 'The political economy of capitalism as a series of stratified entities'



6.2.3 Critical Realism and Structure and Agency

Unlike positivism's 'structural and context-free' research (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 23), critical realist researchers believe that it important to explore how contextual features interact 'with the generative mechanism to produce an observed regularity in the social world' (Bryman, 2012: 29). This enables exploration of 'the conditions that promote or impede the operation of the causal mechanism' (*ibid*, p. 29). Thus, critical realists recognise that agency exists 'within a social and temporal context that is structured by constraining conditions' which have developed over long historic periods emerging only when particular conditions are met (Reed, 2009: 433). As Thompson and Vincent (2010: 53-54) stated,

This suggests a morphogenetic cycle in which agency is limited, constrained and influenced by multifaceted antecedent structural and cultural circumstances. Subsequent to this conditioning, social agents have the independent causal power to shape and change the world in ways that recondition and alter circumstances.

Reed (2000: 54) suggested that agency and structure intersect within organisations at different levels through the action of a multitude of individuals in 'position-practices'. Rejecting a determinist and reified view of structure, the thesis seeks to identify how managers

and union reps' activities affect SAP implementation, although constrained by dynamic, internally and externally shaped organisational circumstances. Further, this study attempts to locate the patterns of power relationships that are present at the frontier of control and the ways in which 'participants have differential room for manoeuvre' to achieve their goals, to secure favourable outcomes and to influence 'broader patterns of relationships' (Ackroyd, 2004: 148).

As critical realism views the social world as highly complex, and only partially known, it recommends in-depth study of organisations. In the thesis, the generative mechanisms which affect SAP implementation in the Council, former and related organisations are not easily observable and open to the closed experiments that positivists favour. Accordingly, the thesis intensively examines the processes that affect SAP implementation, how they impact on union reps as they represent their members and how their activities shape their organisations.

6.2.4 Critical Realist Application

Having outlined critical realism's philosophy and perspective on knowledge generation, this section explores the research design implications of following such an approach.

Historically, sickness absence research has been largely positivist. Positivists seek causality, making the assumption that there is a cause-effect relationship between variables (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 26). Economists such as Thomas (1980) sought the correlation between attendance and sickness insurance schemes while psychologists attempted to find sickness absences' single or multiple *causal* factors (Bolton and Hughes, 2001), such as the association between job satisfaction and work attendance (Ackroyd, 2004: 142). By observing and correlating phenomena, positivists seek explanations from which they make predictions and pursue deductively driven universal laws. Thus, positivists 'operationalize their concepts and hypothesis in scientific and general terms' (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 29), testing them through *falsification*.

Traditionally, competing philosophical paradigms have tended to favour particular research methods (Bryman, 2012: 614). In general terms, positivism affirms that quantitative research methods associated with the natural sciences are best used to gain knowledge while, in the search for meaning, interpretivists favour qualitative methods. As Ackroyd (2004) stated,

One the one hand, positivism insists that things should be measured and compared quantitatively, if possible using experimental research design; on the other hand, phenomenology suggests that the point is to uncover the basic properties of the human experience...and this must be studied by immersion in it (p. 145).

Instead, critical realism took a pragmatic attitude to research methods, rejecting the view that ‘there are some inherently superior methods of study which, if competently utilised, can secure knowledge’ (*ibid*, p. 137). For critical realists methods are tools for tasks, the task determined which ones to use (*ibid*, p. 139). Mingers (2004: 182) visualised the use of different methods or methodologies as ‘like viewing the world through a specific instrument such as a telescope, an X-ray machine, or an electron microscope. Each reveals certain aspects but is blind to others’. Accordingly, different methods used in tandem offer the possibility of unearthing greater knowledge than if a solitary method is used (*ibid*, p. 182).

Critical realism emphasises ontological questions over epistemological ones as ‘it tells us where to look and what to look for’ (Reed, 2009: 438). In the natural sciences researchers conduct closed experiments. However, the social world is open and complex and experimental research there is difficult, if not impossible. The generative mechanisms that critical realists attempt to uncover are, like the inner workings of a clock, ‘mostly hidden from observers most of the time’ (Ackroyd, 2004: 161). The search for generative mechanisms within organisations is difficult because it requires an in-depth analysis of the ‘points of intersection’ (Reed, 2009: 438) between structure and agency. Critical realists seek to *explain* phenomena in causal terms but do not attempt to make predictions or deductions as positivists do (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000): ‘Explanation supplants deduction, prediction, solution, determination, calculation and logical consistency as the goals of theorisation’ (p. 15).

Critical realist research strategy is *retroductive* rather than *abductive*, *deductive* or *inductive*, and its research design is *intensive* rather than *extensive* (Reed, 2009: 438). According to Reed, a retroductive strategy begins with describing events and practices as they take place. Then, through ‘conceptual abstraction, and theoretical model building and evaluation’ an attempt is made to understand and explain generative mechanisms and the conditions in which ‘they emerge and become the entities that they are’ (*ibid*, p. 432). Mechanisms cannot be observed but can be inferred through a ‘working back’ process from the phenomena that is identified which offers theoretical hypotheses about ‘the way they are’ and how they exercise their power. Such theory building is an iterative process where knowledge initially gained is applied into subsequent ‘rounds of theoretical abstraction and elaboration’ (*ibid*, p. 438).

Accordingly, in this study, an attempt was made show the existence and operation of probable generative mechanisms which enable events to happen, explaining how they emerge and the contribution of social actors in this process. As this is not a linear process and events are

multi-causal, no simple causal explanation emerges. Thus, in critical realist terms, the thesis, by exploring in detail trade union responses to SAP implementation within the case study seeks to unravel, and place relative weight on, ‘the micropolitical power relations and processes that act as generative mechanisms’ (*ibid*, p. 440) set amongst management and union push-pull relationships.

6.3 Case Studies Methodology

Having explored the critical realist assumption regarding how research should be carried out, this section outlines the study’s case study methodology, and considers its strength and weakness (Ackroyd, 2009: 533). More accurately, as will be explained further, this is a case study of many parts.

Researchers from positivist, interpretivist and critical realist standpoints have all utilised case studies (Easton, 2009: 118). According to Kitay and Callus (1998), case study is the most popular industrial relations research design. As industrial relations research is concerned with ‘values and perception’, not just ‘objective facts’, the case study is ‘well suited’ to explain and understand the complex social phenomena found in work organisations (p. 101). Although there are limits to what extent case study findings can be generalised, they enable ‘social process to be understood in context (Nichols, 1997: 93). Case studies tease out the ‘interplays’ between the often unseen but real ‘process and structures in the world’ which generate events (Easton, 2010: 9).

Yin (1989: 23) defined a case study as ‘an empirical enquiry’ which, using multiple data sources, examines ‘a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’. Stake (1995) classified three case study ideal types. Firstly, there was the *intrinsic* case study which was studied to learn more about it. Secondly, there was the *instrumental* case study which was undertaken to learn more about a social issue or develop theoretical understandings. Thirdly, there was the *collective* study where a series of single case studies were investigated jointly so that an issue, phenomenon, or condition could be explored (Sarankatos, 2005: 211). According to Sarankatos, case studies are generally conducted in ‘natural settings’; are ‘suitable for pursuing depth analysis; study ‘whole units, not aspects of units’; are typical; employ diverse methods; and make use of several information sources (*ibid*, p. 212).

Case study research asks *explanatory* ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions (Gray, 2004: 124). According to (Yin, 1989), multiple levels of analysis can exist within a single study. Eisenhardt

(1989) suggests that the case studies research strategy is one which ‘focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings’. Typically, case studies ‘combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations’. Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used, either separately or combined (p. 534). Kitay and Callus (1998) suggested that case studies are ‘a research strategy rather than a specific technique’ and thus are used in various ways utilising a variety of methods (p. 101). Accordingly, this case study utilised documentary analysis, semi-structured and focus group interviews and questionnaires (*ibid*, p. 103). Gray (2004) stated that researchers undertaking case studies must remain focussed as a wealth of research data is generated (p. 124).

Case study research has faced criticisms that, weakening objectivity, validity and reliability, they ‘entail personal impressions and biases’; they cannot be replicated; and ‘the interviewer effect may cause distortions; even the presence of the researcher in the field can be destructive’ (Sarankatos, 2005: 216-7). There are claims that ‘it is difficult (indeed, dangerous) to generalize from a specific case’ (Gray, 2004: 125). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that this is a common case study misunderstanding (p. 221). Fleetwood and Ackroyd (2004b) argue that generalisations can be made provided decisions regarding case selection and data collection are ‘informed by theory’ (p. 134). Ackroyd (2004: 157) asserted that the ‘the basis for believing in the possibility of generalisation is theoretical rather than empirical’ because critical realist research attempts ‘to show how mechanisms work themselves out in a particular instance’. Critical realist research accepts that ‘the context in which generative mechanisms work themselves out may indeed be partly contingent’ (*ibid*, p. 157). Keeping in mind *why* questions, case studies allow the researcher ‘to tease out ever-deepening layers of reality in the search for causal mechanisms and influential contingencies’ (Harrison and Easton, 2004: 195). Critical realist researchers favour case studies because they help explore whether outcomes can be attributed to a mechanism or its context (Ackroyd, 2009: 538-9).

Easton (2010: 4) used the metaphor of ‘peeling an onion’ to describe critical realist case studies. As the researcher delves into the case study, different levels of complexity unfold; several hypotheses may need to be put forward to explain developments. As Harrison and Easton (2004) stated, ‘the onion may require peeling in a number of different ways before a satisfactory explanation emerges’ (p. 195). Critical realists view structures as ‘a set of internally related objects or practices’ (Sayer, 1992: 92) comprised of interlinking ‘entities (departments, people, processes, resources) all of which can affect one another’ (Easton, 2009: 120). As Easton stated, ‘structures are nested within structures’ (*ibid*, p. 120). Critical realists envisage

case study research as an iterative process that explores an organisation's underbelly, allowing researchers 'to go back into the site time and again, after analysis and reflection, to test their understanding of what they are researching' (Easton, 2010: 4).

Case study research is 'inherently multi-method', integrating varied types of data, combining them to display 'how complex generative processes work themselves out in particular situations' (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004b: 132). However, case studies often generate thick and difficult to summarise narratives. Nevertheless, Flyvbjerg (2006) suggested that this was 'often a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic'. Flyvbjerg suggested that a detailed focus on events can reveal a case's ambiguities; 'the most interesting phenomena' with greater generalisability are uncovered 'in the most minute and most concrete of details' (p. 237).

6.3.1 Choice of Case Study

This sub-section provides information on the chosen case study which is concerned with union responses to SAP implementation within Glasgow City Council, its former and related organisations. According to Bresnen (1988: 35), the choice of research site is often pragmatic. As the researcher is an elected branch officer within Glasgow City UNISON, the setting was easily accessible. The case study was chosen because the changes in SAP implementation which the reps were resisting were symptomatic of a wider transformation that was taking place with regard to how public sector organisations were managing employee relations. Further, my branch officer position allowed close observation of reps' responses to SAP implementation.

This is a case study of many parts. Through the prism of union reps within UNISON's Glasgow City and Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) branches, managerial SAP implementation is examined. The City branch organise members within the Council, its ALEOs, and former organisations such as further education (FE) colleges (which became independent of council control in 1993, following the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*), and Strathclyde Passenger Transport (controlled by the Council and other West of Scotland local authorities).

Research studies often contain specific and unique aspects. In the last two decades, several ALEOs were established to manage services that the Council previously provided, including Access, City Building, City Markets, City Parking, City Property, Community Safety Glasgow (CSG), Cordia and Glasgow Life (GCC, 2009a; GCC, 2009b). However, although the Council established its ALEOs in a particular way there were many commonalities with developments

elsewhere in local government, such as the introduction of market and commercial methods, budget restrictions and the search for efficiency savings. Thus, enabling analytical generalisations (Yin, 1989), the research sites were not a ‘special case’ (Bresnen, 1988: 36). Contained within the case study were variegated forms of employment and bargaining relationships, reminiscent of Marchington *et al*’s (2005) *Fragmented Work: Blurring Organizational Boundaries and Disordering Hierarchies*. The ALEOs and related organisations are located in a wide range of settings that allow ‘useful comparisons and contrasts, and drawing analytical inferences’ (Bresnen, 1988: 36). Although they are now contained within a variety of organisational entities, all emanated from the Council’s predecessors, Glasgow District Council (GDC) and Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC).

However, the ALEOs vary to what extent they are linked to the Council, follow its modernisation agenda and manage employee relations. GHA offers a contrasting view on SAP implementation, emphasising the shift that has taken place within the Council. Differences also exist, between and within Council departments regarding how SAP policies are implemented. Further, there is considerable variance in union organisation. In some areas there are high membership densities, active shop steward organisation and established bargaining relationships, while elsewhere union presence is less strong. This provides the background for contrasting the similarities and differences of SAP implementation. Such study of the interplay of managerial action and union resistance provides raw ingredients for theory development.

6.3.2 Justification for the use of shop stewards

In the thesis the central focus is on the role of UNISON workplace reps as *witness* and *participant* to events. This is consistent with this study’s theoretical underpinnings which views the workplace as a ‘contested terrain’ (Edwards, 1979) where structural antagonisms between capital and labour play out as workers and unions resist managerial attempts to shift the frontier of control in their favour. Occupying a unique social position within the capitalist relations of production, workplace reps offer a distinctive perspective on the dynamics of workplace relations. Not only are they actively engaged in representing their members, they are witnesses to developments.

In case study research, respondents are viewed as ‘experts’, not data sources (Sarankatos, 2005: 212). Utilising the realist terminology, reps in this study were regarded as ‘mechanism experts’, groups of key informants who could explain phenomena (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 164). Although not ‘all-knowing’, these ‘key sources’ (Pawson and Tilley, 2004: 12) observe

employer initiatives and behaviour, monitoring both formal and informal managerial incursions at the frontier of control, challenging them individually and collectively on behalf of union members when the opportunity arises. At the same time workplace reps are highly attuned and responsive to their members' interests and concerns (Beynon, 1973).

Finally, as Danford *et al* (2003: 164) stated, workplace reps reflect the dynamic of change within the heartbeat of the union movement in organised workplaces, providing valuable alternative perspectives to studies based on managers or full-time union officers. As Darlington (1994) stated, workplace reps' 'day-to-day experience of shop-floor bargaining and conflict with management' helps them 'develop distinctive insights into workplace industrial relations' (p. 21). While accepting that there is a dynamic tension between *structure* and *agency*, this study reasserts the latter's importance in understanding contemporary industrial relations. Although the reps and union members in this study were constrained by the circumstances that they faced, often with little room for manoeuvre, they constantly sought ways to resist this and adapt to changing conditions. Thus, following Moore (201: 3), the thesis examines 'the experiences and testimonies of union activists, how they define their activities, mediate their experiences and receive, internalise and articulate the diverse, confused and contradictory values and ideas that they encounter'. Further, the thesis 'locate[s] these testimonies in the social relations of work and wider political and ideological frames which shape and are shaped by these relations' (*ibid*, p.3).

Nevertheless, while there are strengths in using reps as the unit of research there are also weaknesses. The reps have strong normative views which can introduce bias into the gathered data. Not only do reps articulate workers' demands and are immersed in everyday representation but their *raison d'etre* is their commitment to workers', rather than employers' interests. Bias may also exist in terms of the *interviewer effect* where reps may give answers which they believe the researcher wishes to hear (Sarankatos, 2005: 216-7) and the *social desirability problem* where interviewees provide information that presents them 'in a favourable light' (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986: 535). Further, methodological difficulties arise when asking one person to give their views on another person's behaviour. For instance, reps were asked to give their opinions on employer strategy and the reasons why union members might come to work when unwell. Such biases could have been reduced by interviewing managers and union members. Nevertheless, while offering an alternative view, there were concerns that their employers, fearing that they may critique SAP implementation, would refuse or restrict research

permission. Reading Bacon's (1999: 3) description of the difficulties faced when management limited access to selected employees, the researcher wished to avoid such problems.

Also, while the thesis would have been strengthened by ascertaining union members' views of rep's effectiveness, without employer support there were practical problems identifying which individuals were going through the absence policy. If union members were identified, it would be difficult to gauge how representative they were of the union branches' eleven thousand members. Further, reps attested to how stressed union members felt about their treatment under the SAP. For ethical reasons, it was not felt appropriate to take any action that would have compounded their difficulties. By contrast, the reps represented a discreet group that was easily accessible. To avoid any management challenge, the study did not involve any use of employers' resources or employees' work time. Research interviews were undertaken before or after scheduled union meetings, either at lunchtime or shift end.

To conclude this section, while it was recognised that there were limitations in utilising reps as the unit of research, it was still felt that their testimony made an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of workplace relations. As will be explored below, steps were taken to counter or minimise methodological difficulties.

6.4 Research Techniques and Methods

This section describes how the research was designed and carried out. The thesis follows a mixed method approach, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods. Traditionally, researchers viewed combining quantitative and qualitative methods as 'illegitimate on epistemological (and often ontological) grounds' (Bryman, 2009: 517). However, rejecting the quantitative/qualitative 'paradigm war' (Robson, 2002: 43), critical realism takes a pragmatic view and has 'no particular preference' regarding which methods should be used (Pawson and Tilley, 2004: 10). Realist researchers suggested that the research methods chosen should be appropriate to what knowledge is sought and available data type (*ibid*, p. 10).

For critical realists, both quantitative and qualitative methods, separate or combined, can identify generative mechanisms. Mixed or multiple methods which integrate 'the quantitative and qualitative' enable both 'processes and impacts' to be investigated' (*ibid*, p. 10). Yauch and Steudel's (2003: 477) study exemplified how the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods 'revealed different aspects of organization culture'. The quantitative methods identified organisational behavioural norms whilst the qualitative methods explored 'the underlying reasons for this behaviour' (*ibid*, p. 477). Accordingly, a mixed methods approach

utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods, including document analysis, questionnaires, focus groups and semi structured interviews was pursued. Supplementary data was produced from notes taken at union meetings and training events.

Although this was not a longitudinal case study in intention, it had a longitudinal dimension, or more specific temporal aspect to it, as it took place over a five year time frame between January 2010 and December 2014. As shop stewards were the unit of study, steps were taken to utilise research methods which best captured their views on SAP implementation. Initially, between January and October 2010, documentary analysis took place. Then, between October and December 2010, the first questionnaire was distributed amongst reps (Appendix 1). Thereafter, between May 2012 and October 2013, semi-structured individual and focus group interviews took place. In total reps from thirteen different employing organisations participated. The second questionnaire was issued between October 2013 and January 2014 (Appendix 2). Finally, during the data analysis period throughout 2014, additional documents becoming available that informed the analysis.

These methods allowed historic comparison of SAP implementation within the Council, its current, former and related organisations, thus capturing the changes that were taking place. *Periodisation*, identifying ‘significant historical turning points’ (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009: 186), took place as contrasts were made between, as characterised in the *Evening Times*, (18th March, 2009), the ‘War on the Sickies’ (2009-2014) and the previous period, labelled here as Benign Neglect SAP implementation (1990-2009). The following sub-sections describe the rationale for using each of these techniques and provide information about their use.

6.4.1 Documentary Sources

In the thesis a range of documentation was analysed, including publically available Council papers, internal management-union meeting minutes, and union correspondence and documentation.

According to Bryman (2012), documents provide information about an organisation’s life and assist uncover ‘its culture or ethos’. Viewed in such terms, ‘documents are windows onto social and organizational realities’ (p. 544). However, Atkinson and Coffey (2011: 79) maintain that documents’ source and purpose should be considered. Further, ‘written records alone’ do not provide insights into ‘how an organization actually operates day by day’. Even ‘official’ records should not be treated as ‘firm evidence of what they report’ (*ibid*, p. 79). Documents are

often written to transmit a 'favourable' impression (Bryman (2012: 554-5). Typically, meeting minutes are not a verbatim transcript of discussions.

Sarantakos (2005) noted that document analysis brings *retrospectivity*, allowing study of past events and issues. However, documents contain *personal bias* since they include 'their authors' interpretation of events and biases' (Patmore, 1998: 220). Nevertheless, accepting such caveats, the documents used in this study helped set the scene, and although sometimes fragmentary, weaved with interview and questionnaire data, illuminated the underlying reality of organisational life. As an insider researcher, having knowledge of the context in which the documentary evidence was written, I was able to understand their meaning (Bryman, 2012: 555).

To assist create a timeline, the documents were filed in chronological order in open-leaf binder folders and significant events were highlighted. In examining the documents, an emphasis was placed on identifying 'themes within the text' (*ibid*, p. 290) such as management policy or reps' organising strategies. Especially as managers were not interviewed, examination of employer SAP documentation provided valuable insights into management thinking. Bryman observes that 'researchers were just as interested in omissions in coverage as in what *does* get reported' (*ibid*, p. 291). Thus, signifying benign SAP implementation, attendance management was rarely mentioned in Housing reps' meeting minutes throughout the 1990s.

6.4.2 Questionnaires

Traditionally, questionnaire surveys have been popular within industrial relations research. McCarthy (1964) utilised both interviews and questionnaires to investigate the closed shop (Brown, 2015: 7-8). Questionnaires can be sent to large numbers of respondents, data inflow can be quick, the questionnaire can be completed at the respondent's convenience, responses can be easily codified and anonymous, and interviewer bias reduced (Gray, 2004: 188). Nevertheless, questionnaires response rate can be low, particularly if the survey is too long (*ibid*, p. 188-9). The Webbs (1932) highlighted the pitfalls of utilising a questionnaire that was not meaningful and unambiguous: 'If vague or general questions are asked, vague or general replies will be given' (p.72).

To gather reps' views, both questionnaires utilised both open and closed questions. Closed questions tell researchers *what* the respondent thinks about a particular subject, open questions help elucidate *why* they think that. Questions, were informed by an earlier study (Main, 2007), by the initial documentary analysis and the researcher's knowledge of the research unit. For

instance, questions were framed to obtain reps' views of the extent of representation and what their perceptions of the absence policy were. For instance, using Likert-type questions, reps were asked to strongly agree/ agree/ neither (agree or disagree)/ disagree/ strongly disagree with the proposition that the 'SAP pressurises workers to come to work when unwell' (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Example of Likert-type Statement

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Sickness absence policy pressurises workers to come to work when unwell					

Further, if reps thought that the SAP was becoming stricter, they were asked to give their opinions whether it was stricter in relation to reporting sick, in the use of triggers, advisory warning letters, disciplinary action, OSP removal, and dismissal and capability procedures. Reps were also asked questions about management actions and from given statements what they thought management hoped to achieve through SAP implementation. Thereafter, a series of questions were asked about trade union effectiveness and the impact on union organisation and mobilisation. Reps were asked whether SAP implementation fostered adversarial employer-employee relationships, motivated individuals to join and stay in the union, fuelled union member discontents and influenced other member decisions such as pay ballot voting intentions.

Utilising UNISON mailing lists, both questionnaires were posted to all reps rather than a representative sample. Email reminders were sent and reps who had not returned a questionnaire were encouraged to do so when they attended union meetings. Table 6.2 provides information about the response rate.

Table 6.2 Questionnaire Response Rate

Year	Completed Quest. (no)	Reps Population (no)	% Return
2010	106	176	60.2
2013	84	141	59.6

The 2010 survey was completed by 106 (60.2 per cent) of the 176 City UNISON reps. By 2013, the number of reps had fallen by a fifth down from 176 to 141, although approximately the same percentage (59.6 per cent) completed the survey. Baruch and Holtom's (2008) meta-analysis found that 'the average response rate for studies that utilized data collected from

individuals was 52.7 percent with a standard deviation of 20.4' (p. 1139). This study's survey response rate compares favourably with this. For Cook *et al* (2000), survey representativeness is more important than response rate. In both surveys, respondents were representative of the numbers across the Council, its ALEOs and related organisations. Even union reps in small departments completed the questionnaire.

Table 6.3 provides information about union reps' length of service with their employer and time spent as a rep. In the 2010 survey, the mean (average) length of service of the sample of workplace reps was 15.1 years while in 2013 it increased to 16.4 years.

Table 6.3 Length of Service and Time Spent as a Rep

Year	Av. Service with Employer (years)	Av. Time Spent as a Rep (years)
2010	15.1 (n = 105, sd = 8.0)	6.9 (n = 105, sd = 6.9)
2013	16.4 (n = 80, sd = 9.1)	6.6 (n = 83, sd = 6.8)

Union reps' mean time in office hides considerable variation. In the 2010 survey, nearly a quarter of reps (23 per cent) had less than two years' experience while in 2013 it was about one in three (33 per cent). Conveying a picture of experienced reps playing a key guiding and influencing role among those less experienced, in both surveys three in four reps (75 per cent) had less than nine years' experience while about one in ten had more than 18 years' experience.

Less than half of the reps (45 per cent) who completed the 2013 survey participated in the 2010 survey. During the period between surveys, voluntary redundancy reduced the Council's workforce and older, more experienced reps left. This, considered with the overall reduction in reps, suggests a high turnover of union activists. Yet, there also emerges a picture of union renewal. By the 2013 survey, although the total number of reps had reduced, nearly four in ten (39 per cent) had less than three years' experience, having taken up the responsibility of representing their members since 2010. To further emphasise this dynamic picture, one in six reps (12 per cent) in the 2013 survey had less than one years' experience.

As indicated in Table 6.4, approximating the average age (44 years) of public sector workers in Scotland in 2013 (Audit Scotland, 2013b: 15), the mean age of reps who completed both surveys was 47.

Table 6.4 Union Reps' Age

year	average age
2010	46.6 (n= 104, sd = 8.7)
2013	47 (n= 80, sd = 8.7)

Table 6.5 provides information about reps' age distribution. The data shows that most reps that completed the questionnaires fell into the older age ranges. In both surveys, over eight in ten reps were 40 and older (84 per cent in 2010; 81 per cent in 2013). Nearly four in ten (38 per cent) in both surveys were 50 and older. Only 3 reps were under 30 (3 per cent in 2010; 4 per cent in 2013).

Table 6.5 Union Reps' Age Distribution

age range	2010 (no)	2010 (%)	2013 (no)	2013 (%)
under 20	0	0	0	0
20-24	1	1	0	0
25-29	2	1.9	3	3.8
30-34	8	7.7	5	6.3
35-39	6	5.8	7	8.8
40-44	23	22.1	12	15
45-49	24	23.1	23	28.8
50-54	22	21.2	13	16.3
55-59	14	13.5	12	15
over 60	4	3.8	5	6.3
Total	104	100.1	80	100.3

Table 6.6 provides information about union reps' gender. Although the female composition of the sample (46 per cent in 2010 and 40 in 2013) did not mirror the Council's non-teaching workforce (65 per cent female) (GCC, 2015: 11), it reflected UNISON Scotland's female reps percentage (49.4) (STUC, 2016: 31). Gender balance figures for City branch reps

between 2010 and 2013 are not available. In 2015, 35 per cent of branch reps were female (*Framework for joint branch and region assessments*, 2015).

Table 6.6 Questionnaire Respondents Gender

year	male (no)	%	female (no)	%	total
2010	57	54.3	48	45.7	105
2013	49	60.5	32	39.5	81

Both questionnaires were issued to twenty GHA reps but met a poor response. As three questionnaires (15 per cent) were returned in 2010 and five (25 per cent) in 2013, they were not used for statistical analysis. A possible explanation for the low return was GHA reps' perception that their employer's SAP implementation was not strict. The three GHA reps who completed the 2010 survey agreed that their employer's absence policy was fair while in the 2013 survey three of the five reps agreed or strongly agreed that it was fair.

6.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a popular research technique, used in different ways, reflecting varying epistemological positions (Cassell, 2009: 500). Since the classic Hawthorne studies, interviews have been a long-established research technique within organisational studies yet little has been written about their use (*ibid*, pp. 500-501). Combining interviews and participant observation, Beynon's (1973) study provided 'a vivid portrayal of the brutality of life on shop floor and battles to challenge managerial control' (Edwards, 2014: 1). According to Cassell (2009: 505), critical realist researchers use interviews to establish how the interviewee understands organisational phenomena and to compare their views with other interviewees.

Saunders *et al* (2009) stated that interviews can be 'highly formalised and structured, using standardised questions', 'informal and unstructured conversations', or the 'intermediate position' of semi-structured interviews which were used here (p. 320). Bryman (2012) suggested that semi-structured interviews allow researchers to keep 'an open mind' about the knowledge that they were seeking 'so that concepts and theories can emerge out of the data' (p. 12). Semi-structured interviews encourage 'the interviewee to talk at length around a subject, and shape the direction of the interview as necessary' (Cassell, 2009: 503).

In the thesis, interviews were designed ‘to encourage a conversation’, allowing reps ‘to give their own account’ of events (Jones *et al*, 2010: 108). Unlike *informant* interviews where the ‘interviewees’ perceptions ...guide the conduct of the interview’ these were *participant* interviews where the researcher guides the interview and the interviewee responds to the questions asked (Saunders *et al*, 2009: 321). Generally, reps were allowed to speak uninterrupted, even when their answers did not answer the question or appeared tangential. In such circumstances, useful information was often provided.

Dwyer and Buckle (1999) suggest that researchers should develop ‘an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants’ and seek ‘to accurately and adequately representing their experience’ (p. 59). As researchers should ‘not hide behind the mask of rapport or the wall of professional distancing’, the researcher attempted to be ‘fully authentic’ and genuine with research participants (*ibid*, p. 60). To allow interviewees to feel relaxed in a familiar environment (Saunders, 2009: 329-330), the interviews mainly took place within union offices. Interview lengths varied, averaging about 40 minutes, and were undertaken after shifts or on lunch break on days reps were attending union meetings.

Interview questions were based on an *a priori* understanding (Cassell, 2009: 506) of the Council’s and related organisations’ SAP implementation. To explore reps’ understanding of changing policy implementation, both open and ‘closed questions were used to identify themes which were not initially obvious and required further exploration (Eisenhardt, 1989: 538). An interview schedule (Appendix 3) guided interviews, acting as an *aide-memoire* to ensure that all themes were considered (Bresnen, 1998: 39).

As the purpose of the research was to understand *what* reps thought about managerial SAP implementation and to exploring the reasons *why* it was applied in the way it was, ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions were asked (Easton, 2004: 195). Following McGillis and Kiesner (2004: 10), a ‘laddered approach’ to questions was adopted. Initially, to break the ice, factual questions were asked “How long have you been a union rep?” and “What is your job?”. Bearing in mind that reps had strong views about the absence policy, neutral question were asked. Reps were questioned: “How do management implement the SAP within your workplace?” Thereafter, questions which required a more reflective response were asked such as “If the policy is more strictly implemented, what do you think are the reasons for the change?”

Aspects of the life history interview approach (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 478), where interviewees were asked to reflect on past organisational life, to shed light on the present, was

used. Ylijoki (2005) suggested that ‘nostalgia is not a tragedy full of despair, but rather represents a peaceful and compliant longing for the past’ (p. 560). While asking reps to recollect past events might evoke rose-tinted reminiscences, as Davis (1979) suggested, nostalgia cannot exist without a past that is personally remembered and experienced. While some interviewees recollected a golden age of stable employment relationships and benign SAP implementation their memories of past events emanated from lived experiences.

To consider the impact of hospital reorganisation on nurses’ working lives, McGillis and Kiesner (2005) adopted a narrative inquiry approach which allowed individuals to tell stories about their daily experiences. A snapshot of a changing health care system from a nurse perspective was provided by asking them to describe in their own words their day-to-day work environment. Accordingly, to contextualise the changes that were taken place within their workplaces, reps were asked “What was the job like when you first started?”, “What is the job like now compared to then?” and “Why do you think your job has changed?”. Such questioning provided information on reps’ understanding of organisational budgetary and service delivery pressures, setting the scene for discussion on SAP changes. Interviewees were asked about the details of SAP implementation and, if they felt that a shift towards stricter implementation had taken place, when and why did this occur. Encouraging reps to speak about changes in SAP implementation and their working lives allowed more reflective explanations to emerge. Arguably, by linking *past* and *present*, data quality was enhanced.

Utilising the interview schedule helped the researcher gain greater control of the interviews’ overall structure. However, used flexibly, it allowed supplementary questions which ‘follow[ed] up interviewees’ replies’ (Bryman, 2012: 470). For instance, after the interview schedule question “Has union representation under the SAP any impact on union organisation” was asked, reps were questioned whether such representation brought stewards closer to their members. Nevertheless, as Bryman advised, in each interview most of the questions in the interview schedule were asked with similar wording used (*ibid*, p. 471).

Use was also made of counterfactual questions, for instance; “If the union was not involved in this type of representation what would it be like for the members?” Reed (2009) stated that counterfactual analysis within critical realist research is relevant as research subjects might not fully be aware of the mechanisms and social structures that generate events in their social world (p. 436). Such questions stimulated reps to think deeper about the SAP’s impact on union organisation and their effectiveness. Even reps who doubted their effectiveness felt that their members’ treatment would be much worse without their support.

Table 6.7 provides information about the age range and gender of reps who were interviewed. About one in five (21 per cent, n= 12) were aged less than 35, while one in three (34 per cent, n= 19) were aged between 35 and 50 and more than four in ten were over 50 (45 per cent, n= 25). Over half of the reps were male (54 per cent) while less than half were female (46 per cent). Again, these figures reflected UNISON Scotland female reps' percentages (49 per cent) (STUC, 2016: 31).

Table 6.7 Individual Interviews by Age Range and Gender

Age Range	Male (no, %)	Female (no, %)	Total (no, %)
< 35	6	6	12 (21)
35 – 50	12	7	19 (34)
> 50	12	13	25 (45)
Total	30 (53.6)	26 (46.4)	56 (100)

Table 6.8 provides information about their employer and service. Most reps were employed by the Council (n= 38). In some areas, for instance Finance Co and Construction, the only active rep was interviewed. The two GHA reps were senior branch activists and were thus key informants on their organisation's inner workings. 18 Social Work reps were interviewed, the largest number from any department. This reflected the key role Social Work reps played within the branch and also in representing members across a large, diverse department which included Fieldwork, Daycare and Residential services.

Table 6.8 Individual Interviews by Service/ Department

Employer/Service/Department	No	Employer/Service/Department	No
Council – SWS Fieldwork	11	Community Safety Glasgow	4
Council – SWS Residential	5	Glasgow Housing Association	2
Council – SWS Daycare	3	Glasgow Life	2
Council – Education	4	Finance Co	1
Council – Land & Environmental Services	5	Access Glasgow	3
Council – Development & Regeneration	2	Construction	1
Council – Finance	6	Further Education Colleges	3
Council – Chief Executive/ Corporate Services	2	Transport	1
Cordia	1		
Total	56		

6.4.4 Focus Groups

Historically, focus groups were popular within marketing (Merton, 1987). In the last two decades they have been widely used in many research disciplines, including feminist and post-modernist (Madriz, 2003: 365), occupational health (Jinks and Daniels, 1999) and public health studies (Kitzinger, 1995). According to Madriz (2003), focus groups contain elements of participant observation and interview whilst ‘maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method’ (p. 363). Bryman (2004) distinguishes between group interviews and focus groups. Typically, focus groups facilitate a deeper exploration of particular themes, while group interviews are more expansive. Within focus groups, individuals respond to each other’s views and group inter-action can highlight existing agreement and disagreement (p. 473). Focus groups allow the researcher to explore not only *what* individuals think but *how* and *why* the way they do (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 512; Kitzinger, 1995: 299).

Feminist research has utilised focus groups as a means of gathering a ‘collective testimony’, allowing marginalised women to find a voice, developing ‘a sense of identity, self-validation, bonding and communality of experiences’ (Madriz, 2003: 383). This approach which allows participants to feel safe to tell their stories in each other’s company was applicable as many reps are low paid women who often face discrimination in respect of race, class and gender in their

daily lives. Although gathering testimony is common to phenomenological research, if used sensitively within a realist application, this approach enables interviewees to open up and relate their true views.

Focus groups can help develop debates and discussions, offering valuable insights if new themes and issues emerge. While negative aspects of the group effect have to be guarded against (Morgan, 1996: 139), focus groups allow participants to speak in their own day-to-day language utilising ‘jokes, anecdotes, teasing and arguing’ (Kitzinger, 1995: 299). At the same time, researchers must recognise that group norms may inhibit discussion (*ibid*, p. 300). Thus, care was taken to ensure individuals did not dominate discussions and limit other group members’ participation (Sarantakos, 2005:198). Morgan (1998: 475) recommends smaller groups when it is believed members will have a lot to say about a topic. Hence, the largest number in any group was 4.

Table 6.9 provides information on focus group members. Efforts were made to ensure that group member selection was not haphazard (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 512). Ensuring a balance between Council (Fieldwork, Finance, and Development and Regeneration Services [DRS]) and ALEO (Parking and CSG) reps, groups were based upon established occupational and sectional stewards’ organisations. Providing a broader union perspective, a focus group comprised of three experienced Branch Officers was established. A full time officer with specific responsibilities for developing union organisation participated in the Parking focus group. Although the data she provided was not utilised her involvement in the group helped stimulate insightful discussion. Seven focus group members also participated in individual interviews.

Table 6.9 Focus Group Members by Service

Focus Group	Male	Female	Total
Fieldwork reps	1	3	4
Parking reps	2	1	3
Finance reps	0	2	2
Branch Officers	2	1	3
Community Safety reps	3	1	4
Development & Regeneration reps	3	1	4
Total	11	9	20

Unfortunately, only two Finance reps were able to attend their group. However, these young female stewards sparked off each other and provided a vivid picture of employee relations and SAP implementation within their department which was transferring to the Chief Executives' Central Business Services (CBS) section. Although group participants had little or no previous experience of participating in focus groups, as union reps they were accustomed to sitting round a table, debating and discussing issues. Participants were asked to describe how the SAP affected their members and to reflect on the reasons for policy changes. Focus group questions were the same that were asked in individual interviews, with the same interview schedule utilised. Excluding the female full time officer, 11 focus group members (58 per cent) were male and 8 (42 per cent) were female.

Recognising focus group participants' feelings (Smith, 1995: 484), there was a de-briefing element at the end of the interview where everyone was thanked for attending and relaxed conversation took place after the microphone was switched off.

6.5 Data Analysis

Having described in detail the research methods and techniques used, this section outlines the steps taken to analyse the wide range of data that was provided from the individual and focus group interviews (totalling approximately forty six hours), questionnaires, documentary evidence and notes taken at union meetings. Researchers can sometimes find challenging analysing such a wide range of data. According to Bresnen (1988), rich data is the '*raison d'être*' of research gathering but was its '*bête noire*' in relation to coding and collating it (p. 48). Mindful of this, an attempt was made to analyse the data in a systematic manner.

Enabling statistical analysis, the questionnaire data was entered onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and was coded for analysis. Despite controversies whether parametric or non-parametric tests are appropriate to measuring Likert-type data (Norman, 2010; Sullivan and Artino, 2013), the parametric *t* Test was applied to establish whether differences between the two surveys' data were statistically significant. The *t* Test was not applied when there was no obvious variance or where there were a small number of reps in particular areas.

Some writers have taken the view that 'Likert data is of an ordinal or rank order nature and hence only non-parametric tests will yield valid results' (Murray, 2013: 259). However, others have highlighted 'the abundance of empirical research that have supported the interval view and opined that it is perfectly all right to use the summed scales to conduct parametric tests' (*ibid*, p. 259). De Winter and Dodo (2010) compared the *t* Test and non-parametric Mann-Whitney-

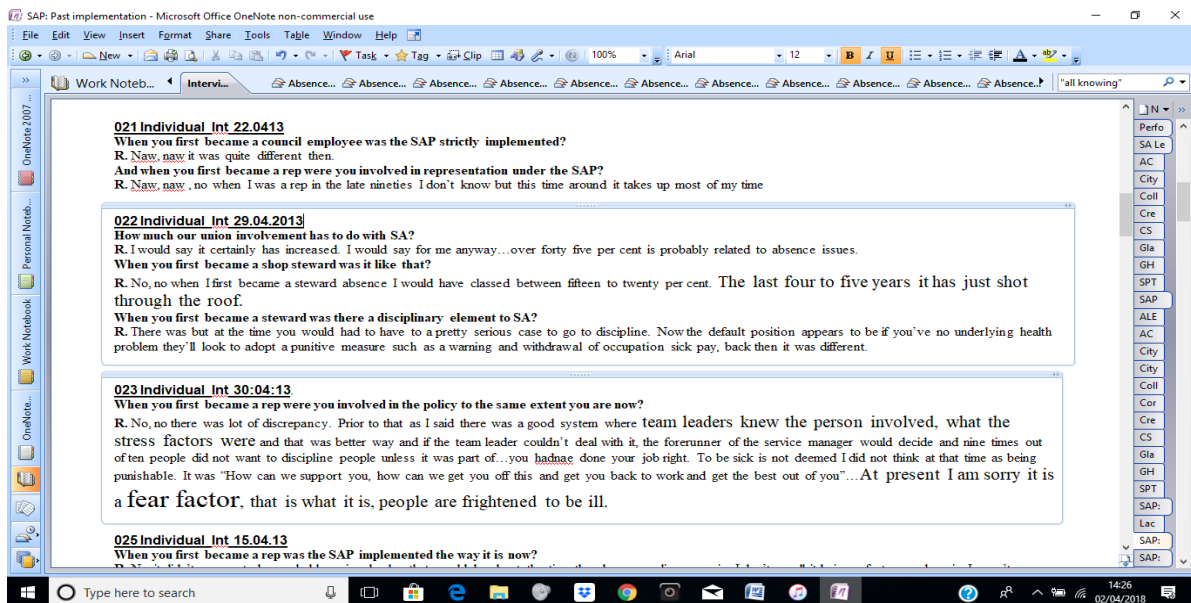
Wilcoxon tests' suitability for comparing two samples of Likert data and concluded that 'the power differences' between each 'were minor' (p. 5). Although data gathered from Likert tests are not normally distributed, Sullivan and Artino (2013) stated that parametric tests are 'more robust' than non-parametric tests (p. 541) as they 'tend to give "the right answer" even when statistical assumptions— such as a normal distribution of data—are violated, even to an extreme degree' (*ibid*, p. 542).²

The six focus groups and fifty six individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recording interviews allows the interviewer to concentrate on the interview process rather than note taking (Bryman, 2012). By transcribing interviews, researchers have a document which they can read until the full meaning of what interviewees say is understood (p. 482). Although time consuming, transcribing interviews brings researchers 'closer to the data', encouraging the identification of 'key themes and to become aware of the similarities and differences between different participants' accounts' (*ibid*, p. 486).

All of the individual interview and focus group transcripts were read line-by-line. The data was then codified around themes in one Microsoft OneNote folder as it emerged from the transcripts. During the coding process the data was 'broken down into their component parts and those parts [were] then given labels'. Rather than repeated 'listening and relistening to the recordings', this made the data 'more manageable', reducing its volume so that sense can be made of it (*ibid*, p. 13). Figure 6.2 provides an example of how reps' comments about past SAP implementation were coded.

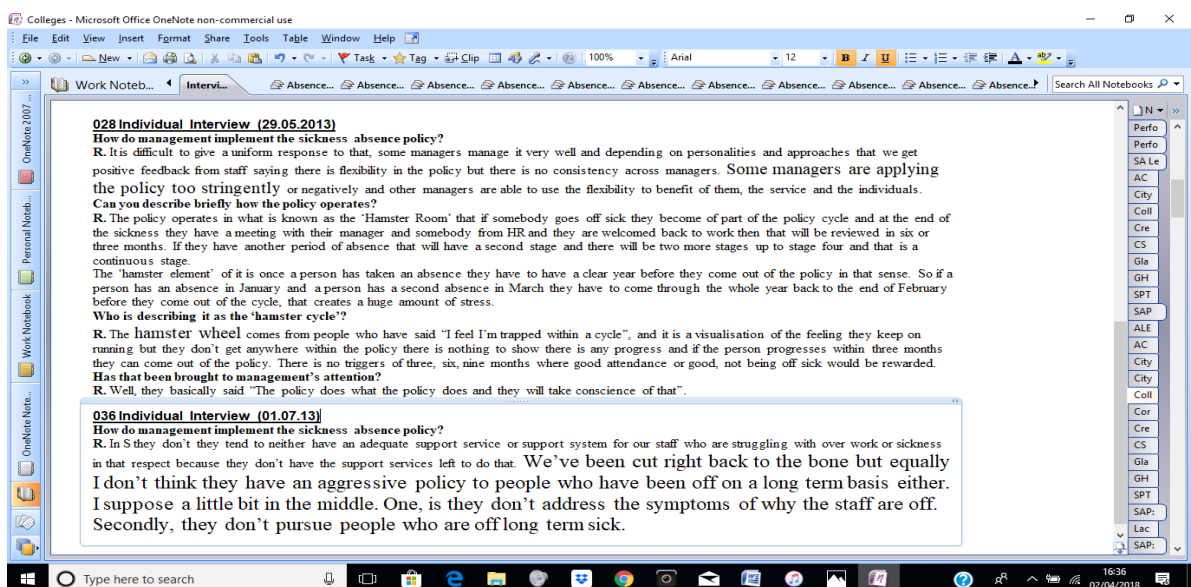
² Statistical results were reported utilising the standard American Psychological Association writing guidelines e.g. $t = 0.36, p < .05$.

Figure 6.2 Past SAP Implementation Coding



Sub-folders were created in relation to particular aspects of the themes. For example, Figure 6.3 illustrates the sub-folder where current College SAP implementation was organised.

Figure 6.3 Current College SAP Implementation Coding



Bryman notes criticism of applying such coding techniques: 'By plucking chunks of text out of the context within which they appeared, such as a particular interview transcript, the social setting can be lost'. Also, 'fragmentation of data' occurs when 'the narrative flow of what people say is lost' (*ibid*, p. 578). Nevertheless, grouping interview and focus group data around coded themes facilitated the writing process. The quotes that were selected were typical of the

reps' accumulated experiences. After interviews, a record was kept in Excel whenever reps made reference to particular themes. For instance, forty six reps (82 per cent) made statements which indicated that they thought that the SAP was becoming more strictly implemented.

6.6 Reliability and Validity

Having described the steps taken to analyse the research data, this section considers the issue of reliability, and validity. According to Bryman, 'the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of social research are reliability, replication and validity' (p. 46). Reliability and validity are inter-related; if a research measure is unreliable it cannot produce valid research (*ibid*, p. 47). However, although similar, reliability and validity are distinct concepts (Sarandakos, 2005: 91-2). For instance, one scale which gives an accurate reading of weight repeatedly is reliable and valid. However, another scale which repeatedly gives the same wrong weight is reliable but not valid. Another scale which gives different readings of the wrong weight is neither reliable nor valid (*ibid*, p.92).

Case study research has been criticised for its lack of reliability, replication and validity (*ibid*, pp. 216-7). Research reliability takes place 'if the findings and conclusions of one researcher can be replicated by another researcher doing the same case study' (Gray, 2004: 138). However, absolute reliability in a case study is impossible as the research process is concerned with 'the particular circumstances and events that occur within that case study' (Brennen, 1998: 47).

Validity is important in both quantitative and qualitative research (Sarandakos, 2005: 83). In quantitative research validity is achieved when 'an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, and whether this measurement is accurate and precise' (*ibid*, p. 83). Bryman (2012: 47) stated that validity relates to 'the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research'. Research textbooks differentiate between *internal validity* and *external validity* (*ibid*, p. 47; Sarandakos, 2005: 85; Saunders *et al*, 2009). Internal validity occurs when the causal relationship between variables 'hold water' (Bryman, 2012: 47). External validity 'refers to the extent to which research findings can be generalized' (Sarandakos, 2005: 85). A study would be externally valid if 'other researchers studying the same or similar settings generate the same findings' (Seale, 1999: 140). Galena (2009: 6) stated that validity is an objective to be 'worked towards' than actually achieved.

Sarandakos (2005) observed that external validity is threatened if the sample is 'inadequate or biased' (p. 85). To ensure generalisation, care was taken to ensure that the data collected was

representative of the reps and related to the research questions (Gray, 2004: 137). Accordingly, all reps were issued with the questionnaire and the sixty per cent response rate in both surveys attests to its representative nature. Similarly, a total of 68 union reps were interviewed in the individual interviews (56) and focus groups (12 who had not been interviewed individually). The interviews took place in-between both surveys when the total number of reps was 176 and 141 respectively. Assuming a mid-point figure between the two populations of 158, over four in ten unique union reps (43 per cent) were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups (n=68). Further, the reps interviewed were the most active in day-to-day union representation and thus closer to the subject. The relatively high number of reps interviewed ensured that the findings did not only apply to those reps that were interviewed and answered the questionnaire. Also, this study has *ecological validity* as it was carried out in a real life setting with interviews taking place in union offices (Bryman, 2012: 48).

In qualitative research validity is often couched in terms of *credibility*, *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* (Sarandakos, 2005: 86). Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested that *trustworthiness* addressed issues traditionally considered as validity and reliability. Trustworthiness was characterised by four elements; *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* (p. 114). Therefore, an attempt was made to ensure this study had *credibility* by periodically sharing the research findings at reps meetings so that research subjects had an opportunity to agree or disagree with their portrayal (Seale, 1999: 45). During interviews, when it was not clear what interviewees meant by what they said, through *informant verification*, they were asked to clarify their statement.

In an effort to underscore this study's *transferability*, a detailed description of the research site is provided in Chapter 7. Although there are local particularities, description of the organisations' policies, procedures, practices and structures allows the reader to identify typical aspects of public sector modernisation, generally experienced within local government. In pursuit of *dependability*, an 'audit trail' of interview transcripts can be made available to the academic reader, subject to research ethics. Auditing, which attempt to assess 'the degree to which theoretical inferences can be justified', has become a popular approach in qualitative research and assists *confirmability*, showing whether researchers acted in 'good faith' and did not allow personal values to over-ride how they conducted their research and their findings (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 414).

Saunders *et al* (2009: 298) stated that researcher bias in the social world is avoidable but steps can be taken to minimise it. Although the thesis was based on an underlying *a priori*

assumption that, within the context of changing public sector workplace regulation regimes, cost and labour control pressures were leading to stricter SAP implementation, interview and questionnaire questions were framed in such a way to elucidate reps' true views. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), *triangulation*, utilising multiple sources of data, strengthens the validity of research findings and counters bias. Thus, complementing each other, both quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis) were used. As Bryman and Bell suggested, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in this way permits 'access to different levels of reality' (p. 413).

6.7 Insider Research

In this section the strengths and weaknesses of being an insider researcher, someone who conducts a study inside the organisation in which they work (Galena, 2009: 4), are examined.

Positivists argue that research outcomes will be contaminated if there is no separation between the researcher and the area studied (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 31). However since the 1960s, there has been increased interest in insider research within organisations (Bryman, 1988: 1; Brannick and Coughlan, 2007). The researcher's interest in examining SAP implementation stemmed from personal experiences. I am a participant in the area studied. I represent union members under the policy and as a Council employee I could be subject to it myself. Further, as a UNISON branch officer I am regularly involved in negotiating with senior managers. They report the severe budgetary pressures that they face and I see at first-hand the effect that efficiency savings pressures are having on workers, both in terms of increased stress and workload demands.

Often researchers find gaining access to organisations challenging, requiring careful negotiations (Buchanan et al, 1998; Burgess, 1984: 46; Crompton and Jones, 1998; French and Weissmeyer, 2003: 10-12). Beynon (1988: 21) highlighted the particularly 'sensitive' nature of research within work and trade union organisations. Often, researchers are viewed with suspicion as organisations may resent 'their 'private lives' being exposed to public surveillance' (*ibid*, p. 29). Within employer and union organisation, in an essentially political process, researchers must mediate habitually conflicted power relationships. Researchers may feel that they are 'negotiating a minefield', asked to take one side over another, only accepted if they sympathise with the subject's concerns and interests (*ibid*, p. 32). However, although the reps in this study were not a homogenous group and expressed differing views, the researcher did not come under any pressure to agree or take sides with interviewees.

According to Norskov and Rask (2011), there are four participant-observer types: the *complete participant*, the *participant-as-observer*, the *observer-as-participant* and the *complete observer*. The *complete participant* is fully involved in organisational life but operates as a covert researcher, while the *complete observer* simply witnesses events. The *participant-as-observer* participates openly and ‘conducts the observations while acting as a full group member, but lets the subjects/informants know that they are under observation’. Being a researcher and union rep, the *participant-as-observer* type resembled my position.

Kanuha (2000) highlighted the dilemmas of insider research. While it ‘enhances the depth and breadth of understanding of a population...questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity’ arise because the researcher ‘knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied’ (p. 444). As a result of work power imbalances, workers may hide their views on organisational life. Consequently, researchers may miss seeing workers’ ‘everyday’ language, activities and behaviour as resistance to management control (Taylor and Bain, 2004: 277). To counter this, researchers must obtain ‘an intimate knowledge of an organisation’s underlife, and gain a high degree of trust from workers, if behaviour is to be understood’ (*ibid*, p. 277). Dwyer and Buckle (1999: 57) observed that research subjects ‘are typically more open with [insider] researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered’. My insider role facilitated easy access to research subjects and resulted in a greater acceptance than an outsider researcher would have enjoyed.

For Galea (1999), there is a dynamic triad between what the insider researcher brings to the research process, their own explicit and tacit knowledge, and what they know about organisation members and structures (p. 7-8). Thus, I was well placed to understand, the ‘individual behaviours, personalities, traits, management styles, priorities, preferences and moods’ of organisation members (*ibid*, p. 7). As well as grasping their ‘idiosyncrasies’, I had knowledge of the research sites’ organisational systems, practices and patterns of behaviour and like typical insider researchers had been ‘immersed’ in its ‘minutiae’ for many years, developing a deep understanding and comprehension of its functioning (*ibid*, p. 7).

However, the *participant-as-observer* approach can lead to researchers ‘over-identify[ing] with the informant, lose perspective, and ‘go native’’ (Norskov and Rask, 2011). Saunders *et al*, (2009: 292) stated that insider researchers’ closeness to research subjects can challenge their objectivity. Dwyer and Buckle (1999) observed that, while the shared status of participant and researcher offers ‘access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research’, it can negatively impacted on the research process as the researcher’s observations might be

‘clouded’ by their own personal experiences, ‘leading to an emphasis on shared factors between the researcher and the participants and a de-emphasis on factors that are discrepant, or vice versa’ (p. 58).

However, absolute objectivity may be impossible. Therefore Gillham (2000) suggests that researchers develop a detached honesty, where effectively ‘you *decentre* from yourself’ (p. 23). Thus, attempts were here made to separate my academic and union roles. By standing back from events and analysing their significance, an attempt was made to develop *reflexive awareness* and to theorise organisational life (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: 60). Once researchers develop reflexive awareness they can express ‘tacit knowledge that has become deeply segmented’ in an organisation ‘and reframe it as theoretical knowledge’. Because insider researchers ‘are close to something or know it well...[they] can research it’ (*ibid*, p. 60).

To conclude this section, my union role brought with it a close knowledge of the case study’s inner workings and the trust of fellow reps. However, being a researcher and participant in the organisation in which I am employed, I was conscious of this differing role when gathering data. Being close to the subject brought advantages, but checks and balances were necessary. The mixed methods approach which provides data from a range of sources, utilising different techniques, helped reduce ‘bias’, an issue that is now considered further.

6.8 Axiology and Bias

This section considers the impact of researcher’s values on their research. To prevent biases which negatively affect research credibility, Saunders *et al* (2009: 116) stressed the importance of researchers’ understanding how their values impacted on their research. Traditionally, twentieth century research was based on value neutrality. Some researchers took the view that research should be free ‘of all values, and concerned with the pursuit of theoretical or factual knowledge for its own sake’ (Darlington and Dobson, 2013: 286). Other researchers, while acknowledging their values, accepted that ‘they must set them aside and not seek to promote them through their research’ (*ibid*, p. 286).

However, while positivism asserted research should be value free, realism took the view that research was value laden. Thus, while positivists asserted that the researcher should ‘be independent of the data and maintain an objective stance’, realism accepted that ‘the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing’ (Saunders *et al*, 2009: 119). Gouldner (1962), arguing that it was a myth to suggest that research was value free, conceived

its goal in general terms as social improvement, promoting the values of greater equality, democracy and social justice (Darlington and Dobson, 2013: 286).

Bourdieu (1999: 607-8) reminded us how researchers can distort the research process. Research orthodoxy suggests that ‘the researcher, out of a concern for neutrality, rules out all personal involvement’ (*ibid*, p. 619). However, Bourdieu suggested that such an approach produced ‘sociolinguistic data’ which was difficult to interpret (*ibid*, p. 612). Instead, Bourdieu sought a participative approach ‘in which one engages in conversations and brings the speaker to engage in it as well’ (*ibid*, p. 619).

Heron (1996) observed that researchers must develop axiological skill where they explain how their values influence their research interests and how they carry out their research. According to Skeggs (1997), researchers should not impose their own frame of reference (their ‘histories, locations and identifications’) onto research subjects without fully ‘listening to or hearing what they were saying’ (p. 34). Similarly, Darlington and Dobson (2013) stated that ‘There *is* a fundamental distinction between factual inferences drawn from strict fidelity to the evidence, and evaluative or prescriptive ones that allow political sympathies to skew the research process’ (p. 288).

Within the industrial relations literature, several writers have written from a standpoint which was sympathetic to organised labour (Hyman, 1972; Beynon, 1973; Darlington, 1994). Moore (2011) stated that, against a background of austerity driven attacks on working class living standards, her research was ‘motivated by a desire for social change’ (p. 8). Darlington and Dobson (2013) suggested that ‘an important and desirable by-product’ of industrial relations research was that it facilitated workers’ collective organisations efforts ‘to redress the imbalance of power in the employment relationship, and to create a more equal society’ (p. 295). In similar terms, Darlington (1994: 10) claimed that his research was informed by a commitment to advancing ‘the struggles of labour against capital’.

Cancian’s (1992) feminist study highlighted the tension between the ‘two competing worlds’ of activist and researcher, suggesting activist research challenged inequality and the status quo by ‘empowering the powerless’ and ‘promoting social changes that equalizes the distribution of research’. This contrasted with ‘academic research’ which’s audience was ‘colleagues’, restricting it to exploring ‘theoretically or socially significant’ questions (p. 92). Such approaches chime with Burawoy’s (2004) call for a ‘public sociology’ which was ‘in part, a reaction and a response to the privatization of everything’ (p. 7). Burawoy argued that the

relationship between the public sociologist and the public was organic and they should engage in a mutual dialogue which learnt from each other (*ibid*, p. 8). Beynon (1973: 9) cautioned against a ‘sociology for sociologist’ which fails to ‘make clear the issues that so deeply affect people’s lives’. Beynon sought to overcome sociologists’ ‘contrived isolation’ which ‘cuts the writer off from the subjects of his writings’. As ‘an outsider who was accepted inside’, Beynon developed a ‘hesitant mutuality’ with the shop stewards who were the subject of his research (*ibid*, p. 9).

In recent years, concerns about the interviewer-interviewee power imbalance have emerged (Cassel, 2009: 508). Bourdieu (1999: 608) argued that the researcher must understand and overcome the ‘distortions [which] are embedded in the very structure of the research relationship’. The research relationship between the *investigator* and the *investigated* is asymmetric, because the researcher ‘starts the game and sets up the rules’. This imbalance is reinforced by each party’s social position. To counter the ‘symbolic violence’ implied in the research relationship, Bourdieu suggested that the researcher must adopt ‘active and methodical listening’, an approach which requires them to conjoin ‘a total availability’ to the interviewee where they adopt their ‘views, feelings and thought -with methodical construction’ based on the subject groups’ objective conditions (*ibid*, p. 608).

My interest in SAP implementation emerged from an attempt to understand the reasons why a shift to stricter attendance management was taking place and what this meant for union organisation. The distance between researcher and researched was reduced because of a shared trade union experience. To paraphrase Beynon (1973), the researcher was an *insider who is accepted inside*. As an insider researcher, I was accepted by fellow union activists, having known many of them for several years, sharing the day-to-day pressures of representing union members. Nevertheless, I was aware of the dangers of imposing my pro-union values onto the research evidence.

Although Darlington and Dobson (2013) stated that they were committed to societal change and were not impartial, they claimed that they strived for objectivity. Likewise, Darlington (1994: 11) declared similar objectivity to C. Wright Mills (1962) who stated that ‘I have tried to be objective, I do not claim to be detached’. Darlington and Dobson (2013: 294) acknowledged that there ‘were real dangers that partisanship *may* lead to biased research’. However, they did not believe that this was inevitable and, although difficult, it was possible to undertake research that was committed and objective. Accordingly, research should be ‘grounded on scientific research methods’ and ‘involve a self-critical and self-conscious examination of the basic value-

commitments that inform research in order to understand how they relate to the enquiry at hand' (*ibid*, p. 294).

According to Darlington and Dobson, researchers must adopt a reflective, self-critical approach which sought out 'flaws' in their own interpretation to counter bias (*ibid*, p. 294). Objective research can produce knowledge on the basis that it is 'scholarly and rigorous in its methodology, in terms of measures such as reliability, validity, representativeness and verification'. For Darlington and Dobson, such research should 'systematically assesses any formulated hypotheses in the light of the evidence' unlike "'biased' research in which subjective evaluations are expressed independent of such evidence' (*ibid*, p. 287).

To conclude this section, as researcher I have views about the world and it would be unrealistic to suggest that they did not influence the research. I hold normative beliefs regarding management powers and union rights. However, while these values influenced the research interest, an attempt was made through the research design to retain balance. Nevertheless, as Rose (1985: 77) stated, 'there is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases'.

6.9 Research Permission

Research permission was obtained from Glasgow City and GHA UNISON branches but not from management. The potential difficulties securing employer research permission have been discussed previously. As the focus of the study was on trade union responses to managerial action, it was felt that there was no requirement to seek permission from management.

6.10 Research Ethics

This section considers ethical issues pertaining to this research. According to Bresnen (1998), researchers within an organisation's 'real-life social setting' have to 'rely upon some degree of cunning, deviousness, opportunism and persistence' to ensure that they obtain reliable and viable data (p. 47). However, unlike the outside researcher, the inside researcher continues to work in the organisation after the research is completed and needs to have a greater awareness of organisation politics (Saunders *et al*, 2009: 292). Galea (2009: 9) stated that insider researchers must consider four key ethical issues: firstly, data ownership and its release; secondly, the nature of the relationship between the researcher and researched; thirdly, the nature and level of informed consent and freedom not to participate; and fourthly the nature and

level of anonymity and confidentiality for individuals and the organisation. These are considered each in turn.

With regard to data ownership and its release, the information gathered from questionnaires and interviews was collected for research purposes only, and will not be used otherwise. Use was made of publically available Council documentation and their sources are acknowledged. Regarding my relationship with research subjects, as a union activist in a trusted position with union colleagues there was a particular responsibility to be open and transparent. While this facilitated access and provided rich data, I sought to avoid any action, even inadvertently, that could have resulted in research subjects' harm. Privy to union reps' frustrations with regard to SAP representation, I exercised 'appropriate tact and sensitivities' (*ibid*, p. 9) in respect of how such information was handled.

With regard to informed consent and freedom not to participate, the information sheet (Appendix 4) explained the research's purpose and stated that reps were under no obligation to participate. With regard to anonymity and confidentiality, Beynon (1988) interviewed the ethnographic industrial researcher Roy who made anonymous the organisation and workplace in which he undertook research. Alternatively, Beynon viewed 'sociological research as a means of building and extending a dialogue between the sociologist and the public', and stated that he preferred to name the individuals and organisations studied (p. 29). Like Beynon, as stated previously, the thesis' findings have been periodically reported at reps' meetings. This approach contrasts with that undertaken by the concealed researcher and required 'an open and positive relationship' with the individuals involved.

In this study the organisations studied were not made anonymous, apart from Construction, Transport and Finance Co. where there were small, more easily identifiable numbers of reps. Care was taken to ensure that research participants were not identified. Also, while elected councillors who made public statements were named, Council officers were not. Pragmatically, as the researcher is regularly in contact with Council officers, naming them would have broken trust, affecting long-term relationships. To protect confidentiality, reps were discouraged from discussing union members' cases or providing any information that might identify anyone. Raw research data, including interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored on a password protected computer which only the researcher has access to.

6.11 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter presented, with reference to alternative positivist and interpretivist positions, the rationale for the chosen critical realist stance. Accepting that capturing social reality was not easy, the thesis seeks plausible and practically adequate explanatory conjectures rather than absolute truth. Critical realists take the view that our knowledge and conceptualisations are bound together, resulting in shortcomings and deficiencies. Nevertheless, critical realists take the view that ‘better and worse forms of knowledge exist’ and that ‘reliable procedures for producing knowledge of things and events’ exist (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000: 11). Thus, after outlining the study’s philosophical and ontological underpinnings, this chapter described the methodology and methods used.

Easton (2009: 123-4) recommended that research projects should firstly identify the phenomena under study and consider the nature of research questions. Accordingly, stricter local government SAP implementation was identified as a phenomenon that required examination with ‘What’ questions asked (*ibid*, p. 123). This chapter also explored the strength and weakness of the case study approach and detailed the chosen case study. Thereafter, the research methodology and methods which enabled data collection were described. Then the steps taken to analyse this data were detailed (*ibid*, p. 124). This chapter also considered issues relating to insider research, axiology, bias, reliability, validity and research ethics.

To conclude, no methodology is problem free, but from a critical realist philosophical stance, as the social world is highly complex and can only be partially known, it was felt that the chosen case study approach, utilising mixed methods, was best suited to an in-depth study of union reps’ response to managerial SAP implementation. Not only were reps’ organising efforts the focus of research, they were the prism through which it was understood. Combined with surveys and documentary examination, reps’ ‘oral testimonies allow[ed]...a deeper exploration of the articulation of interest, identity and consciousness’ (Moore, 2011: 3).

To set the scene for the research findings, the following chapter now provides contextual information about the research site.

Chapter 7: Glasgow: The ‘Neo-liberal City’

7.1 Introduction

As the thesis locates strict SAP implementation within changed workplace control regimes at a time of straightened economic conditions, this chapter examines austerity’s local impact. In doing so, it examines the broader political, economic and historical factors which shape employers actions and union responses. To provide context, a brief history of Glasgow Labour Party, the city’s historical roots and its branding by Council leaders as a ‘neo-liberal city’ (Paton, 2012: 212) are firstly sketched out. The following sections outline how the Council extended NPM as it adapted to market and commercial pressures by establishing its ALEOs and reduced spending. Finally, further information about Glasgow City and GHA UNISON branch structures, organisation, membership and disputes are provided.

7.2 Labour in Glasgow

For the last four decades, until its defeat in the 2017 council elections, Labour controlled Glasgow City Council.³ At its height, following the 1995 local government elections, Labour’s dominant position in the Council epitomised its hegemony throughout the West of Scotland and other urban areas as ‘a networked local state’ (Hassan, 2012: 8). According to Hassan, in ‘Glasgow, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire, opposition councillors became an endangered species’ as ‘a one-party politics’ developed in which ‘councillors and officials saw little conflict of interest’, as closed doors’ decisions were made between senior Labour councillors and council officers (*ibid*, p. 8). In the 1995 elections, Labour in Glasgow captured 61.5 per cent of the vote, winning 77 of the 83 seats (*ibid*, p. 8). Through its dominance of local government and trade union links, ‘shaped by power and [its] exercise’, Labour Scotland was ‘a different kind of party’ from its English counterpart (*ibid*, p. 9). With a wide ‘influence and reach’, it maintained its power base through networks and relationships which fostered ‘a politics of patronage and administration’ (*ibid*, p. 9). However, in the last two decades, Labour’s popularity in Glasgow, like the rest of Scotland, steadily declined. Its support for the Gulf War and PFI alienated many traditional party supporters (Hassan, 2008; Hassan, 2012). As examined further in this chapter, the Labour Council’s relationship with its workforce was conflict-ridden as it attempts to implement modernisation policies met frequent workforce resistance (Appendix 5).

³ As the party which won most seats in the 2017 local government election, the SNP now forms the Council’s administration. Because the SNP were in opposition during the research gathering phase, this chapter focuses on the previous ruling Labour Party’s modernising agenda. However, in Chapter 11 the SNP’s approach to managing employee relations is considered as an area for future research.

7.3 Glasgow: “Open for business”

During Victorian times, Glasgow was the ‘second city’ of the British Empire (Paton *et al*, 2012: 12). Glasgow’s factories, foundries and shipyards manufactured the ships, trains and munitions that were the building blocks of empire. Vestiges of the city’s imperial past and slave trade history are found in the street names and buildings within the Merchant City district, now host to up-market shops and restaurants. The Council’s headquarters, the City Chambers, dominates the city’s George Square.



Glasgow City Chambers

At its highpoint, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Glasgow’s population was 1.1 million. Today, 600,000 Glaswegians live in the city (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2016). According to Craig (2010), Glasgow is the ‘quintessential’ post-industrial city which since the 1980s ‘haemorrhaged jobs from shipyards, steelworks, mines and even from the new industries which were due to take the place of the old heavy industries’ (*ibid*, p. 17).

Between 1971 and 2001, Glasgow lost nearly 200,000 manufacturing jobs as traditional industries declined and gained 145,000 in the service industries (Law and Mooney, 2005). Employment growth in commerce, service industries, education and the arts offset manufacturing job losses. Integral to Glasgow’s regeneration, the city played host to major sporting and culture events such as the Garden Festival (1988), City of Culture (1990) and the

Commonwealth Games (2014) (Craig, 2010: 17-18). Since the 1980s, the Council, its predecessor Glasgow District Council, Scottish Enterprise and other agencies have initiated a succession of regeneration stratagems (Paton, 2010: 213). Varma (2016) observed the economic and physical impact of such developments:

...the city has changed its manufacturing and shipbuilding base to retail, tourism and financial services...the smoke of the chimneys and the cranes of the shipyards have been largely replaced by shopping facilities, office towers, tourist attractions and new luxury flats (p. 106).

Paton (2010) suggested that Glasgow offered a 'paradigmatic example of decline and restructuring' as it re-casted itself as a 'neoliberal city' (p. 212). According to Harvey (1989), urban development is shaped by a 'broad range of class practices' related to capital circulation, 'the reproduction of labour power and class relations, and the need to control labour power' (*ibid*, p. 5). According to Harvey, the entrepreneurial city, is characterised by, firstly, encouraging public-private partnerships, in which 'a traditional local boosterism' (*ibid*, p. 6) is allied to local government powers to attract private investment. Secondly, public-private partnerships socialise risk whereby 'the public sector assumes the risk and the private sector takes the benefits'. Thirdly, the local state focuses on 'the political economy of place rather than territory' in the form of enhancing civic amenities and city branding instead of improving living conditions (*ibid*, p. 7).

According to Gray (2008), the Council's urban regeneration was part of a 'long term project to transform its image from that of recalcitrant 'Red Clydeside' to consumerist 'Glasgow: Scotland with Style'' (p. 8). While the Council believed that rebranding would be a 'powerful force for change' (GCC, 2007a: 10), safeguarding its competitive 'edge' in global markets, concerns were expressed that urban regeneration was emblematic of 'a global urban strategy of gentrification and capitalist accumulation' (Gray, 2008: 6). Since the 1970s, impacting greatly on its urban built environment and institutions, a shift has taken place in Glasgow away from urban managerialism towards urban entrepreneurialism (Paton, 2010). Encouraging the development of private interests, the Council emphasised its entrepreneurial role (Gray and French, 2010), promoting 'Team Glasgow', an 'informal network' of councillors, business and media figures who advocated business-friendly policies (Paterson and Braden, 2010). Underscoring this approach, former Council leader Stephen Purcell (2005-2010) stated that Glasgow was 'very much open for business despite the economic downturn' (Clyde Waterfront, 2009), a strategy which his predecessor Charlie Gordon (1999-2005) pursued and has continued since (GCC, 2016; Varma, 2016: 113).

However, there are limits to what extent local government can stimulate its local economy as wider political and economic factors come into play. At best, it can perform a facilitating and coordinating role (Harvey, 1989: 6). According to Gray (2008: 8), local government is ‘compelled’ to manage ‘potentially recalcitrant local populations’ while simultaneously ‘maintaining or creating the conditions for profitable capitalist investment’. This ‘balancing act - between accumulation and legitimation’, results in ‘place-specific discourses of blight and decay’ which justify ‘the devaluation and disposal of unprofitable properties and land’ (*ibid*, p. 8). Thus, concerns have been expressed that Glasgow’s economic regeneration bypassed its large housing estates which were blighted by decay and high mortality rates (Mooney, 2004). Glasgow’s life expectancy of 71.6 is nearly seven years below the national average (Williams, 2013). Its wealthiest citizens live 28 years longer than its poorest (WHO, 2008: 32).

Glasgow has been associated with a long history of working class struggle and remains a city of two halves (Craig, 2010: 217-225). Since the Industrial Revolution, Glasgow has been ‘predominantly a working class city with a very small middle and upper class’ (*ibid*, p. 27). The city has ‘the largest number of deprived local areas in Scotland’ and ‘the highest rate of people of working age claiming benefits, and the highest proportion of workless households in Great Britain’ (GCC, 2009c: 11). While many of Glasgow’s citizens live in poverty, the city has 154 multi-millionaires, the third largest concentration in the UK (Edinburgh has 138) (Insley and Avely, 2012). According to Mooney (2004), the Glasgow regeneration model has been marked by ‘a low paid workforce, grateful for the breadcrumbs from the tables of the entrepreneurs and investors’ and reduced public spending which has failed to tackle ‘worsening levels of poverty and deprivation’ (p. 337). Glasgow’s dependence on financial services, tourism, and retail jobs made it vulnerable to economic downturn (GCC, 2009c: 7). Many new financial services and retail jobs are precarious, lower paid with shorter hours (*ibid*, pp. 10-20; Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 2015: 6-10). While a stratum of Glasgow council workers are concentrated within highly paid professional, senior and middle management grades, large numbers are low paid (Weldon, 2016).

7.4 Glasgow’s ‘Tangled Web’

The Council was established in 1996 through local government reorganisation, taking over the responsibilities of Glasgow District Council (GDC) and Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC), hitherto contained within the city’s metropolitan boundary. Following reorganisation, the Council’s workforce of 40,000 was reduced to 36,000 through natural wastage, re-structuring, voluntary severance and early retirement (GCC, 2009a: 2). By 2009, the Council

had established a complex ALEO network which directly employed 15,000 workers with a further 500 seconded, leaving 24,000 workers employed by the Council (including 5,500 teaching staff) (GCC, 2009b: 2). Figure 7.1 draws the linkages between the Council, its ALEOs, former and related organisations.

Fig 7.1 Glasgow's Blurred Organisational Boundaries and Disordered Hierarchies



Exemplifying NPM, Council ALEOs represented a Third Way approach to public services provision. Although not privatised, these organisations contain elements of marketisation and commercialisation. In 2000, the Council introduced the UK's largest PFI project with its school building programme (Hassan, 2012: 271). In 2003, it transferred 1,600 workers and its housing stock to the newly formed GHA (GCC, 2009a: 2). The GHA is part of the Wheatley Group of housing providers. As a legal entity, GHA now has no formal links with the Council although its nominees sit on its board (GHAA, 2016). However, to further illustrate the complex relationship between the Council and the ALEOs, the Wheatley Group became 'a 50-50 joint owner and partner in City Building Glasgow, the Council's wholly-owned subsidiary' (GHAb, 2016: 8). In addition to repairing GHA properties, the joint venture also repairs Council buildings (ibid, p. 8).

Increasingly throughout the last decade, Glasgow's local government services were provided by Council owned ALEOs.⁴ Table 7.2 provides further information on this 'tangled web' (Braden, 2010).

Table 7.1 Glasgow City Council's ALEOs

ALEO	Established	Employees (no)	Notes
Access Glasgow	2008	300	Joint partnership between Council and SERCO
City Building	2006	2,2000	Limited liability partnership with Council and GHA
City Markets	2008	25	Limited liability partnership. Now in City Property.
City Parking	2007	200	Wholly council owned limited liability partnership
City Property	2008	50-100	Wholly council owned
Community Safety Glasgow	2006	400-500	Charitable trust
Cordia	2009	4,000	Wholly council owned
Glasgow Life	2007	2,300	Charitable trust. Previously Culture and Sport Glasgow

In 2006, over two thousand council employees were TUPE transferred to City Building and Glasgow Community Safety Service (later renamed CSG). CSG is a charitable status partnership between the Council and Police, with 90 per cent Council ownership. In 2007, despite union opposition, 2,300 leisure, library and museum workers were transferred to Culture and Sport Glasgow (later renamed Glasgow Life), a newly established charitable trust (BBC, 2007). George Black, former Council Chief Executive, claimed that the transfer would allow access to 'much more funding and generate more income' (*Insider*, January 2007: 4). Following an unsuccessful legal challenge, former City UNISON's branch chair, Mike Kirby said that:

To discard hundreds of hard-working staff, snatch libraries, museums and leisure centres away from the people of Glasgow, and to breach the law in doing it is bad enough. To do it as a tax dodge is worse (BBC, 2007).

In 2007 City Parking which manages car park and street parking services was established (GCC, 2009a). The market in which it operates is intensively competitive. Public sector parking services have faced privatisation and outsourcing pressures (*Parking News*, 2011: 32; *Parking*

⁴ Since its election, the SNP administration has indicated its intention to review the ALEOs; initially Cordia and CSG will return to the Council.

Trend International, 2011: 35). Although City Parking is not privatised, it operates as a trading company competing with private sector car parks so revenue maximisation is a main concern.

In 2008, the Council established City Property to manage its property estate. In doing so, it raised £40 million which helped fund the Council's voluntary severance programme. Also that year, 300 Council IT and janitorial workers were seconded to Access, a ten-year partnership with Serco. Then in 2009, 8,500 home help, catering and cleaning workers were transferred to Cordia from the Council's Direct and Cleaning Services (DACs) (GCC, 2009a: 2). According to Cordia's Managing Director, the organisation was established to win catering contracts from other public sector bodies to 'create new opportunities for us to grow, develop and diversify into new markets' (*Insider*, December 2008: 7).

Several other smaller ALEOs were created such as Glasgow Cultural Enterprises Ltd and City Marketing (GCC, 2009b: 2). The Council retains overall control by appointing councillors to sit on the ALEO boards, through financial mechanisms and by reporting mechanisms on how targets are met to its Governance Board (UNISON Grievance, 2010: 2).

The ALEOs operate in different ways. While operating within a framework established by the Council, CSG has considerable operational freedom. Glasgow Life has greater independence and came into conflict in 2010 with the trade unions when it attempted to change terms and conditions (Appendix 5). Although City Parking directly controls its workforce, the Council sets the framework for the provision of street parking enforcement services. The ALEOs are 'separate legal entities in their own right and have wide ranging devolved decision making powers' (GCC, 2009b: 2). 'By clearly specifying the outputs, outcomes and targets' they 'must achieve through their resource management', the ALEOs are made accountable to the Council (*ibid*, pp. 2-3). The Council's stated it established its ALEOs to generate income, improve financial management and service performance, and to achieve pay flexibilities,

...because they have fewer equal pay comparators. The ALEOs are tax efficient...allowing substantial savings to be made in business rates for those ALEOs with charitable status. ALEOs involved in external trading, can expand their potential market and income base by seeking business from sectors outside the local authority (*ibid*, p. 3).

In 2009, Stephen Purcell explained the rationale for creating ALEOs:

Long before the credit crunch we in Glasgow started reforming services to make them as efficient as possible. For example, we have turned former council departments into arm's length companies, still wholly owned by the council, but free to compete in the private market (Purcell, 2009).

Although Purcell took the view that local councils were best placed to provide local services, he stated that they had to be provided efficiently. Purcell declared that, ‘the days of overstaffing and pointless bureaucracy have gone, certainly in Glasgow’ (*ibid*). Cordia’s Director stated that its establishment provided ‘a platform to be more creative with employment conditions, perhaps bringing in positive things like profit-sharing arrangements, or encouragement to improve attendance levels’ (*The Herald*, 2009a).

However, the ALEOs have encountered controversy with one critic claiming that they resulted in ‘blurred distinctions between business and government’ and were ‘run by well paid councillors appointed by the leader’, leading to ‘political patronage, and lingering suspicions of dodgy contracts’ (Morgan, 2010: 5). In March 2010, following Council Leader Purcell’s resignation, concerns were expressed that the appointment of councillors to the boards of the ALEOs was a form of ‘cronyism’ (Gray and French, 2010: 7). Until the intervention of the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee in 2011, councillors were paid £6,335 per annum to attend ALEO board meetings (Hassan, 2012: 258).

Gray and French (2010) argued that controversy over Purcell’s resignation hid the ‘real issue’ of ‘the restructuring of local government along lines of market largesse at public expense’ (p. 7). According to Gray and French, Glasgow’s ‘restructuring ha[d] spawned an ‘economy’ of conspicuous consumerism’ which was dependent on the exploited labour of ‘a low-waged vulnerable service class’, at a time when property speculation had ‘blighted the city and reinforced extremes of inequality masked by pageant’ (*ibid*, p. 7).

UNISON claimed that the rationale for the establishment of the ALEOs was to avoid equal pay claims. Speaking for UNISON, Mike Kirby stated that ‘ALEOs are a tax scam, that they lead to loss of democratic control by councillors, and that they can avoid more equal pay claims because they have fewer comparators’ (*Scotland in UNISON*, 2009: 3).

7.5 Glasgow’s Response to the Financial Crisis

Chapter 4 highlighted how the SNP government accepted UK government’s spending limits which then reduced council budget allocations. Unable to raise council tax levels and faced with ‘ring-fencing’ expectations, local councils felt that they had little room for manoeuvre other than make spending cuts (Bryden, Bort and Refsgaard, 2015). Although more than 28,000 public sector jobs have disappeared since 2010, the SNP’s ‘no compulsory redundancy’ policy (Jackson, 2018) was implemented by councils, including Glasgow, further reducing its ability to save money through workforce reduction alone.

Before the 2008 financial crisis, the Council experienced budgetary pressures (Carmichael and Midwinter, 1999: 84). Thereafter, the Council's Chief Executive warned employees that in addition to the Scottish Government's 2% efficiency target, higher energy costs and wage rises, a £53 million cut was necessary within two years (*Insider*, December 2008: 2). One month later, he asserted that 'some' employees did not 'fully realise' how the 'world economic crisis' affected the Council's finances (*Insider*, January 2009: 3):

While I don't want to worry anyone unnecessarily, it is vital that I am clear with you about you how bad that the current situation is and how much worse it could become in the future...The circumstances we face just now are like nothing we have ever experienced before (*ibid*, p.3).

A further £10 million budget cut was proposed (*ibid*, p.3). Purcell stated that as the Council was 'facing the most difficult public spending budgets since the 1980s...Councils will be forced to bleed every stone dry' (*Scotland on Sunday*, 18th January, 2009). In May 2009, *The Herald* (2009b) warned that 'doomsday' cuts were necessary. Also that month, the Council estimated that its budget shortfall was £99m, equivalent to 4,000 job losses (*Insider*, May 2009). Between 2010 and 2013/14, £130m was cut from Council budgets and a further £21m in 2014/15. By 2015, the Council projected 'further cuts of £103m in 2016 and 2017' (Defend Glasgow Services leaflet).

The Council responded to the financial crisis in several ways. Firstly, since 2010, through retirement and voluntary severance, workforce numbers were reduced; 3,500 workers left the Council and their posts became vacant (UNISON Scotland, 2014: 8). Secondly, the Council expected its remaining workers 'to be flexible to respond to a more uncertain future' (GCC, 2009c: 21). As 'staffing costs are our main area of spending', more efficient ways of working were felt necessary (*ibid*, p. 21). As well as attempting to change the terms of the effort bargain through its WPBR pay review, the Council also increased its use of agency workers and fixed-term and temporary contracts.

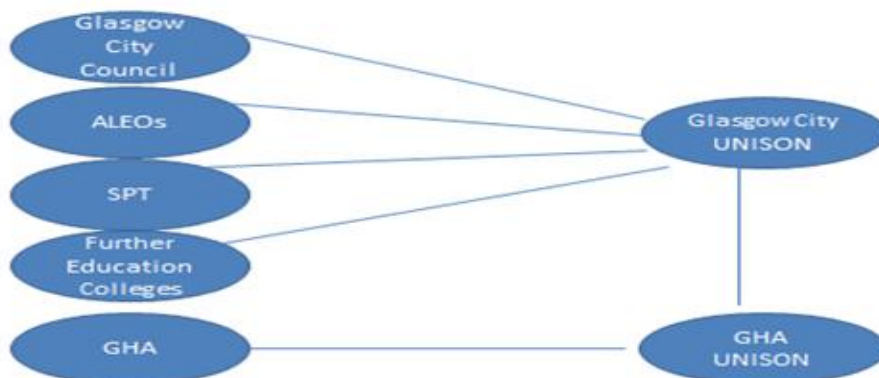
Thirdly, the Council's Tomorrows Office workplace programme reduced its office space by a half (GCC, 2009c). Promoting agile working, the Council stated that Tomorrow's Office made 'better use of our existing buildings and provide a higher standard of office for our staff' (*ibid*, p. 21). However, as Baldry *et al* (1998:164) stated such 'structures of control' are designed to 'house the labour process and, in so doing, facilitate control over it by the way that space is organised'. Finally, Council spending cuts increased workload pressures on its workforce and negatively impacted on voluntary organisation, their employees and service users (GCVS, 2009: 9-11; Main, 2014).

7.6 UNISON Branch Structures and Organisation

This section provides further information about Glasgow City and GHA UNISON union branches. With 1.3 million members, UNISON is the second largest trade union in the UK. UNISON was formed in 1993 with the merger of the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) and National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). UNISON organises across several sectors, including local government, the voluntary sector, health, police and fire services. NALGO's growth and development in the 1980s was related to the public sector expansion of white collar and professional occupations, and job deskilling through the application of scientific management techniques (Ironsides and Seifert, 2000: 8).

The Glasgow City and GHA UNISON branches are part of the union's Scottish Region. UNISON Scotland exercises significant autonomy in how it relates to its UK structures, the Scottish Government and employers. During research gathering, Glasgow City UNISON bargained with about 30 separate employers⁵, including the Council, its former and related organisations, including further education (FE) colleges. Despite externalisation, the Council remains the largest employer that it has a recognition agreement with. The GHA branch emanated from the City branch in 2006, after GHA was established in 2003 to manage the Council's housing stock. Although councillors sit on the GHA board, it has no formal links with the Council. Figure 7.2 maps the relationship between the City and GHA UNISON branches.

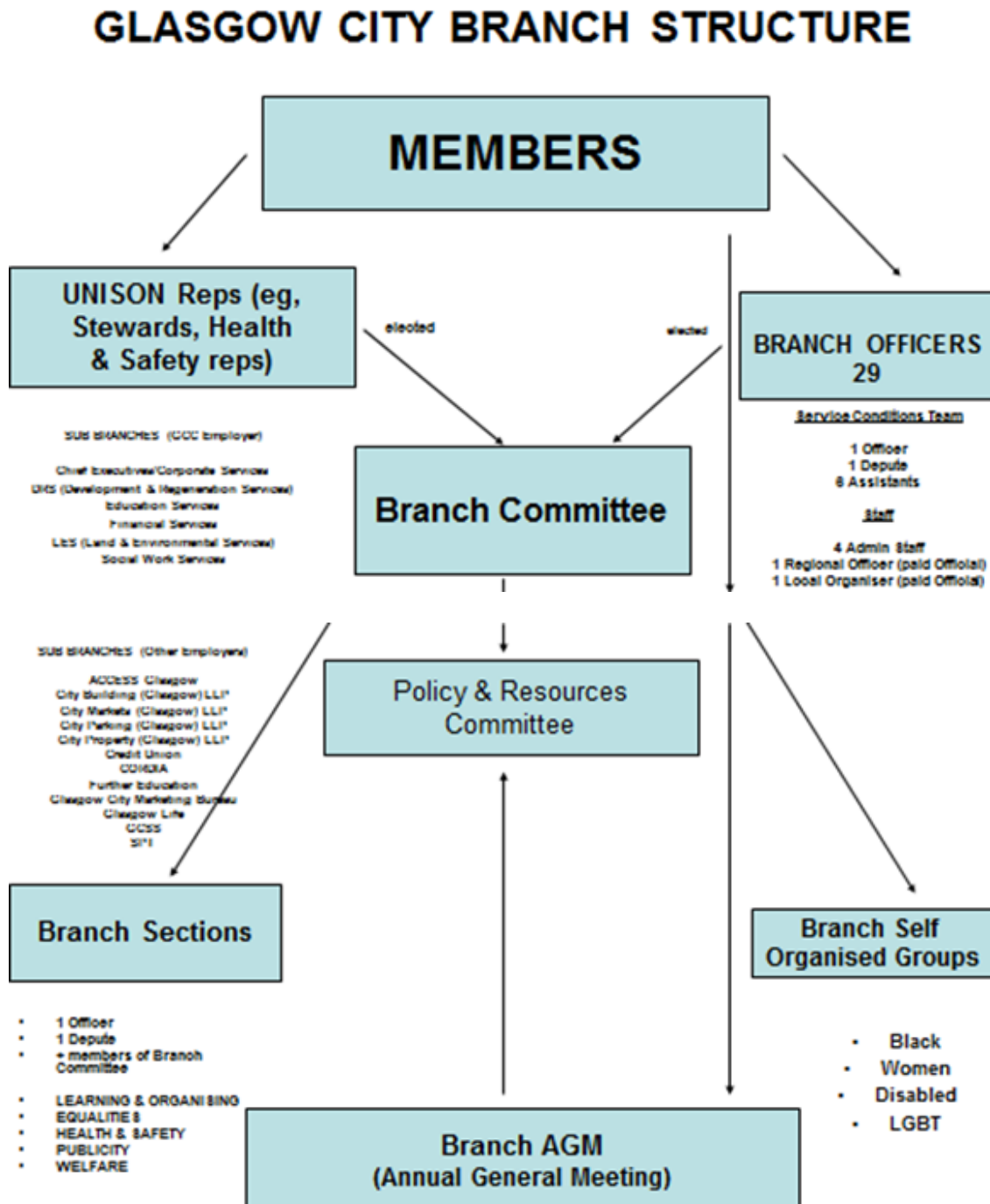
Figure 7.2 Employers and Union Organisation



⁵ As a result of college mergers and ALEO reorganisation, this number has now reduced to about twenty.

Figure 7.3 provides details of the City UNISON Branch’s Structure.

Figure 7.3 UNISON Branch Structure



The branch’s sovereign body is its Annual General Meeting (AGM). Each November, nominations are sought for branch officer posts. If positions are contested, a ballot of all members takes place. The Branch is comprised of several departmental sub-branches in which

shop stewards committees regularly meet. Sub-branch rep meetings elect their Departmental Convenor. Some sub-branches, such as Social Work (with over 70 shop stewards) are large while others are much smaller. Each sub-branch has its own AGM where a report is presented of its activities. Branch Officers and Departmental Convenors attend the Service and Conditions Forum (SCF) which regularly meets to discuss strategic issues. The SCF and other branch bodies such as its Health and Safety Committee report to the Branch Committee (BC) which authorises branch spending and requests industrial action ballots. The BC is comprised of Branch Officers and reps elected from sub-branch committees.

In contrast, the GHA UNISON branch structure is much simpler; each fortnight all reps meet to discuss the issues that they confront. Until the GHA was established in 2003, the housing stewards were part of Glasgow City UNISON, thereafter founding their own branch in 2006. The GHA branch's 1,100 members are largely concentrated within GHA, although it organise amongst other Wheatley Group housing associations. While the GHA branch is autonomous and has its own office within its employer's head office, it maintains links with the City branch where it receives administrative support.

7.7 Glasgow City UNISON Membership

Table 7.2 provides details of Glasgow City UNISON's membership between 2002 and 2017. Membership figures for 2003, 2004 and 2015 are unavailable. Although falling by 2 per cent (n= 275) since its 2002 figure (11,134), in 2017 branch membership stood at 10,859. During the period studied between 2009 and 2014, it fell by 9 per cent (n= 1,033). Between 2002 and 2007, latterly coinciding with the Council's introduction of WPBR, an extra 2066 members were recruited, representing a 19 per cent increase. Although affected by voluntary severance and budget reductions, the branch's membership has steadily increased since 2014.

Table 7.2 UNISON Branch's Membership (2002-2017)

Year	No
2002	11,134
2005	11,758
2006	12,073
2007	13,200
Oct 2008	11,597
Oct 2009	11,347
Oct 2010	10,858
Sept 2011	10,334
Nov 2012	10,284
May 2013	10,308
Oct 2104	10,314
June 2016	10,790
May 2017	10,859

A more detailed examination of membership figures suggests greater periodic flux. Table 7.3 provides a breakdown of Glasgow City UNISON's membership by service. Accounting for 60 per cent of the 1,724 fall in membership between 2007 and 2008 was the departure of 1,036 Housing members to form the new GHA branch. After 2009, as a result of budgetary pressures, the Council and ALEO workforce reduced. The corresponding membership fall in Social Work, Glasgow Life (previously Culture and Sports), LES, DRS and Finance was particularly noteworthy. For instance, between 2009 and 2014, DRS membership fell by over a half. In Education during the same period, there was a smaller 12 per cent reduction (n= 302) as a result of an influx of new members during the Pupil Support Assistants (PSA) Dispute (2013-14).

Outwith the period of this study, the branch almost doubled its membership in Cordia between 2014 and 2017, rising from 768 to 1526. Between 2013 and 2014, there was over a fourfold increase in the Chief Executives' membership, climbing from 381 to 1,718, as a result of the transfer of over 1,000 administrative and clerical workers from other Council departments to CBS.

Table 7.3 UNISON Branch's Membership by Service (2007-2017)

	2007	2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2010	Sept 2011	May 2013	Oct 2014	June 2017
Access	0	0	174	166	163	195	185	274
Chief Execs	420	422	320	320	399	381	1718	1627
Building	197	125	109	106	108	102	94	80
Marketing	7	7	0	6	5	5	8	3
City Markets	0	0	11	9	11	0	0	0
City Parking	0	0	45	46	46	46	47	29
City Property	0	0	0	28	29	34	27	31
Cordia/ DACS	740	670	630	611	600	636	768	1526
CSG/ GCSS	0	0	82	146	157	141	171	176
Finance Co	0	0	0	21	23	20	17	16
DRS	584	488	452	360	340	298	196	187
Education	2388	2433	2585	2451	2342	2558	2283	2251
Finance	788	703	678	618	543	483	83	0
FE	525	514	650	676	653	628	566	615
GHA	1036	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glasgow Life	890	908	802	851	819	740	784	713
LES	926	848	648	592	441	454	359	366
Social Work	4463	4140	3938	3684	3508	3444	2846	2775
SPT	192	178	171	161	142	118	115	102
Others	44	40	52	6	5	25	47	88
Total	13,200	11,476	11,347	10,858	10,334	10,308	10,431	10,859

There were variations in union membership density. In October 2014, in some areas such as Social Work (80 per cent) and Education (64 per cent) UNISON member density was high. In other areas where the GMB and Unite organise UNISON's density was lower, for instance LES (13 per cent), Cordia (11 per cent) and Glasgow Life (31 per cent). Nevertheless, outwith the period studied, union density increased in Cordia from 11 per cent in 2014 to 23 per cent in

2017. In the same period, density rose in Access from 54 per cent to 68 per cent. In CSG, although UNISON membership increased by only 5 from 171 to 176, as a result of general workforce reduction union density rose from 33 to 43 per cent.

In general terms, examination of the branch's membership figures suggests that despite workforce reduction it has been able to maintain its numeric strength, increasing its density in some areas. As members left, new ones were recruited. While voluntary severance and non-filling of vacant posts in Social Work, DRS and LES resulted in membership losses, this was offset by new members joining in Access, Cordia, CSG and Education, areas where there has been industrial conflict.

7.8 Glasgow City UNISON Industrial Disputes

This section provides a short history of Glasgow City UNISON's industrial disputes (listed in Appendix 5). These form part of the collective backcloth in which individual union member representation takes place. In broad terms, these disputes can be characterised as occurring within four distinct periods as follows:

7.8.1. New Labour's 'Offensive'

In 1998, typifying worker resistance to New Labour's modernising agenda Law and Mooney (2008: 27), the Council faced two major industrial disputes involving social workers and library workers. In August 1998, 2,000 social work employees took 8 days unofficial action after workers were suspended for following union boycotting action in relation to home care duties. McCafferty (2004), who interviewed strike activists, observed that the dispute 'brought together those already politically active and politicised a wider layer of members' who perceived that the Labour-controlled Council was 'going on the offensive' (p. 17).

Faced with a court injunction, the workers voted to return to work. The strikers feared that the Council's proposal to establish a purchaser-provider split by transferring home care workers to DACS, a new Council department, was the first step towards privatisation, or at least, the introduction of market and best value disciplines (BBC, 1998; *Herald*, 1998a; *Local Government Chronicle*, 1998). According to McCafferty (2004), many strike activists expressed the view that the Council's confrontational stance was designed to weaken the workforce to enable it to implement New Labour's modernisation (*ibid*, p. 17).

The subsequent Glasgow library workers' dispute lasted over a year with librarians taking action over management plans to change shift patterns and reduce evening working, resulting in a 5 per cent wage rate reduction, with some workers losing £50 a week (*Herald*, 1998b). At the heart of the dispute lay the Council's intention to modernise the library service (Cameron, 1998). After five months of selective action, the library workers voted in October 1998 to escalate the dispute and take indefinite action (Stewart, 1998). Eventually, following a 'sign up or lose your jobs' threat (MacCalman, 1999), the dispute ended in May 1999, after UNISON refused to ballot its 12,000 branch members (*Local Government Chronicle*, 1999).

7.8.2 Nursery Nurses

The next major industrial action involving Glasgow City UNISON members was the Scottish nursery nurses dispute (March 2003-June 2004), which latterly, from February 2004, involved indefinite action (Clark, 2004). The dispute arose as a result of nursery nurses' long-standing frustrations regarding their employers' historic failure to address equal pay. The union's attempt to preserve a united front across Scotland was undermined after employers offered local negotiations, resulting in several branches reaching local agreements. However, most Scottish nursery nurses took 8 weeks all-out action (14 in Glasgow) before returning to work (Mooney and McAfferty, 2005: 231-5). According to Mhairi, a Glasgow nursery nurse, the dispute was part of a 'wider battle' to demonstrate 'that nursery education is not something that can be done properly on the cheap' (*ibid*, p. 234). In addition to concerns about low pay and working conditions being eroded, there was a common belief amongst nursery nurses' that, essential to New Labour's childcare reform agenda, they were expected to become more flexible and take on additional duties (*ibid*, pp. 235-7).

7.8.3 Workforce Pay and Benefits Review Disputes

The nursery nurses dispute highlighted union concerns that employers were failing to implement the 1999 Scottish local government Single Status equal pay agreement. Although legislation had 'been in place for over 30 years' employers 'struggled' to meet their equal pay legal responsibilities (UNISON, 2005). Before the agreement, there had been 'mass litigation and expensive settlements' as unions pursued 'work rated as equivalent' equal pay claims for women whose jobs were broadly comparable to men (Close the Gap, 2010: 1).

In 2006, stating its intention to implement 'a pay, grading and benefits package which delivers equality, is modern and fair' (GCC, 2006a); the Council announced its WPBR pay review. While the review attempted to address historic equal pay inequality, it was also linked

to the Council's 'new thinking' about work (GCC, 2006b: 1). To 'remain competitive', the Council stated that it intended 'to move towards a more equitable, flexible and modern way of working' (*ibid*, p. 1). As the review progressed, compensation payments totalling £40m were made (GCC, 2007b: 1). Despite this, UNISON described the WPBR negotiations a 'sham' (*Voice*, May 2006: 3). Noting that 4,500 workers faced wage reduction, UNISON claimed that the review's methodology and processes were 'fundamentally flawed' and perpetuated existing pay inequalities (UNISON letter, 24th October, 2006). Asserting that the review was 'Unfair, Unjust and Unsound' (*Voice*, November 2006: 3), UNISON persuaded its members to vote by a 2 to 1 majority to strike (50 per cent turnout) (UNISON correspondence, 23rd November, 2006). Mike Kirby, (then) UNISON branch chair told reps, "For the past few months we have been using force of argument – now we will use the argument of force" (*Socialist Worker*, 2006).

However, the planned 3 days strike in December, 2006 was suspended after the Council made concessions. Nevertheless, many WPBR issues remained unresolved⁶, leading to industrial action by social care workers (SCWs), learning disability workers, residential workers, clerical workers and community service officers (CSO) between 2007 and 2009. These disputes typified UK-wide union resistance to employers' usage of Single Status to impose new terms and conditions (Basketter, 2007).

In 2007, the SCW's 20 day WPBR grading dispute resulted in 'a clear victory against a hardnosed employer' (*The Voice*, November 2007: 3). According to UNISON, 'The solidarity of the members on strike was instrumental in delivering the key objective that they sought. They have a right to be satisfied with the outcome of their action' (*ibid*, p. 3). Following the successful conclusion of the SCWs strike, Glasgow Daycare workers voted by a 5 to 1 majority to strike. They felt aggrieved that their allocated WPBR grade did not reflect 'the range or complexity of the work that they do' (UNISON bulletin). Like the SCWs, their 13 weeks all-out strike, was characterised by a high level of militancy and union member involvement. Facing a determined management, they accepted a settlement which made the award of an improved grade conditional on acceptance of 'service reform' proposals which reduced staffing and closed day centres (UNISON Scotland, 2007).

Then in July 2008, UNISON's residential members voted overwhelmingly, by a 93 to 7 per cent majority, to strike over their WPBR grading (Electoral Reform Services correspondence,

⁶ In 2017, arguing that WPBR was unfair, claimants won a landmark equal pay case at the Court of Session. The full implication of this decision has yet to emerge.

17th July, 2008). However, before strike action began, management conceded the disputed grade. UNISON claimed that the threatened action demonstrated that ‘workers who are organised and are able to deliver industrial action win the most from their employer’ (*Scotland in UNISON*, 2008: 2).

Between January and July 2009, CSO supervisors struck for 21 weeks, eventually accepting an improved grading offer. However, the offer was conditional on the CSOs transferring to CSG who proposed to expand the service (*Socialist Worker*, 2009a). In July 2009, following the CSO supervisors’ action, Social Work clerical grades threatened strike action to win a £521 per annum WPBR work context payment (*Socialist Worker*, 2009b).

These disputes took place against widespread union members’ concerns about low pay and pension changes. Between August and September 2008, City branch members were involved in the Scottish Council pay dispute, participating in two one-day stoppages. The dispute was settled after an improved two-year offer was made. Then in 2011, City and GHA UNISON members participated in the UK Pensions Dispute (the only industrial action the GHA branch has been involved in since its formation in 2006).

7.8.4 Second Wave Workforce Pay and Benefits Review Disputes

In general terms, the WPBR disputes described previously can be characterised as being primarily related to the *wage* aspect of the wage-effort bargain (Behrend, 1957). The following disputes arose out union-management disputes over *effort*. In other words, while the earlier WPBR disputes were related to workers’ attempts to improve their allocated wage rate, the following arose out of disagreements over the tasks or duties that management then expected workers to perform. However, these *fair day’s work* grievances stimulated new wage-rate demands. Firstly, in September 2013, 100 Homelessness Caseworkers took four days unofficial action after a worker was suspended in a long-standing staffing and workload demarcation dispute (*Herald*, 2013). Faced with the Council’s ‘return to work or face the sack threat’ (Braden, 2013), the caseworkers ended their strike after the suspended worker was reinstated. Thereafter, UNISON pursued a collective re-grading grievance.

Then between October 2013 and January 2014, the PSAs participated in several one day strikes in a grading dispute over medicine dispensation. Eventually, after 4 one day strikes and boycotting action, the PSAs accepted the creation of a higher graded post and extra payments for workers who voluntarily undertook additional duties (UNISON Scotland, 2014c). UNISON claimed that the PSA’s strike action was ‘solidly supported’ with high member participation

and 250 new members, 60 workplace contacts and two new reps were recruited. In March 2014, after 7 days action over the introduction of 12 hour shifts in older people units, residential workers accepted a management proposal to increase staffing and compensate them for a shift allowance reduction (Glasgow City UNISON, 2014).

Since 2014, several other Glasgow City UNISON disputes have taken place. As they fall outwith the period studied, they are simply listed: Glasgow Homelessness Caseworkers (2015), CSG CCTV Operators (2016), Cordia Janitors (2016-2017), CSG Shift Workers (2016), FE Support Workers (2016) and Access (2016-2017) (Appendix 5).

7.9 Summary

This chapter provided background information on the Labour-controlled Council's adoption of market and commercial methods, particularly through its establishment of ALEOs. Both externally through urban boosterism (Harvey, 1989: 6) and internally through its general labour control strategies it followed a neo-liberal approach that was firmly rooted within NPM.

The chapter then outlined the Council's attempts to address the severe budgetary crisis that it faced. As a consequence of the SNP Government's budget allocation being framed within UK Government spending limits, the Council set cuts budgets. Because of the Council Tax Freeze, compulsory redundancies policy and the need to protect ring-fenced services, it attempted to save money through voluntary redundancies, office space rationalisation, more flexible and efficient ways of working, and spending cuts which intensified work pressures and affected service delivery. As will be explored in the next chapter, strict attendance management was central to the Council's attempts to reduce costs, increase productivity and achieve workforce control. However, its modernisation agenda brought it into conflict with UNISON.

This chapter also provided information about UNISON branch structures, organisation, membership and industrial disputes. Despite the general fall in public sector strike action, the City branch has been involved in several major industrial disputes as it resisted the Council's attempts to change the terms of the effort bargain. While UNISON was able to organise *collective* resistance in relation to WPBR, as will be evident in the following chapters, the union's ability to effectively represent *individual* members was stretched by the Council's strict SAP application. The next chapter now explores the 'War on the Sickies'.

Chapter 8: Reps' Experiences and Perceptions of the 'War on the Sickies'

8.1 Introduction

In 2009, Glasgow City Council's 'War on the Sickies' was declared on the front page of the local *Evening Times* (18th March, 2009).



The newspaper was reporting on the Council's plan to toughen its SAP through the introduction of trigger points which, unless there were exceptional circumstances, resulted in workers automatically having their OSP removed (GCC, 2009b). Over the next five years, an incremental tightening of management's absence control techniques within the Council, its ALEOs and related organisations took place. This was not a linear process as the pace of absence management sped up and slowed down throughout this period.

This chapter explores the twists and turns of SAP implementation in Glasgow. Initially, a timeline of significant events is provided, followed by a largely chronological account of Benign Neglect SAP implementation within the Council and (prior to local government reorganisation in 1996) its predecessor organisations, Glasgow District Council (GDC) and Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC). Developments leading to the 'War on the Sickies' are explored, followed by an examination of the specific aspects of stricter SAP implementation and the manner in which the policy was rolled out throughout the Council, its ALEOs and

related organisations. Thereafter, the workforce impact and changed FLM's role are examined. This chapter concludes with a discussion on reps' perceptions of the reasons for the policy shift.

8:2 Timeline

2009	Developments
18 March	'War on the Sickies' announced in <i>Evening Times</i>
20 March	Council approves <i>Managing the Workforce of the Future</i> policy which heralds stricter SAP implementation
Summer	Stricter SAP implementation suspended due to Swine Flu epidemic
2010	
January	Council reactivates stricter SAP after Swine Flu epidemic eases
February	95 reps attend UNISON absence seminar
2011	
24 th Feb	Branch Committee AGM considers industrial action 'up to and including strike action' to resist the SAP
Feb	UNISON issues FLMs 'round Robin' letter
2012	
May	ET Judgment confirms removal of OSP is lawful but FLM's must exercise discretion
2013-14	
	Some slackening in SAP implementation, "guerrilla war" continues

8.3 Benign Neglect: Earlier Policy Implementation

Throughout the 1990s, and well into the next decade, SAP implementation, appears to have been generally benign. This was a period of transition, as following SRC's dissolution in 1996, Glasgow City Council was established. Initially, through examination of Housing Department Shop Stewards Committee (HD SSC) minutes, SAP implementation within GDC during the 1990s is considered. Then developments within SRC and the newly formed Council are explored.

8.3.1 From Glasgow District Council to Glasgow City Council

In 1990, *The Herald* reported that GDC introduced new absence control measures (MacCalman, 1990). NALGO branch secretary Ritchie Carroll informed the newspaper that, while the union did not condone self-certification procedure “abuse”, it was concerned that the new policy “could adversely affect the genuinely sick and lead to them being harassed” (*ibid*). An examination of HD SSC minutes from this period show union concerns about its exclusion from management SAP discussions (Minute, 2nd March, 1990). It was later reported that the union’s collective agreement on discipline ‘was being torn up’ without proper consultation. However, after negotiations this threat was withdrawn to allow further discussion (Minute, 30th March, 1990). Thereafter, it was reported that ‘there was no implementation date and so status quo should prevail’ (Minute, 6th July, 1990).

There were no further indications within the HD SSC minutes that sickness absence was causing reps problems until July 2000 (Minute, 21st July, 2000). Following local government re-organisation the HD reps were employed by the Council and, after NALGO’s merger with NUPE and COHSE, were UNISON members. The minutes between July and September 2000 indicate union concerns about the introduction of absence monitoring and formal interviews. However, although union members were advised that they ‘MUST take stewards with them at all levels of sickness interviews’ there were no suggestions that management was taking an overtly disciplinary approach (Minute, 1st September, 2000).

In 2001, both HD SSC and management-union liaison minutes reflected increased SAP activity. However, management pursued a consensual approach; ‘regular dialogue’ with local reps was encouraged and managerial action was limited to making workers ‘aware of the consequences of their absence’ (Liaison Meeting Minute, 24th April, 2001: 4). At one meeting, management thanked UNISON ‘for their support’ and asked them to make contact if ‘any sickness issues’ arose (Liaison Meeting Minute, 10th September, 2001: 2). Thereafter, until the last available HD SSC minute of September, 2005, there were no further reports that sickness absence was an issue of concern.

8.3.2 From Strathclyde Region to Glasgow City Council

Experienced reps confirmed that SRC FLMS had considerable discretion over SAP implementation. A Chief Executives rep remembered how “managers managed it locally” and knew which workers were misusing the policy, failing to attend “work on a Monday morning because they were bevyng all weekend” (033). A Fieldwork rep stated that there was then “a

good system” in place “where team leaders knew the person...what the stress factors were”. He recollected that there was a strong welfare element to SAP implementation with an emphasis on supporting sick workers to “get back to work and get the best out of you”? (023). According to a Residential rep, formal meetings never took place within SRC: “You submitted a sick line and the manager had limited conversations with you. In fact you could post it...or...put in by somebody else.” (042).

Some reps reported that during the early 1990s, changes to SAP implementation took place. A former Strathclyde employee recollected how for the first time:

Forms started to be produced, where managers were required to sit down and have an actual meeting with those returning to work, whereas before you handed in your sick line to the admin section and the manager signed it off (012).

Workers were told “not to get worried about what was on the form” as it was introduced “to help them” (012). Strathclyde’s *Managing Absence: Guidance Notes for Supervisors* policy stated that ‘Employees who suffer ill health will be treated sympathetically’ (SRC, 1992: 3). Managers were encouraged to have ‘an informal chat’ with the worker when they returned from sick leave (*ibid*, p.10). If the supervisor accepted that the worker’s illness was genuine and there were no concerns about their absence record, ‘an acknowledgment is normally all that is required’ (*ibid*, p.10). A follow up interview only took place if ‘the reason for the absence is unclear, unauthorised, appears to be unacceptable or there is some other cause such as a pattern or trend beginning to develop’ (*ibid*, p.10). The policy was not trigger-based and unlike Glasgow City Council’s policy there was no automaticity about imposing discipline and removing OSP. Disciplinary procedures were only invoked when sick pay ‘abuse’ was suspected (*ibid*, p. 10) or ‘counselling’ failed to improve attendance (*ibid*, p. 11).

By the mid-1990s, processes had changed so much that the “concerned” manager interested in workers’ welfare became one concerned about “delivering figures for HR” (012). A LES rep (045) recollected that after local government reorganisation, the Council introduced triggers for formal absence interviews (FAIs) (GCC, 1997). A Branch Officer confirmed this but stated that they were not “used the way they are now” (065). A worker was asked to attend an absence meeting if they had three period of self-certified absence or six days absence within a six month period, or five absence spells or eight days absence in twelve months (*ibid*, p. 2). Although the policy did advise managers that they could invoke disciplinary procedures if “no sustained improvement has taken place” (*ibid*, p. 5), it emphasised that welfare supports should be

offered. During this period, discipline was only imposed if “you hadnae done your job right” (Fieldwork rep, 023). A Finance rep recollected

You still had to go through the formals but to an extent it was a tick box exercise. They were more likely to give you support than they are now... there were very few disciplinary [hearings] (041).

Workers only faced disciplinary action if management thought that they were “taking the piss”, part of the “old style Monday clubs” following weekend binge drinking (041). Another Finance rep who started working for the Council in the late 1990s said that policy implementation was not “so harsh” then because managers used “more discretion” (039). Similarly, another Fieldwork rep reported that if you were sick no punitive action was taken; an occupational health referral was “unusual” (002).

A shift in tone took place in the early 2000s. The Council was explicit that if there was ‘no sustained improvement’ in short term intermittent absences, ‘in most circumstances’ disciplinary action was ‘appropriate’, ‘as the genuineness of the absences in most circumstances will not be in question but rather it is the overall level of attendance which is unacceptable and therefore should be dealt with as misconduct’ (GCC, 2002: 12). Although the shift towards stricter attendance management did not take place until several years later, this statement provided the rationale for doing so.

Written evidence presented to the *Forsyth v GCC* (2012) ET confirmed that since 1996 the Council took the view that workers with an ‘unacceptable’ level of absence, whereby they hit the specified triggers and there were no exceptional circumstances (e.g. underlying health reason), could face misconduct proceedings. Nevertheless, as the ET statement indicated, this policy was not widely enacted until 2010. Reps recollected that sickness absence implementation in the early 2000s was not overtly punitive. After first working for the Council in 2001, a Fieldwork rep recollected her line manager stating that “I am supposed to dae this” as they put the SAP paperwork into a drawer; “nothing ever happened” (027). Similarly, a Finance rep recalled the response that she received in 2005 following her own absence:

I came back and my manager says...“Sign that”, and I say “What’s that” and he says “Ach, it is nothing to worry about, I just wrote down why you were sick, just sign it...Nothing is going to happen” (035).

However, in 2006, Glasgow City UNISON’s branch magazine started charting SAP implementation changes. Initially, concerns were expressed that management’s sending of ‘advisory warning letters’ to workers served ‘no obvious function than to intimidate members

who are ill' (*Voice*, August 2006: 6). In January 2006, a senior rep wrote to Social Work management expressing concerns that clerical workers were 'disproportionately' called to disciplinary hearings (Email, 26th January, 2006). Then in February, further concerns were expressed that FLMS were informing members of the outcome of formal meetings before they took place (Email, 2nd February, 2006). The following year, the *Voice* reported that a disciplinary approach was emerging in some areas. Posing the question whether the policy was one of 'Absence Management or Absence Punishment', it observed that 'Some managers appear to be emphasising the more punitive aspects of the policy rather than seeking to provide assistance' (*Voice*, August 2007: 1).

8.3.3 Summary

The previous sections considered Benign Neglect SAP implementation prior to 2009. Through examination of written documents and reps' recollections, it appears that since the 1990s a relaxed approach to attendance management persisted within the Council and preceding organisations (SRC and GDC). Although a shift in tone was observed in formal policy terms, FLMS appeared reluctant to implement the SAP strictly. By 2006, there was evidence of a shift towards stricter attendance management. In retrospect this was the opening skirmish in the 'War on the Sickies'. Its key events are now explored.

8.4 The Opening Shots in the 'War on the Sickies'

Under the headline 'City's Blitz on the Sickies', the *Evening Times* reported in March, 2009, that the 'War on the Sickies' was imminent: '32,500 council staff [were] told to ditch the duvet days ...or pay the price' (*Evening Times*, 18th March 2009). Its sister paper, the *Herald*, explained that the Council's Executive Committee 'will this week be asked to introduce trigger policies' so that any worker who hits them 'will automatically have OSP removed except in exceptional circumstances' (*Herald*, 2009c). The paper claimed that this 'could leave repeat 'sickie' offenders receiving just £15-a-day statutory sick pay' (*ibid*).

The Council's *Managing the Workforce of the Future (MWF)* (GCC, 2009b) provided the context of stricter SAP implementation:

The current recession is considered to be the worst in recent memory and it is predicted that it will take a number of years for the country to recover. The impact on local government as public sector spending reduces over the next few years will be significant and the City Council faces operating with reducing financial resources (p. 2).

Against a background of budgetary pressures arising from the 2008 financial crisis and the need to save money to finance job evaluation and the Glasgow Living Wage (then £7 an hour), the Council changed its SAP implementation with the aim of ‘improving absence levels and saving...£5 million a year’ (*Herald*, 2009c). Making explicit reference to budgetary pressures, a Council spokesperson stated that “Our absence rate has been too high for too long. At a time when budgets are under severe strain it cannot be right for us to accept far higher rates of absence than the private sector” (*ibid*).

Former Council leader Stephen Purcell made explicit the reasons for the stricter approach. To pay for the Glasgow Living Wage, he stated that the Council intended to take

...a more robust approach to absenteeism. Currently we spend millions of pounds on overtime for example. Lost productivity is wasted because of absenteeism in the City Council, and that is something I am determined to change...it is a very progressive way to use the money saved by increasing the pay of some of our lowest paid workers (BBC Scotland Newsnight, 9th March, 2009).

MWF, which was approved on 20th March, 2009, outlined the Council’s future labour force and attendance management strategies (GCC, 2009b). Absence control and the introduction of ‘fixed term, temporary contracts and agency staff’, were seen as integral aspects of the Council’s workforce management strategy (*ibid*, p.3), latter labelled Tomorrow’s Council (*Insider*, November 2009). At this time, the Council was asking ‘tough questions’ regarding ‘What services will we deliver in the future? How will we deliver them? What will our offices look like? And where will they be located’ (*Insider*, October 2009: 2). Faced with pressures to reduce costs and to make the most efficient use of resources, strict attendance management was viewed as one way that the Council could survive difficult economic conditions and ‘cope with the recession’ (*Insider*, April 2009: 2). Instead, UNISON expressed concerns that *MWF*, which normalised temporary and fixed term contracts, brought the threat of workforce casualisation, resulting in ‘a “flexible”, casualised workforce, worked to the bone, and scared to go sick’(Glasgow City UNISON, 2009a: 6).

In *MWF*, absence control was to become an ‘area of key performance’ for executive directors’ annual review (GCC, 2009b: 4). It was proposed that a FAI would be convened when workers hit the pre-existing SAP’s trigger points (three spells of absence in a six month period or five spells within twelve month; or six days within a six month period or eight days within twelve months); thereafter a disciplinary hearing was arranged. The SAP changes represented the tightening of an existing policy rather than the introduction of a new one. As a Residential

rep said, the “existing policy has...been given capital letters. It is exaggerated but it is the same policy” (017). FLM’s discretion was considerably reduced as a result of the policy shift.

In April 2009, the Council’s Chief Executive stated that high absence levels “put pressure on colleagues” and meant that “we can’t deliver the service which the people who rely on us need”. Allied to productivity and service delivery concerns there was disquiet about the “waste [of] resources on overtime and agency staff” (*Insider*, April 2009: 2). By reducing “absence by...two percent”, £5 million per annum savings were anticipated (*ibid*, p.2) which would be ‘redirected into front line services’ (GCC, 2009b: 3). In May 2009, the Chief Executive forecasted £65 to £99m spending cuts in 2010/11 because of the Scottish Government’s austerity driven budget freeze. It was claimed that the Council would “weather the storm” if it kept costs down and “constantly” improved its service delivery (*Insider*, May, 2009: 2). At UNISON’s Branch Committee (BC), a LES rep highlighted how intertwined sickness absence and budgetary pressures were becoming when he reported discussions at his local management-union liaison meeting: “We had a report about Doomsday cuts of £99 million [and] we were informed that sorting out our absence would wipe out the problem” (BC Notes, 14th May, 2009).

Referring to newspaper reports, a Social Work UNISON convenor informed reps that “another...Draconian step” is “being proposed by the Council for addressing the absence/attendance issue” (Email, 18 March, 2009). However, in Social Work, the ‘War on the Sickies’ represented an intensification of an already strictly implemented SAP. Two months, earlier at a reps briefing, a Branch Officer claimed that the Council’s robust SAP implementation was symptomatic of a shift across the public sector where UNISON members had “been under [the] cosh...about their absence rates for a number of years” (Absence Meeting, 27th January, 2009).

In April 2010, further reasoning for tightening the absence policy was provided by a Council officer at a CIPD/ Strathclyde University (SU) seminar. Taking the view that not all absences were legitimate, he argued that it was possible “to reconcile cost cutting with humane, welfarist elements”. He stated that the Council managed absence to ensure services were delivered and to provide early assistance to employees with health difficulties. However, he stated that service delivery “must come first” (CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010). Consequentially, “we have to have employees at work ...It is not that we think assistance to employees is unimportant, it is not the primary objective of the absence policy” (*ibid*).

He was explicit about the impact of austerity budgetary pressures, stating that the (then) developing “recession environment” meant that the Council had to “demonstrate that attendance management will make a difference to government funds” (*ibid*). He stated that “sickness absence is a significant loss of productivity”; on average the Council’s 24,000 thousand employees each took 12 and a half days sickness absence per year (*ibid*). By reducing average sickness absence to 8.4 days per person, the Council hoped to save £7m pounds (a £2m increase on the 2009 projected figure) (*ibid*). According to the *Local Government Chronicle* (26th March, 2009), the Council’s stricter SAP implementation was ‘groundbreaking’. A management consultant described the policy shift as a ‘new departure’ in local government but indicated that it was ‘not an unusual model in the private sector’ (*ibid*).

8.5 Sickness Absence Policy Implementation

This section details the shift within the Council towards stricter SAP implementation, its roll out to Council departments and ALEOs, the workforce impact and FLMs’ discretion. Within the Council an overarching disciplinary approach emerged which spread out into all departments and into some ALEOs. However, in some areas such as ACCESS and GHA, little or no change took place.

8.5.1. Preparing for Battle: The Swine Flu Phony War

UNISON condemned the Council’s new SAP implementation proposals as ‘draconian and backward’. It was concerned that sick workers would be forced to come to work when unwell and resolved ‘to use all means at its disposal to resist these proposals’ (BC Minute, 19th March, 2009: 6). Shortly afterwards, reps reported that management were “piling workers into absence meetings” and that “managers were getting phoned by Personnel to change their decisions”. It was also stated that managers, feeling pressures to “toe the line”, were contacting the union for advice (BC Notes, 16th April, 2009). UNISON advised its members that it had not agreed to any SAP changes: ‘If any manager tries to implement the proposal...tell them that they do not have the authority to do so’ (Letter to UNISON members, 17th April, 2009). UNISON informed its members that it was meeting ‘the Council in the next few weeks to raise our objections; (*ibid*).

However, after political approval for the shift towards stricter SAP was given at the full Council meeting in March 2009, the Council’s HR sections played an important role in implementing change. In Social Work a dedicated Absence Team of HR officers was established. In LES a Branch Officer reported that managers were “being threatened with discipline if they do not implement the policy” (SCF Notes, 1st June, 2009). In August 2009, the

Council announced that it hoped to meet its absence saving targets through improved FLM training, upgraded information systems and better-quality occupational health provision (*Insider*, August 2009). Then, the threatened Swine Flu pandemic delayed stricter policy implementation. At the management-union Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) in September 2009, UNISON was informed that ‘Managers would be expected to take this issue into account when reviewing attendance prior to any disciplinary conduct or withdrawal of occupational sick pay’ (JCF Minute, 23rd September, 2009: 3).

However, by October the Council informed UNISON that, as Swine Flu concerns had passed, it would ‘revert to ‘business as usual’ with respect to the management of Absence’ (Email, 12th October, 2009). Thereafter, reps were informed that, ‘The Council will reactivate the revised absence management procedures which were suspended due to the outbreak of swine flu’ (Branch Officer’s Email, 13th January, 2010). In subsequent months, at the same time as the Council embarked on its voluntary redundancy programme further details emerged of its stricter approach. In February 2010, UNISON was informed that the Council planned ‘robust’ implementation of RTW and FAI meetings. At the FAI, the ‘default position’ of progressing to a disciplinary hearing would be recommended. At subsequent disciplinary hearings, unless there were ‘significant’ reasons, a worker would receive a written warning and OSP would be withdrawn (JCF minute, 2nd February 2010). Although still entitled to SSP, disciplined workers would lose their OSP ‘for the same period as any verbal, written or final written warning’ [respectively 6 months, 6 months, 12 months] (Branch Officer’s email, 2nd February, 2010).

An email exchange between UNISON and a Council officer was illuminating. UNISON challenged the Council’s claim that the proposals did not change the existing policy. Reps felt that, in effect, they were dealing with a new policy:

How can your new approach not be a change of policy when the existing policy says that withdrawal of sickness allowance is to be considered only if it is established that the absence is not genuine (Email, 11th February, 2010).

The Council officer replied that, ‘Hitting the triggers is, and always has been, viewed as an unacceptable level of short term intermittent absence’ (Email, 18th February, 2010). A management circular was unambiguous that disciplinary action ensued when a worker hit a trigger and did not have an underlying health problem:

Where an employee meets the criteria for a formal interview, it is implicit that their level of absence is unacceptable, therefore the default action should be to recommend disciplinary action (Circular 04/2010 – The Control and Management of Absence – Additional Guidance).

Although not previously implemented, this document put into practice what historically had been Council policy. As a Council officer confirmed, “It is not a new absence policy; it is possibly a more robust application of what was already written” (CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010). Previously, if workers had an unfortunate “run” of sickness, no action was taken. Now, workers were informed that “You’ve hit the triggers, you’re going... to a disciplinary. So, it is the same policy but it is more strictly implemented” (Residential rep, 006).

Significantly, while UNISON was *consulted* in March, 2009 about the Council’s intention to implement the SAP more strictly, no *negotiations* took place. As the Council officer stated, “There was consultation with the trade union...but I think it would be fair to say there was not an awful lot of negotiation” (CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010). By tightening the existing policy rather than introducing a new one, the Council avoided negotiating this major change with the unions. Against a background of industrial action, budget cuts and service reform, the absence of negotiations was symptomatic of conflicted employer-union relationships.

To incentivise managers to meet SAP savings targets, it was reported that departmental budgets would be cut if absence targets were not met (*Voice*, March, 2010: 4). Management explained how this worked in practice: ‘if the absence rate is 8% [4 per cent higher than the department’s 4 per cent target figure] then 4% will be deducted from the social work budget’ (Liaison Meeting Minute, 15th March, 2010: 2). Similarly in Finance, departmental managers faced “a financial penalty” which came “out of their budget” if they failed to meet their absence-reduction target. It was argued that this was a “cash grab” mechanism for cutting departmental budgets, as target figures were set which “quite frankly can’t be met” (Finance Rep, 045).

Challenging the Council’s attendance strategy, UNISON expressed doubts whether stricter SAP implementation would achieve the projected savings and claimed that:

...the additional costs incurred by managers, workers and TU reps being involved in hundreds of hearings and appeals will actually cost the Council more in cash terms and lost productivity than you ‘save’ (Email, 11th May 2010).

Despite UNISON objections, although uneven in its application, the policy was rolled out across the Council, and then on to ALEOs. In response, UNISON encouraged its members to ‘take trade union reps to all formal interviews’ and to appeal against OSP withdrawal (Stewards Briefing, March 2010). The battle lines in the ‘War on the Sickies’ were now drawn.

8.5.2. “Tightening the Screws”

In both surveys, reps were asked whether they thought that the SAP was becoming more strictly applied (Table 8.1). In 2010, over nine in ten reps (96 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that the policy was becoming more strictly implemented. By 2013, the figure had reduced to about eight in ten (85 per cent). Applying the *t* test, this variance was significant ($t = 0.02, p < .05$). Despite this fall, a clear majority of reps in 2013 agreed or strongly agreed that the policy was becoming more strictly applied.

Table 8.1: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied

	2010 n=106	%	2013 n=84	%
Strongly agree	74	70	49	58
Agree	28	26	23	27
Neither	3	3	7	8
Disagree	0	0	4	5
Strongly disagree	1	1	1	1
Total	106	100	84	99

The following tables contrast reps’ view about strictness between Council and Non-Council employed reps, between Council reps, and by age and gender.

In 2010, there was a significant variance ($t = 0.03, p < .05$) between Council (97 per cent, n= 82) and Non-Council reps (90 per cent, n= 20) who agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming more strictly applied (Table 8.2). However, in 2013 the variance between Council (91 per cent, n= 59) and Non-Council reps (78 per cent, n= 13) was not significant ($t = 0.06, p < .05$). Comparing the views of Council reps in 2010 and 2013, there was a significant decrease in the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition ($t = 0.03, p < .05$) but not between Non-Council reps ($t = 0.33, p < .05$).

Table 8.2: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council/ Non-Council

	Council 2010	Council 2010 %	Non- Council 2010	Non- Council 2010 %	Council 2013	Council 2013 %	Non- Council 2013	Non- Council 2013 %
Strongly agree	64	76	10	45	41	63	8	42
Agree	18	21	10	45	18	28	5	26
Neither	2	2	1	5	4	6	3	16
Disagree	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	16
Strongly disagree	0	0	1	5	1	2	0	0
Total	84	99	22	100	65	101	19	100

Examining Council departments, Table 8.3 highlights that in 2010 all the Fieldwork, Residential, Finance, LES, DRS and Chief Executives reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming more strictly applied. Just one Daycare and one Education rep took an alternative view.

Table 8.3: 2010 - Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council Department

	Fieldwork 2010 no (%)	Residential 2010 no (%)	Daycare 2010 no (%)	Finance 2010 no (%)	Education 2010 no (%)	LES 2010 no (%)	DRS 2010 no (%)	Chief Exec 2010 no (%)
Strongly agree	40(89)	5(71)	4(67)	8(73)	3(43)	2(50)	1(33)	1(100)
Agree	5(11)	2(29)	1(17)	3(27)	3(43)	2(50)	2(67)	0(0)
Neither	0(0)	0(0)	1(17)	0(0)	1(14)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Disagree	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Strongly disagree	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Total	45(100)	5(100)	6(100)	11(100)	7(100)	4(100)	3(100)	1(100)

Suggesting a slackening of the SAP in Fieldwork, by 2013 the percentage of reps who agreed or strongly agreed that the policy was becoming more strictly applied (84 per cent, n= 26) significantly fell from the 2010 figure (100 per cent, n= 45) ($t = 0.01, p < .05$) (Table 8.4).

Table 8.4: 2013 - Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Council Department

	Fieldwork 2010 no (%)	Residential 2010 no (%)	Daycare 2010 no (%)	Finance 2013 no (%)	Education 2013 no (%)	LES 2013 no (%)	DRS 2013 no (%)	Chief Exec 2013 no (%)
Strongly agree	20(65)	3(60)	5(71)	3(75)	2(33)	2(33)	2(50)	4(80)
Agree	6(19)	1(20)	2(29)	1(25)	4(67)	1(67)	2(50)	1(20)
Neither	3(10)	1(20)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Disagree	1(3)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Strongly disagree	1(3)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Total	31(100)	5(100)	7(100)	4(100)	6(100)	3(100)	4(100)	5(100)

Table 8.5 provides information on reps' views about policy strictness by age. In 2010, 91 per cent of reps aged 40 and under ($n=19$) and 98 per cent of those over 40 ($n=81$) agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming more strictly applied. In 2013, 84 per cent of reps 40 and under ($n=16$) and 86 per cent of those over 40 ($n=52$) felt that this was the case. The variances in 2010 was significant ($t = 0.049, p < .05$) but not in 2013 ($t = 0.46, p < .05$). The variance in the view of reps 40 and under between 2010 and 2013 about policy strictness was also not significant ($t = 0.50, p < .05$). However, the difference in the views of reps over 40 between both surveys was significant ($t = 0.003, p < .05$).

Table 8.5: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Age

	<40 2010	<40 2010 %	40+ 2010	40+ 2010 %	<40 2013	<40 2013 %	40+ 2013	40+ 2013 %
Strongly agree	10	48	63	76	12	63	34	56
Agree	9	43	18	22	4	21	18	30
Neither	1	5	2	2	3	16	4	7
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	7
Strongly disagree	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	21	101	83	100	19	100	61	100

Table 8.6 provides information on male and female reps' views about policy strictness. In 2010, 93 per cent of males (n= 53) and 100 per cent of females (n= 48) agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming more strictly applied. In 2013, 81 cent of males (n=40) and 90 per cent of females (n=29) felt that this was the case. These variances were not significant (2010: $t = 0.45, p < .05$; 2013: $t = 0.36, p < .05$). The variance in male reps' views between 2010 and 2013 about policy strictness was also not significant ($t = 0.08, p < .05$), as was the differences amongst females ($t = 0.15, p < .05$).

Table 8.6: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP is Becoming More Strictly Applied by Gender

	Male 2010	Male 2010 %	Female 2010	Female 2010 %	Male 2013	Male 2013 %	Female 2013	Female 2013 %
Strongly agree	40	70	33	69	28	57	19	59
Agree	13	23	15	31	12	24	10	31
Neither	3	5	0	0	5	10	2	6
Disagree	0	0	0	0	3	6	1	3
Strongly disagree	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0
Total	57	100	48	100	49	99	32	99

Both surveys provided information on reps' views regarding which way the SAP was become stricter (Table 8.7). A clear majority of those reps who felt that the SAP was becoming more strict agreed or strongly agreed that it was become stricter in relation to reporting sick (65 per cent in 2010; 74 per cent in 2013). More than eight in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming stricter in relation to RTW interviews (84 per cent in 2010; 82 per cent in 2013) and to using triggers to decide management action (95 per cent in 2010; 96 per cent in 2013). About eight in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming stricter in relation to the use of advisory warning letters (76 per cent in 2010; 81 per cent in 2013). At least eight in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming stricter in relation to the use of disciplinary action (90 per cent in 2010; 93 per cent in 2013) and the removal of OSP (81 per cent in 2010; 90 per cent in 2013).

Table 8.7: Agreed or Disagreed in Which Way Stricter?

SAP is becoming more strictly applied in relation to...	Strongly Agree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Agree 2013 no (%)	Agree 2010 no (%)	Agree 2013 no (%)	Neither 2010 no (%)	Neither 2013 no (%)	Disagree 2010 no (%)	Disagree 2013 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2013 no (%)
reporting sick (2010 n=101; 2013 n=71)	26 (26)	23 (32)	39 (39)	30 (42)	22 (22)	14 (20)	14 (14)	4 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
RTW interviews (2010 n=102; 2013 n=74)	39 (38)	26 (35)	47 (46)	35 (47)	8 (8)	5 (7)	8 (8)	8 (11)	0 (0)	0 (0)
the use of triggers (2010 n=104; 2013 n=75)	74 (71)	54 (72)	25 (24)	18 (24)	4 (4)	2 (3)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
warning letters (2010 n=102; 2013 n=73)	49 (48)	33 (45)	29 (28)	26 (36)	19 (19)	12 (16)	5 (5)	2 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
disciplinary action (2010 n=102; 2013 n=72)	74 (73)	49 (68)	17 (17)	18 (25)	10 (10)	4 (6)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
OSP removal (2010 n=103; 2013 n=75)	62 (60)	43 (57)	22 (21)	25 (33)	17 (17)	6 (8)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)
dismissal/ capability procedures (2010 n=103; 2013 n=73)	41 (40)	29 (40)	28 (27)	29 (40)	31 (30)	13 (18)	2 (2)	2 (3)	1 (1)	0 (0)

Workers faced dismissal under capability procedures if it was deemed that they were no longer fit enough to carry out their job. About seven in ten reps (67 per cent) in 2010 and eight in ten (80 per cent) in 2013 agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming stricter in relation to the use of dismissal and capability procedures. Statistically, this variance was not significant ($t = 0.31, p < .05$).

In both surveys, about nine in ten reps expressed the view that the sanctions managers imposed in disciplinary hearings were often too harsh (90 per cent in 2010; 91 per cent in 2013) (Table 8.8).

Table 8.8: Agreed or Disagreed that Disciplinary Sanctions were Often too Harsh

	2010 n=57	%	2013 n= 47	%
Strongly agree	21	37	25	53
Agree	30	53	18	38
Neither	4	7	4	9
Disagree	2	4	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
Total	57	101	47	100

Over and over again, the interviews provided further evidence of an increasingly disciplinary approach to SAP implementation. In individual interviews, forty six (82 per cent) of the fifty six reps expressed the view that their employers' SAP was becoming stricter.

The introduction of the 'default position' had a dramatic effect, immediately removing FLM's discretion. In practice, decisions were made at FAIs whether or not to send workers who hit a trigger to a disciplinary hearing. A Fieldwork rep reported that "It seems to be the minute you hit this trigger it doesnae matter what your history could be... people are getting taken to discipline" (043). A Daycare rep stated management "just go by the rules, if you hit a trigger you go to discipline" (005). According to a Fieldwork rep, at absence-related disciplinary hearings, workers normally received a "six months verbal [warning] and six months loss of statutory pay...there does not seem to be any sympathy or empathy any more" (027).

Similarly, a Finance rep reported, although "it doesn't have to go hand in hand", the imposed disciplinary sanction was usually "a verbal warning and the removal of your occupational sick pay" (035). However, an Education rep said that she had not encountered any worker who actually lost their OSP: "You find they've never been off again" because "the threat has been there" (050). A LES rep who previously worked for the District Council observed the difference in policy implementation between her current and former employer: "Today it is more hard hitting, it's less sympathetic; it's more accusing the person instead of taking into account the fact that people are genuinely ill; it's meeting targets basically" (047).

A Branch Officer stated that the SAP's "welfare and support aspect" that had been "put in place many years ago is now completely and utterly gone" (064). Another Branch Officer

suggested that attendance management was now “a tick-box exercise” (065). According to a Finance rep, workers “don’t feel they are supported” as the “welfare aspect” had been removed (009). A Daycare rep said that management were “tightening the screws all the time...they’re making it harder and harder” (004).

Previously, relatively small numbers of workers found themselves caught up in the absence policy. The ‘War on the Sickies’ dramatically altered this. A Fieldwork rep illustrated the transformation that took place: “I accept we work in a big building but I was absolutely amazed how many people end up going to disciplinary” (027). A Finance rep reported that the number of workers being disciplined “just shot through the roof” (022). Another Finance rep stated that workers with long term illnesses faced dismissal through “lack of capability” (009).

Reps reported that members found attendance procedures stressful, even its early stages: “The letters they send out are absolutely appalling. I’ve never seen anything so frightening. If you were off with stress...that is enough to scare you to death, it was awful” (027). Workers escaped discipline only if there were “exceptional circumstance”. However, a Chief Executives rep reported that this was narrowly defined as “illness due to pregnancy, an underlying health condition or a severe disability” with “everything else” not accepted (054). A DRS rep recollected that on the day the ‘War on the Sickies’ was announced a FLM approached him to say “We’ve just received this circular...It’s saying...that if I don’t discipline I’m gonna...be disciplined” (001). This threat was also reported by seven other reps (five in Social Work and two in LES). Thus, in some sections an integral aspect of the Council’s stricter SAP implementation was an explicit threat to FLMs that they would be disciplined if they did not pursue a disciplinary approach.

8.5.3. The Stricter Approach

The following sections examine the roll out of stricter SAP implementation across departments, its ALEOs and related organisations.

8.5.3.1 Council SAP Implementation

Council SAP implementation was not uniform and varied between, and within, departments. In Social Work there was an initial delay in implementing the policy changes as management awaited guidance from HR. However, in May 2010 a rep reported that Social Work FLM’s discretion had been removed: “The default position is you will be disciplined” (SCF Notes, 10th May, 2010). A Fieldwork rep stated that management were “more punitive”

with clerical workers while fieldworkers enjoyed “more leeway”, even although they worked in the same building (007). Another Fieldwork rep felt that “office bound” clerical workers were “easy targets” (034). Unless clerical workers had an underlying health problem, “their discipline seems to be upped”: “They will get a written warning rather a verbal warning...they will be punished more severely” (Fieldwork rep, 023).

Another Fieldwork rep said that the “harder time” clerical workers faced under the policy was consistent with the harsher treatment they faced over “everything”: “over flexi, over annual leave, over tea breaks, lunch breaks...absence management and access to annual leave”. He suggested that this partly due to the union’s inability to mobilise clerical workers: “We as a union have not empowered them as. They are not as involved as they should be...it is a constant frustration” (021).

At a reps’ meeting there were claims that Social Work managers were dealt with less harshly: “We never hear of any managers getting disciplined for their sickness absence, but always workers do” (Meeting Notes, 22nd March, 2011).

A Residential rep stated that management’s general approach to discipline had become “more brutal” with sanctions “notched up”; workers faced suspension for “little things” that previously did not warrant action as “somebody would have spoken to you”. He reflected that “It is ironic they’re going for people for no[t] being at their work and they are suspending people to keep them off their work” (017). However, a Fieldwork rep reported that although managers did not show any discretion with regard to the SAP “there isn’t an atmosphere of discipline” in his workplace (025).

Initially, Education managers were reluctant to implement the stricter SAP. A Branch Officer said that Education managers “didn’t want to manage” and conduct disciplinary hearings (066). Another Education rep reported that two years after the SAP became more robust, managers “did not really follow the policy” (050). Eventually in 2011, Education managers were brought into line. As the Branch Officer stated “It has now become much more Draconian...They just follow the policy and there is no flexibility in how they apply it” (066).

However, despite the drive to uniformly stricter policy application, Education managers implemented it differently. While some managers laxly implemented absence reporting arrangements, others “went the other way” pursuing the policy “absolutely to the letter” (050). In one school, management were very supportive and arranged counselling and physiotherapy supports, in another their “first reaction” was to arrange a formal meeting (052).

Initially, there was limited SAP implementation within DRS. When the ‘War on the Sickies’ was declared, noting that the department’s absence figures were ‘the second best’ in the Council, DRS management confirmed that ‘they did not feel that hitting ...trigger points should automatically trigger a move to disciplinary action’ (Senior Management Team Minutes, 18th May, 2010: 3). When interviewed in May 2012, a DRS rep explained why he thought management adopted a softer “common sense” approach in which managers “actively seek to resist the policy”. Historically, he stated that DRS was a “professional service” which had been “reasonably well staffed and resourced” with a culture of promotion “up through the ranks” and no “culture of discipline”. Senior management had a “positive” attitude to the union, developing “an open and non-combative relationship”. Both formal and informal management-union liaison arrangements were long-established. UNISON reps were able to convince DRS’ senior management that having managers, HR and union reps regularly attending absence meetings was counterproductive and costly (001). It was reported that DRS FLMs viewed the SAP as “heavy handed” (068).

However, when interviewed in August 2013, another DRS rep identified emerging signs of a shift towards stricter attendance management. Although this was resisted by “experienced managers” who “use their discretion”, other managers felt “pressurised to go down the formal route” (051). It was stated that the introduction of MyPortal, the Council’s electronic workforce data management system, led to an increase in FAIs. Before its introduction, managers could avoid arranging formal meetings even although “trigger points had been hit”; now they were under greater scrutiny, leading to a period of “full scale trench warfare” (001). In September, 2013, despite the increase in FAIs, none of the DRS reps (001, 051, 068, 069) recollected anyone being disciplined for their sickness absence.

A LES rep expressed the view that his department implemented the SAP the most strictly (012). Another LES rep stated that the department’s “vigorous” SAP implementation pre-dated the ‘War on the Sickies’ and was consistent with its strict approach to all disciplinary matters: LES treated “everyone equally, and it was equally harsh” (008). Another rep stated that LES pursued the SAP “very aggressively” and “jumped in with two feet”, like a footballer “does a two-footed lunge”. Unless workers had “an underlying health condition or another suitable reason” management would “automatically” arrange a disciplinary hearing once they “hit the trigger points”. The rep suggested that this was symptomatic of a “prevalent” bullying culture within LES, reflecting “how managers deal with...and speak to staff” (045). An Access rep who

previously worked in LES felt management took “delight” in disciplining workers: “I just thought it...appalling, absolutely appalling” (024).

The policy was also strictly implemented in Finance. Here, many clerical workers were being transferred to CBS. One Finance rep said that CBS HR implemented the SAP “to the letter...they are pretty rigid”. Unless a worker had an underlying health problem, or was seriously ill, management went “down the punitive route...most of the time”. However, if the absence was related to “personal difficulties”, such as “divorce or relationship breakdown”, managers adopted a welfare approach and relaxed policy implementation, allowing “some breathing space” (022).

A Chief Executives rep stated that his department’s SAP implementation was “brutal”. He reported that a union member was dismissed following nine days of intermittent illness within a 12 month period. An incremental “topping up” of disciplinary sanctions took place, “verbal warning, written warning, final written warning, bump, bump, you’re gone” (033). Another Chief Executives rep confirmed that workers faced incrementally more punitive sanctions for repeated absence: “Instead of putting you back to the beginning of the process again, what they seem to be doing is escalating your warnings”. If a worker received a six months verbal warning, they would receive a written warning if they went sick again. Further absence resulted in “a final warning” with sick pay removed for twelve months (054).

Reflecting a general tightening of all its policies, another Chief Executives’ rep suggested that absence meeting decisions were predetermined, making it “very difficult” to persuade managers that workers, even those with serious illnesses, should not be disciplined. As a result of workforce reductions, access to flexi-time, time off and overtime became restricted with many Chief Executives workers working “excessive” unpaid hours and taking work home to meet workload targets (033).

8.5.3.2 ALEO SAP Implementation

There was considerable variance in ALEO SAP implementation.

CSG reps reported that although absence levels within their workplaces were low (011; 014; 031), management informed UNISON in March 2010 that they intended to implement a ‘new robust approach’ to sickness absence, (Liaison Meeting Minutes, 11th March, 2010). Reps were assured that management did not wish ‘to instigate a culture of fear’ (*ibid*). Management stated that ‘it was not a change in policy it’s just the tone that will change’ (*ibid*). Later, CSG

informed UNISON that ‘only in exceptional circumstances should an alternative course’ to discipline be considered (HR Circular, 4th November, 2010). Managers were required to provide a ‘clear justification’ if they did not remove OSP (*ibid*).

One CSG rep stated that the organisation’s SAP was taken “lock, stock, and barrel” from the Council. Although CSG had autonomy to implement its own SAP, it regularly reported to the Council’s Scrutiny Committee. Absence control was one of the KPIs which CSG was “expected to meet...to continue to get the same funding” (014).

Another CSG rep who was employed in 2009 reported that he was then unaware of the SAP’s existence such was its low level of visibility (031). However when interviewed in 2013, CSG reps stated that managers implemented the policy “ruthlessly” (011) and “very rarely” failed to issue disciplinary warnings (014). It was stated that the “very robustly” implemented SAP had a detrimental effect on staff morale, leaving “very little flexibility...for individual circumstances” (031). Once a decision had been made to proceed to a disciplinary hearing, it was “pretty much set in stone that the member is going to get a warning”. However, although the SAP was “strongly adhered to” within CSG, this contrasted with the organisation’s general “friendly and supportive” atmosphere (011).

Within Cordia, a rep reported stricter SAP implementation “came three months” after the organisation emerged “from the ashes of DACS” (its predecessor organisation) in 2009. Cordia implemented the SAP “robustly” with management withdrawing OSP “as quickly as possible”. It was claimed that Cordia managers informed workers at RTW meetings that they were going to a disciplinary hearing even before a FAI had taken place (044). A Branch Officer likened Cordia’s head office to “a conveyor belt” with workers “getting called in” to absence meetings, “one every half hour” (007).

In the City Parking focus group, one rep stated that his management paid “lip service” to the SAP, implementing it inconsistently: “Some people get harassed for their sickness absence no matter what” while others are “left to glide about and do what they want” (061). Another Parking rep asserted that the organisation’s strict SAP implementation reflected the organisation’s generally punitive approach to disciplinary matters where “you go to the High Court for everything” as management generally pursued formal rather than informal processes, even for less serious matters (060).

By contrast, Access reps reported that their management did not follow a disciplinary approach. According to one rep, Access implemented the SAP “very loosely, a ticking the box

exercise” in contrast to the Council’s “very Draconian” approach. It was stated that Access managers viewed SAP implementation as an “added burden” and “extra work” as they delivered their Council Service Level Agreement. It was stated that in Access “nobody is brandishing a big stick” (029). Another Access rep reported that although “in almost every instance” there was no “move towards any sort of disciplinary action” in absence meetings; the decision was always “Review in Three Months”. With regard to long term absence cases, Access management was “fairly supportive”, providing occupational health assistance (024).

A Construction rep could not recall when he last attended an absence meeting, stating that the organisation was “a reasonable employer” and “a half decent place to work” with no “culture of bullying and harassing staff”. However, despite this he thought that management “would clamp down” if absences increased (046).

Glasgow Life reps (018, 049) reported low sickness absence levels. A Branch Officer confirmed this and observed that “there isn’t a culture within Glasgow Life that people will get disciplined”. It was stated that Glasgow Life’s SAP implementation was “not as bad” as that within the Council. Although in “certain pockets”, some “individual managers” took a disciplinary approach this was not universal within Glasgow Life (017). Generally, workers attended a FAI if they hit a trigger but “nine times out of ten it doesnae go any further”. Previously in 2012, there was “a spate” of absence-related disciplinary hearings when management was “disciplining everyone” but this passed (018). Another rep felt that there was a cyclical aspect to Glasgow Life’s SAP implementation with periods when management “crack down”, followed by periods when it became “a bit more relaxed”; then “time again” became stricter. Nevertheless, it was said that Glasgow Life was generally “reasonably fair to work for” (049) as managers used their discretion (018, 049).

8.5.3.3 Related Organisations’ SAP Implementation

Within GHA, a rep reported that sickness absence levels varied. In the main city centre and neighbourhood offices absence rates were low but were high in its call centre and a local housing association (056). Although GHA’s absence policy was trigger based, workers rarely faced a disciplinary hearing. Reps successfully highlighted workers’ underlying health conditions and other mitigating factors. If a disciplinary hearing took place, OSP was never removed (038). However, shortly after GHA was established in 2003, workers faced a threatened management “attack” from performance pay and strict SAP. Following negotiations, fearing a dispute, management withdrew their proposals. For the union, this “fundamental

issue” had been a test of its strength. Thereafter, the union established strong management-union liaison arrangements where they highlighted inconsistencies in FLM’s SAP implementation and negotiated improved terms and conditions, including health benefits (038).

In Transport in 2011, although sickness levels were reported low, SAP implementation became stricter and representing members under the policy became a central union activity. “Heavy” sickness absence was concentrated in those sections which dealt with the public. A Transport rep stated that in one section of nine workers, he represented “four cases in the past two months”. Invariably, management took “the view that they are going to give everybody a written warning” (055).

Within Finance Co, a rep stated that the SAP was “a horribly, grey, woolly subject” depending on each manager’s interpretation: “There is nothing standard”. Although each section applied the policy differently, there was a general disciplinary approach. One manager’s approach was described as “Tick box, don’t care, not listening, tick, discipline”. Previously a senior manager “twisted” the policy “to basically deal with people...how she seemed fit” (037). However, a new Chief Executive with an open door approach improved management-union relations. Despite this, union concerns remained about some managers’ behaviour. In one section, with a call centre aspect, it was stated that a manager routinely shouted at workers: “What are you doing at the water machine? Get back to your desk...there is a phone ringing, you need to pick that up” (037).

FE College reps (026, 028, 036) agreed that their absence levels were not high. However, managers implemented the absence policy differently. One rep reported that while some managers applied the policy “flexibly”, others implemented it “stringently”. He stated that there was a “hamster wheel” effect as sick workers received incrementally more severe warnings each time they were absent: “They keep on running but...don’t get anywhere within the policy”. Despite the warnings, he couldn’t “recall anybody being disciplined” for their absence (028). Another college rep reported that six years previously when she dealt with “three or four” absence cases a week, SAP implementation was “quite harsh” (026). However, another college rep stated that even although staffing levels were “cut right back to the bone”, management did not pursue an “aggressive” absence policy as they had “other priorities” (036).

8.5.3.4 Summary

In conclusion, a complex and varied picture of attendance management emerged. There were reports of an incremental tightening of the SAP within Council departments and the ALEOs. LES continued to pursue the punitive approach to absence management that was in existence before the 'War on the Sickies'. In the twelve months after the announcement of the Council's more robust approach in 2009, other departments such as Finance, Chief Executives, and Social Work tightened policy implementation, followed by Education in 2011. There appeared to be little appetite within DRS to implement the SAP strictly and it appeared that when FLMS were forced to hold FAIs they did not recommend disciplinary action.

Absence management implementation was more varied within the ALEOs. In CSG, Cordia and Parking, reps reported that management pursued a strict approach. However, Access and Construction adopted a more relaxed approach while Glasgow Life appeared to go through cyclical periods when absences were clamped down upon and other times it was not. Similarly, a diverse picture emerged within related organisations. There is no evidence of strict SAP implementation within GHA. However, there was a mixed picture within the FE colleges. Within Transport and Finance Co (particularly within the latter's call centre environment), policy implementation was strict.

8.5.4. Workforce Impact

I feel as if I'm giving you an update from the frontline news from the 'War on Sickies'. It is not really all that bad. The Evening Times has perhaps exaggerated the story (Council officer, CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010).

People are frightened... about raising their heads above their parapet, they are frightened of taking sick days. They're frightened when they're in...meetings. They're frightened about the threat of losing their occupational sick pay. They're frightened to take a day off if their child is sick (Fieldwork rep, 002).

These two statements juxtapose management and reps' perceptions of the SAP. While the Council officer suggested that the 'War on the Sickies' was exaggerated by the media and its impact on sick workers was not punitive, the Fieldwork rep stated that strict attendance management engendered an all-encompassing and pervasive workforce fear. This section explores which of the above statements most closely fitted reality. Firstly, it examines reps' perceptions of how widespread presenteeism was, thereafter considering the reasons for this phenomenon, and concludes by exploring the policy's impact on workers' morale, work effort and productivity.

8.5.4.1 Coming to Work When Unwell

Both surveys confirmed reps' strong views about the SAP's impact on workers' attendance, leading to widespread presenteeism as union members came to work unwell.

In both surveys, more than nine in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP pressurised workers into coming to work when unwell (92 per cent in 2010; 95 per cent in 2013) and forced sick workers to return to work too soon (90 per cent in 2010; 95 per cent in 2013) (Table 8.09). Statistically, that there was no difference between both surveys in reps' views in relation to workers coming to work when unwell ($t = 0.61, p < .05$) and returning too soon ($t = 0.40, p < .05$).

Table 8.09: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP Pressured Workers to Come to Work When Unwell and Return Too Soon

	Strongly Agree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Agree 2013 no (%)	Agree 2010 no (%)	Agree 2013 no (%)	Neither 2010 no (%)	Neither 2013 no (%)	Disagree 2010 no (%)	Disagree 2013 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2013 no (%)
to come to work when unwell (2010 n=106; 2013 n=84)	70 (66)	57 (68)	28 (26)	23 (27)	3 (4)	1 (1)	2 (2)	1 (1)	3 (3)	2 (2)
to return to work too soon (2010 n=104; 2013 n=83)	61 (59)	49 (59)	33 (32)	30 (36)	4 (4)	2 (2)	3 (3)	1 (1)	3 (3)	1 (1)

In interviews, thirty three reps (59 per cent) across all services reported that presenteeism was taking place. A Fieldwork rep stated that “people are coming to their work when they are ill, sneezing, coughing and spluttering” (003). A Glasgow Life rep said that workers attended work with “infections ...when they should be at home” (049). A Residential rep suggested that such behaviour had a negative effect on work colleagues and service users' health (017). Another Residential rep expressed concerns that workers attending work when sick “endanger[ed]” frail elderly residents (010). A CSG rep took the view that strict SAP implementation led to workers working less than “half capacity”, “sharing their germs and giving other people their illnesses” (014).

A Daycare rep said workers who were “terrified to go off sick” were “coming into work unwell” (004). Similarly, a Finance rep reported that ill workers were “scared to go off sick” (035). Another Finance rep stated that some workers attended work looking “at death’s door...too scared to take a day off” (057). A Branch Officer was aware of workers coming to work “with broken limbs” (009). A Finance rep said that colleagues “will phone in and ask for emergency annual leave, they will do anything” to avoid going through the “very stressful” SAP (062). Similarly, a LES rep stated that the policy was “used as a bullying device”: “People are scared to go off absent; people are scared to have operations” (045).

Another LES rep intimated that the “bullying tactic is working” as workers were no longer taking sick leave because they “don’t want management breathing down their neck” (040). Even in areas such as Access where SAP implementation was not strict, a rep stated that workers were “frightened to stay off” (018). Similarly, it was reported that in GHA workers will “take holidays rather than phone in sick” (056).

8.5.4.2 Reasons for coming to work when sick

The reasons why reps perceived union members were coming to work when sick were explored. Table 8.10 displays ranked responses to a questionnaire question asking what was significant from a list of given reasons.

The answers provided clear evidence of fear and compulsion. In both surveys, more than 9 out of 10 reps (92 per cent) reported that it was the fear of being disciplined and being scared of the SAP, more than other reasons, which caused union members to attend work when sick. About three in four (77 per cent in 2010; 74 per cent in 2013) believed that the withdrawal of OSP forced members to come to work when unwell, while nearly seven out ten reported that it was job loss fear (68 per cent in 2010; 71 per cent in 2013).

Table 8.10: Reasons for Coming to Work When Sick

	2010 n=106	2013 n=84
(the question provided for multiple responses)	%	%
Fear of being disciplined	92	92
Scared of the Sickness Absence Policy	92	92
Worried about occupational sick pay being withdrawn	77	74
Fear of losing job	68	71
Do not want to let colleagues down	66	61
Worried about heavy workload on return from sick leave	63	64
Worried about being on a temporary contract	48	48
Management/supervisor pressure	45	60
Do not want to let public/service users down	44	55
Want to get job done/complete work tasks	35	49
Not ill enough to justify taking time off	34	39
Worried about poorer promotion prospects	29	30
Do not want to let employer down	25	25
Work colleague pressure	8	19

In interviews, several reps described the SAP as “Draconian”. However, closer examination found that these reps were concentrated in Social Work (003, 010, 017, 023, 025, 034, 048, 064), Education (066), LES (040), and Finance (009, 022, 035). Several Social Work (006, 010, 017, 023, 027, 064), Chief Executives (033), Finance (022, 057), Finance Co (37) and LES (040) reps stated that the SAP engendered a “fear factor”.

A Residential rep said workers came to work when unwell because they did not wish “to be disciplined” (031). A Fieldwork rep stated that fear of “the disciplinary process and...of losing occupational sick pay” generated presenteeism (025). Similarly, a Finance rep reported that workers were coming to work for “monetary reasons, they don’t want to be penalised” (022).

A CSG rep stated that the mental health of workers who came to work when unwell was affected as they were made to “feel guilty for being ill”. Concern was expressed that workers caught up in “intimidating” SAP processes were sick for longer periods as “additional stress”

had “a knock-on effect on their overall health” (019). According to a Finance rep, workers’ SAP worries were “one of the greatest stressors”; workers became “extremely distressed” about reporting sick and attending FAI meetings. Even if not sick, workers “worry about being off” because of the threat of discipline (041).

8.5.4.3 Impact on Morale, Work Effort and Productivity

Reps reported that the SAP negatively affected morale, work effort and productivity. In both surveys, more than nine in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP had a negative effect on workplace morale (92 per cent in 2010; 94 per cent in 2013) (Table 8.11).

Table 8.11: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP has a Negative Effect on Workplace Morale

	2010 n=106	%	2013 n=83	%
Strongly agree	71	67	46	55
Agree	27	25	32	39
Neither	7	7	2	2
Disagree	0	0	2	2
Strongly disagree	1	1	1	1
Total	106	100	83	99

In interview, a Fieldwork rep said that the SAP lowered “workers' morale” (032). Another Fieldwork rep suggested the SAP created a “disconnect between the Council and its employees” (025). Similarly, a CSG rep stated that, creating “an environment of fear”, SAP implementation “demoralises the workforce incredibly” (031). A LES rep felt that workers’ “motivation goes” if they were disciplined for going sick, “pulled up for silly things” or refused flexi-leave (045). A Chief Executives rep suggested that workers “lose the will to live” after going through the SAP (033). Similarly, an Education rep said that morale was undermined as workers were “scared about their jobs because of the current climate...scared of their pay getting cut [and] scared of...going through that whole demoralising process” (022)

There were mixed views whether workers’ perceptions about their treatment under the SAP led to loss of effort. A Fieldwork rep, stating that social work employees are “dedicated people”, reported that “I’ve never come across” loss of effort (034). However, a Finance rep thought that management were “crushing the life out of...very conscientious workers”, leaving

them with “no heart in the job anymore”. She stated that some workers adopted the attitude “why should we care when management don’t” (039). An Access rep said that workers who come to work unwell “hide out of the road...and go through the motions” (053).

A Residential rep stated that when workers were disciplined for something they perceived as unfair they showed less goodwill and flexibility: “Aw, stuff that, I’m not going to swop shifts for you, I’m not going to hang back...you can come in”. Requiring workers’ cooperation, some FLMs realised that a punitive approach was ineffective. However, they were torn between wishing “to help and support” workers to “get something out of them” and being forced to undertake “the mechanical exercise of disciplining people” (017).

It was suggested that the SAP led to some workers staying off longer, adopting the attitude “I might as well get hung for a sheep as a lamb” (Finance rep, 009). Similarly, a Chief Executives rep stated that some workers, knowing that they would automatically face a disciplinary hearing, took the view “I might as well make it worth it” (033). A DRS rep stated that his department’s SAP implementation “totally changed” manager-worker relationships as workers resented the intrusion of “someone looking into [their] affairs” (001), creating “a polarity” that led to conflicted work relations “of investigation and suspicion where before there had been camaraderie” (001). According to UNISON, the removal of FLM’s discretion ‘to properly, firmly, fairly and reasonably manage absence’ had ‘a corrosive effect’ on relationships, ‘affecting all areas of the management of work’ (Leaflet, February 2011).

Other reps identified the SAP’s negative effect on productivity. A Residential rep reported that stressed workers felt that “they have to rush back” when unwell and this “results in poor performance” (015). A Finance rep recollected a sick worker “lying on her desk [who] couldn’t do anything” (057).

8.5.4.4 Summary

The preceding sub-sections explored the negative workforce impact of stricter SAP implementation. Reps reported widespread presenteeism amongst union members who were coming to work when unwell and prematurely returning from sick leave. The fear of being disciplined, of losing OSP and job loss were all reported to be significant factors in members’ decisions to attend work when sick. There was general agreement that strict SAP implementation negatively affected morale, and may affect work effort and productivity.

8.5.5. FLMs' Discretion

For the Council, FLMs were 'critical' to implementing the stricter SAP procedures (Power Point presentation, April 2010). As the policy was rolled out intensive FLM training took place. FLMs were informed that management expected a 'more robust approach' and 'consistent' policy application. FLMs were expected to take 'ownership' of the policy: 'Not doing anything is not an option' (*ibid*). A Council officer explained that this required FLMs having "difficult conversations" with workers: "When people phone in they know they are going to be asked probing questions" (CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010). It was stated that the Council did not have "automatic triggers for discipline": "What we do have is triggers for formal interviews to discuss attendance" (*ibid*). However, following the formal interview a disciplinary hearing was convened if the manager felt that the "level of attendance" was "unacceptable... that is the situation referred to in the War on Sickies" (*ibid*). It was made clear that

If someone hits one of those trigger points, and there is no underlying health problem...that would lead to the disciplinary action being taken. And Glasgow's disciplinary action is the withdrawal from the Occupational Sick Pay Scheme. So it is quite a harsh action (*ibid*)

In the 2010 survey, about a quarter of reps (27 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that FLMs had discretion while in 2013 nearly four in ten (38 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed (Table 8:12). This variance was not significant ($t = 0.28, p < .05$). Over half (55 per cent in 2010; 52 per cent in 2013) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposition.

Table 8.12: Agreed or Disagreed that Line Managers have Discretion Over SAP Implementation

	2010 n=105	%	2013 n=81	%
Strongly agree	8	8	10	12
Agree	20	19	21	26
Neither	20	19	8	10
Disagree	31	30	24	30
Strongly disagree	26	25	18	22
Total	105	101	81	100

In both surveys, over six in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that managers decided outcomes before a disciplinary hearing (63 per cent in 2010; 68 per cent in 2013). Less than one in ten reps disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposition (9 per cent in 2010 and 2013) (Table 8:13). Statistically, there was no difference in reps' views between both surveys ($t = 0.80, p < .05$)

Table 8.13: Agreed or Disagreed that Managers Decide Outcomes Before a Disciplinary Hearing

	2010 n=57	%	2013 n=47	%
Strongly agree	19	33	11	23
Agree	17	30	21	45
Neither	16	28	11	24
Disagree	5	9	4	9
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
Total	57	100	47	101

In interviews, thirty seven reps (66 per cent) indicated that managers now had less discretion. A nuanced picture of differing levels of managerial discretion across services and departments emerged. While, some FLMs continued to exercise discretion, there was clear evidence of an incremental erosion of their ability to do so.

In Social Work, a Fieldwork rep stated that managers were generally administering the SAP in “a bureaucratic way” and “not using discretion” (002). In Finance, it was reported that managers said that their “hands are tied” (035). Another Finance rep claimed that “very few” managers showed discretion, stating that the “decent” managers had accepted voluntary severance (041). Another Finance rep indicated that generally FLMs “toe the party line and do what they are told” (022). A Finance rep, transferring to CBS, stated that “Financial Services managers definitely had discretion”; they would “listen”, “understand”, and “get...appropriate help”. However, in CBS “There is no discretion at all” (062). According to a Residential rep, a manager stated that she felt justified in showing no discretion (006).

Although accepting that some managers showed discretion, another Residential rep stated that, “more and more”, his department’s centralised Absence Monitoring Team made “a mockery of the whole system” by over-ruling managers’ decisions (010). Another Residential

rep described how “a phone-call from the absence team” changed decisions (042). A Fieldwork rep reported that FLMs were routinely called into ‘accountability meetings’ where they were asked to justify their decision: “Before they know it, managers are coming out having changed the decision” (027). A Fieldwork rep stated that HR reminded managers that they “do not have discretion” and that “every step of the way” they “have to seek approval for their decisions” (048). A LES rep reported that managers must attend monthly meetings to “justify their reasons for not disciplining staff” (SCF Notes, 14th September, 2009). A Chief Executives rep said that the impetus towards stricter SAP implementation came “from senior management down to HR” who were “feeding it down” to FLMs (054). Similarly, a Parking rep reported that decisions came “down the line from Personnel, down to managers, down to seniors, down to whoever is doing the interviews” (061).

A LES rep said that HR informed FLMs of the “script” from which they must not “deviate” (040). Similarly, another LES rep reported that some managers will “just tick the boxes”, stating “you know I have to do this” (008). An Education rep reported that FLMs claimed “I have been told to do it” (020). A Chief Executives rep described how, after a disciplinary hearing adjournment, a manager’s attitude “completely changed” to follow “the HR line” (054). Another Chief Executives rep reported that after a recess, a manager “made a very rushed decision to move to disciplinary action”, “fearful” that if they showed discretion they would “be the subject of scrutiny” (033). A Daycare rep stated that there was a common belief amongst managers that they would get their “knuckles rapped” if they showed discretion (015).

Across Council departments, several reps reported that FLMs felt pressured to implement the SAP robustly otherwise they would be disciplined. According to a LES rep, managers came “under pressure” that if they did not strictly implement the policy “they themselves may be disciplined” (045). Similarly, a Finance rep recollected that “a supervisor [came] to me in tears”, stating that they were threatened with disciplinary action because they did not wish to pursue discipline (062). Daycare (005) and Residential reps (010) also confirmed that managers were reporting that they faced disciplinary action if they did not adopt a punitive approach.

It was reported that a Residential manager faced disciplinary pressure but “steadfastly” refused “to be swayed”: “He made his own judgement and...stood by that”. Consequentially, management “just backed off” (017). Despite Social Work managers’ fears of being disciplined, a rep recounted that “as far as we are aware...not one manager...has been disciplined” for showing discretion (027). UNISON wrote to FLM who were union members, stating that ‘We

are not aware of any manager being formally investigated, never mind disciplined, for exercising their discretion' (UNISON correspondence, 25th February, 2013).

Another Fieldwork rep said that it was “an easy option” for managers to “hide behind” HR: “I’m not blaming Personnel because I think it depends on the managers too” (043). A Finance rep expressed the view that if FLMs could be persuaded to “grow some backbone” fewer workers would be disciplined (009). A DRS rep stated that his managers still exercised discretion despite receiving telephone calls from HR “telling them what the outcome should be”. They approached the union to say that they were being pushed “into daeing this, but I’m no gonna” (001). Despite this resolve, another DRS rep indicated that a “shift” was taking place as procedures were becoming “dictated” by HR: “Outcomes have been already decided before the meeting has taken place” (051). Nevertheless, although DRS employees were now regularly attending disciplinary hearings, the outcomes were not punitive.

Several Social Work reps expressed the view that the FLM’s management style was an important factor in deciding whether discretion was shown or not. For instance, a Residential rep stated that some managers did not “respond to pressure from above” but other “want-to-be managers” believed that strict SAP implementation “steers them up the management path”. It was suggested that “stronger and more self-assured” managers were “more willing to argue the point with HR and the Absence Team” while “relatively weak” managers found the policy stressful (010). A Fieldwork rep stated that ambitious FLMs “will follow what HR tells them, to hell with the consequences” (023). Similarly, another Fieldwork rep suggested that “newer” FLMs who wanted “to rise through the ranks” were the most likely to “tow the party line”. Alternatively, experienced and “more relaxed” managers’ who understood the pressures workers were under took a more sympathetic approach (007).

A similar picture emerged within Council ALEOs. It was reported that Cordia managers must complete a Variance Form if they did not recommend discipline. Managers claimed that they had discretion but HR was “on their shoulders whisper[ing], this is what you’ll do” (044). A CSG rep stated that “the minute the manager challenges” HR, “they are then under scrutiny”, (019). In CSG it was reported that managers’ “autonomy and ability to make decisions” has been removed, with decisions “very much dictated and driven by HR” (031).

However, a Finance rep with branch-wide responsibilities stated that college managers took “different” approaches to managing attendance: “They are certainly not too bad...managers do have more discretion” (009). Similarly, a Glasgow Life rep indicated that FLMs “do listen

and...are more discretionary (018). Within Cordia it was said that there were a few “reasonable” managers who had “a touch of common sense”. However, managers who were “strong enough” to show discretion had to explain in writing the reasons why they did not recommend discipline (044).

8.5.5.1 Summary

This section explored FLMs’ central role played in SAP implementation. Pressure on FLMs from HR and senior management to implement the SAP strictly was a common theme within the Council and ALEOs. The shift towards stricter attendance management was centrally driven by senior management and rolled out throughout Council departments and ALEOs. However, without FLM’s active participation in applying the stricter approach, its impact would have been limited. As seen within DRS, albeit made easy by senior management’s benign attitude, FLMs’ insistence on using their discretion ensured that a shift towards a disciplinary approach was lessened. However, across Social Work, Finance, LES, CSG and Chief Executives, FLMs discretion was fundamentally eroded. Even in Education, where there was a delay in implementing the stricter approach, reps reported reduced managers’ discretion.

8.6 Reps’ Perceptions of Managerial Strategy

This section explores reps’ perceptions of what management hoped to achieve through strict SAP implementation.

A Daycare rep stated that “at the end of the day” management’s driver for implementing the SAP more strictly was “a simple thing”, the promotion of regular attendance: “They think if they’re rigorous it’s gonna make people attend their work” (06). Similarly, in both surveys reps indicated that they agreed that managers’ key objective was to improve attendances levels and address service delivery concerns. When asked to rank from a list of ten given reasons what they thought management hoped to achieve through SAP implementation ‘reduce sickness levels’, ‘promote an attendance culture’ and ‘maintain services’ were top-5 answers in both surveys. ‘Reduce sickness levels’ was the top reason in both surveys; ‘promote an attendance culture’ ranked third and fourth in the 2010 and 2013 surveys respectively; while ‘maintain services’ was the fifth stated reason in both surveys (Table 8:14).

Table 8.14: Managerial Strategy

What do management hope to achieve though SAP implementation...?	2010 N=84	2013 N=78	What do management hope to achieve though SAP implementation?
Reduce sickness levels	1	1	Reduce sickness levels
Scare workers from going sick	2	2	Scare workers from going sick
Promote an attendance culture	3	3	Demonstrate managers are in control
Demonstrate managers are in control	4	4	Promote an attendance culture
Maintain services	5	5	Maintain services
Bully workforce	6	6	Bully workforce
Help sick workers return to work	7	7	Sack workers
Sack workers	8	8	Help sick workers return to work
Help access occupational health	9	9	Improve workers' health
Improve workers' health	10	10	Help access occupational health

The survey responses indicated that although reps thought engendering fear and workforce control were important aspects of management SAP implementation, sacking workers was not. While the statements 'scare workers from going sick' ranked second in both surveys and 'demonstrate managers are in control' ranked fourth and third in the 2010 and 2013 surveys respectively, 'sack workers' was lower ranked in both surveys. This suggested that although there was a strong compulsive element to SAP implementation, there were limits to how punitive it was enacted. In other words, the policy's objective was to ensure workers attended work regularly rather than dismiss them. While union members feared being disciplined in respect of their absence, relatively small numbers were dismissed as a result of their sickness. Instead, Council and related organisations' workforce reduction was achieved through voluntary severance (GCC, 2012). Nevertheless, although ranking sixth in both surveys, 'bully workforce' scored higher than 'help sick workers return to work', 'improve workers health' and 'help access occupational health' (between seventh and tenth in both surveys).

In interviews, reps offered deeper and nuanced explanations of management strategies. These, the inter-related aspects of cost control, productivity, workforce-control, ideological factors, employers' workforce attacks and organisational factors, are now considered further.

8.6.1 Cost Control Pressures

In interviews, many reps (n= 32, 57 per cent) identified budget and cost pressures, the need “to save money at every turn” (021), as an important driver for stricter SAP implementation: “They don’t really care if people are sick, it is just what saves them the most money” (057). A Finance rep agreed that “behind every [management] decision” there was a monetary consideration of “how are we going to save money?” (035). Another Finance rep suggested that the Council’s cost concerns emanated from the need to meet Audit Scotland absence KPI targets (022). A Fieldwork rep claimed that “The big agenda [is] to get rid of people...they want to save money and the absence policy is a way of saving money by getting rid of jobs” (002). A Finance rep suggested that management were using the policy to target poor performing workers, those who “aren’t working up to standard” (062).

Cost control pressures to reduce sickness absence were also felt within Council ALEOs. A Cordia rep stated that his employer implemented the SAP strictly for “purely financial” reasons to “save money” (044). A CSG rep suggested that “by not paying sick pay” if a worker went absent, his organisation was “saving money” (014). A Glasgow Life rep said that his employer implemented the SAP strictly as workers’ “fear” of disciplinary action resulted in them taking “less time off which automatically saves money” (049).

In 2011, the Council claimed that ‘Between 2008/9 and 2009/10 the number of average days lost to sickness absence reduced from 12.5 to 11.0 resulting in a saving of £5,013, 888’ (GCC, 2011). However, although reps accepted cost control drove strict attendance management, a Finance rep reported that UNISON asked management to provide evidence of SAP savings as they doubted that other policy costs such as labour turnover were considered (022). A UNISON Social Work Convenor reported that as ‘a conservative estimate’, stricter SAP implementation cost £2.5m, greater than the department’s £1m absence savings target. He estimated that ‘it will take the equivalent of at least 30 managers working fulltime to...punish those off sick’ (Email, 13th April, 2010). UNISON claimed that ‘the automaticity of progression to disciplinary hearings’ increased reps’ ‘workloads’ and that any ‘savings’ made had ‘to be offset against the amount of time’ that they, HR and members spent in absence meetings (Leaflet, February 2011). Similarly, a CSG rep suggested that “unnecessary” absence meetings had hidden productivity costs (013). Likewise, a DRS rep reported that his management finally accepted strict SAP implementation had “no productive benefit”: “They lose the time; they lose their own time, they lose the members’ time and if they work in the same section they lose the steward’s time” (001).

A Fieldwork rep accepted the SAP had reduced sickness absence but stated that unwell workers “staggering about” the workplace created resentment towards the absence policy: “You can’t put a price on good relations...on people being happy at work [and]...motivated” (025).

8.6.1.1 The Exceptional Area

While reps from several areas suggested that cost control pressures drove strict attendance policies, GHA reps recounted a different picture.

Within GHA, no budgetary pressures were reported. GHA reps stated that the SAP was implemented in a supportive, non-disciplinary way (038, 056). Comparing GHA and Council SAP implementation, one GHA rep stated that she felt “embarrassed” to say “we’re all right” when Council workers reported that they were experiencing redundancies and their employers was “battering people for sickness”. UNISON GHA successfully negotiated a 2.8 per cent salary increase and improved annual leave arrangements: “I know that it is because financially we can afford to do it” (056).

8.6.2 “Complete control”: Workforce Control Pressures

Management’s desire to reduce costs is linked to their need to ensure workers attended work on a regular basis. Thus, if workers are attending work regularly employer costs will be reduced (Bevan, 2003: 7). In interviews, twenty one reps (38 per cent) identified workforce control as important to understanding stricter attendance management. However, cost and workforce control imperatives were intertwined. As a Residential rep said, management’s need “to save money” resulted in them making “examples of people...to show their power” (015). Similarly, a Fieldwork rep accepted that while “budgetary pressures...to save money at every turn” drove the Council’s SAP, they also felt the need to show that “we have power over you” (021). Also, an Education rep stated that management SAP implementation had twin aims: “to save money” and to “control the workforce” (020).

A Fieldwork rep suggested that strict SAP implementation resulted in a “fear factor” which gave management “complete control” of the workforce as workers “don’t want to create a fuss any more” (027). As a Cordia worker stated, workers who “fear” they will “lose their job...turn up unwell” (044). Another Fieldwork rep suggested that there was a “longer-term aim to get rid of...deadwood” (058). However, a Residential rep suggested that, rather than sack workers, the Council’s aim was simply to improve attendance and “pull people into line. And sadly...it

works” (006). Similarly, a CSG rep agreed that his employer’s objective was to ensure regular attendance. He suggested that “scared” workers were “less likely” to report sick:

Right across the organisation there is a significant feeling of fear about being off ill...people won’t challenge things because there is that...atmosphere of fear... I think they ultimately quite like [it] that staff are scared to be off their work ill (031).

A Fieldwork rep felt that strict SAP implementation was the employer’s “day to day” attempt “to control the workforce more”. She observed that when workers phoned in sick managers would ask them “Do you want to take flexi or annual leave?” Workers had “to jump through a hundred hoops” to attend hospital appointments (002).

In the Parking focus group, reps (060, 061) thought that their management implemented the SAP for control, rather than cost reasons. As one stated “I think it is about control. This disnae save money it wastes money” (061). The fellow rep said that management “treat everything the most serious”; even less serious workplace issues led to formal investigation (060).

A CSG rep suggested that SAP was linked to a wider bullying culture: “It is all fear tactics, it is all about your job security, your future”. She felt that there was a very hierarchical structure within her organisation. Management signified that they were “in charge”: “Keep your workers under tight control and they’ll do what they are supposed to” (019). In Access, where discipline was not widely used, a rep stated that a union member will “never get the benefit of the doubt” as management sent out the message “we’re always in control, you should fear us” (053).

8.6.3 Doing More with Less

Initiated in 2009, the Council’s voluntary severance programme allowed any worker over 50 whose post was deemed not ‘business critical’ to leave (HR Email, 3rd October, 2012). As a Finance rep reported, “that got rid of a lot of people [who were] doing their jobs for twenty, thirty years...with a lot of knowledge” (062).

UNISON drew the links between workforce reduction and increased service demands as a result of the economic crisis (UNISON Scotland, 2014a). A Social Work rep observed that a 20 per cent workforce reduction coincided with rising service demands ‘due to the economic crisis caused by the bankers, the government’s austerity measures, and the cuts in welfare benefits’ (Email, 9th October 2013).

Across all departments, the decreasing workforce faced increased workloads. In Finance, work demands and attendant work intensification pressures were acute:

All these people have left and they were not replaced...The work is still...the same, if not more, and yet the staff aren't there to do it so there is more pressure on the staff that are there left (Finance rep, 039).

Another Finance rep indicated that "I would say pretty much every single person in Financial Services has got maybe double the amount of work that they used to" (041). A Chief Executives rep in CBS explained that following the voluntary severance programme, "a lot of staff members in our team...left. They have not replaced anybody and they are taking on more work" (054).

According to another Chief Executive rep, although redundant workers left, their workloads remained and were "spread out more", resulting in "the same amount of work or more work" being "divided out amongst less staff". It was stated that this "creates stress, it creates pressure". Hence, conscientious workers worried about "meeting their targets" worked "excessive hours" or took work home (033). Within this context of reducing workforce numbers and increasing workload demands, workers' sickness absence took on particularly significance. An Access rep observed that "There are fewer people working for the Council. There [are] fewer people to do the work, so they need people to be at their work" (024). Similarly, a Fieldwork rep stated that the Council's stricter SAP implementation was "linked to budgets and a shrinking workforce" as a result of the "need to have the workforce in at the workplace" (007).

A Finance rep stated that because management "have let so many staff go" they were now in a position where "they can't afford" to have any remaining workers go sick because of the "impact on the business" (039). As another Finance rep explained, "If somebody is no[t] in work, they are not doing their work. So that work gets backed up and clogs up the system"; even "one or two people being off sick" created stress for co-workers who were asked to carry to cover their work (035).

In DRS, "over a third" of its workforce took voluntary redundancy. Consequentially, long term and short term "stress and anxiety related conditions...rocketed" with workers "attending work [and] reporting severe stress and anxiety problems" (001). Similarly, a Transport rep suggested that workforce reduction set the context for a "much more rigorous approach" to absences. With "fewer and fewer people to cover" workloads, attendance management became "much tougher" (055).

Finance reps transferring to CBS commented on an emerging performance management regime. Workers disciplined under the SAP felt themselves particularly vulnerable to performance pressures. Management's attitude was said to be "if that person isn't performing as

well as that person we might as well put them out of the door” (062). Another Finance rep confirmed that this was made “easier” by regular performance reviews and weekly performance statistics. Workers who felt “down” after attending a disciplinary hearing faced additional pressures keeping their “stats” and “performance up” to avoid further action. Workers felt a “constant” disciplinary pressure that was “chipping away” at them to maintain their performance and attendance (063). As a Chief Executives rep stated, through performance management workers risked being demoted, moved “sideways” and faced “counselling” out of their job if they did not “meet the grade” (033).

Another Chief Executives rep reported that the introduction of Lean-type processes in one section of CBS reduced staffing which had “the knock on effect of adding...more work to another team”. Not only were work demands increasing, work tasks were becoming more complex at a time when workers felt they were being “micro-managed”. In this “intense” work environment, work pressures on other workers increased when a worker went sick. However, “a lot of the work” was “still there when you come back” (054).

8.6.4 Ideological Factors

Reps thought that SAP implementation had certain ideological underpinnings, both internal and external to the Council and related organisations.

8.6.4.1 External

A Finance rep expressed the view that “right wing newspapers” such as the “Mail, Express and Telegraph” put forward a media constructed narrative of “public sector, skivers; private sector, hard workers” (022). To facilitate the “race to the bottom”, a LES rep suggested that the “right wing” media perception that public sector “workers have it good and private sector workers don’t” was divisive, “pitting...workers against each other” (045). As a Fieldwork rep stated, strict SAP implementation was “part of the overall ideology of bashing council workers and the myths that [are] about” (003).

This issue was explored further within the focus groups. In the Fieldwork group, a rep suggested that strict SAP implementation was linked to a “new managerialism” whereby the “public sector has to learn lessons from the business sector”. Being “held up, named and shamed”, she felt that councils came under governmental pressure to “sort” their attendance levels. It was suggested that this was one aspect of a wider ideological “big stick” that was used “to beat public sector workers” and attack their pensions and sick pay arrangements (058).

Another rep stated that within Social Work a managerial “tick box” approach dominated which perceived workers as “machines”, performing tasks in a “narrow” and “mechanistic” way: “Just get on and do it, fill in those boxes” (059).

In the Branch Officer’s focus group, it was claimed that strict SAP implementation was “a knee-jerk reaction” to media constructs: “As budgets became tighter, pressure was put on councils” to ensure “people are at work” (064). Another Branch Officer stated that “perceptions of lazy council workers always...on the sick” were more important than cost pressures in driving stricter SAP implementation (065).

In interview, a Finance rep also suggested that there was a popular belief that council workers had “an easy time of it” (009). However, a LES rep stated that “sick workforce” perceptions “belied the realities” of long-hour working lives (012).

8.6.4.2 Internal

A Fieldwork rep stated that the Council had got caught up in the media’s exaggeration of public sector sickness absence levels and its “attempt to discredit workers” (021). A DRS rep suggested that there was “an inherent disciplinarianism” within the Council. Strict attendance management enabled it to challenge perceptions that it was a “soft, paternalistic, old corporation”, sending out a message “things are different [bangs table]. Don’t think things are the way they were before” (001).

A Chief Executives rep stated that in recent years “a call centre ethos from the private sector” had been imported into CBS as new managers came from “organisations where ...sacking people was commonplace”. He said that it “took some time” for these managers to accept that the Council formally recognised trade unions and that there were process that they must “adhere to before they can sack somebody” (033).

A Residential rep suggested that management tried to make workers feel guilty about going sick. As a result of service cuts, there were not enough workers “to run departments...So they blame the people who are off sick for poor performances” (042). Similarly, a CSG rep, agreed that workers “are meant to feel guilty for being ill” (019). An Education rep reported that managers often said to workers “We believe your absences are genuine. However the level of absence is unacceptable. What are *you* [emphasised] doing about it?” (016).

A Fieldwork rep suggested that management attempted to “isolate” workers by asking them “Do you realise the impact your absence is having on...your colleagues?” (002). Another Fieldwork rep stated that after attending a disciplinary hearing workers often felt that “they’ve...done something terribly wrong when the reality is they have just been ill” (021). An Access rep stated managers “always” said that “your colleagues have to do your work for you” which often was not true (024). In similar terms, a Finance rep stated that management sent out contradictory messages when a worker returned from sick leave, stating “You know you are valued” while asserting that the absence impacted on work colleagues. Although the absence was not questioned, managers made workers “feel guilty about it” (035).

In the Fieldwork focus group, one rep thought that strict SAP implementation was symptomatic of “a political thinking” that viewed public sector workers negatively. He stated that Council managers were not any different from those “who manage the Scottish Government...or Westminster” and it was not “an uphill struggle” to persuade them to implement the SAP strictly as they negatively viewed the workforce as “a waste of time”. It was suggested that strict SAP implementation was “a feature of management”, adopted simply “because it is there, it is one of the tools in their tool box” (059).

8.6.5 Employers’ Workforce Attacks

Several reps expressed the view that employers’ strict attendance management was linked to managerial attempts to engender workforce change. According to a Fieldwork rep, its objective was to “weaken” workers will to fight management proposals: “It’s making people keep their heads down ...it is a big stick” (059). A Finance rep said that workers’ treatment under the SAP lowered their morale, “taking away all their stomach for a fight” (022).

Another Fieldwork rep said that strict SAP implementation was linked to attacks on terms and conditions: “Hitting us around absence is a part of that general attack on workers (002). A Residential rep thought that workers’ “state of fear” of losing their jobs if they reported sick made it “quite easy” for management to impose changes to working conditions, particularly when there was a “public image” that “you should be lucky to have a job” (010). Another Fieldwork rep felt such fears made the workforce “more malleable, it makes them think they can’t win”. When several workers in a workplace were disciplined “the impact can be the same upon the people who haven’t been disciplined”, sending out the message “this is the way things are” (025). Similarly, another Fieldwork rep stated that if the workforce was “demoralised and scared”, management could “push through other things that are...unpalatable” (003).

A DRS rep stated that strict attendance management made “the workplace less comfortable” for workers at a time when they were considering voluntary redundancy. Workers who felt insecure at work and whose terms and condition were being “attacked” were “getting hit over the head” by the SAP, becoming “more ill” at a time when they “should be getting more support” as their workloads increased (001). A Finance rep suggested that management’s view that workers’ fear of the SAP encouraged workforce acceptance of change was “counterproductive” if morale and productivity were lowered. Instead of being so “scared they’ll do what they are told”, workers develop “contempt for their employer” (022).

Some reps suggested that strict SAP implementation was symptomatic of a more general disciplinary approach to workplace issues. A Residential rep reported that management was “taking much more punitive action” and workers were being suspended for matters that previously would not have warranted action. Before “somebody would have spoken to you” but now “things have been notched up...they are a bit more brutal (017). Within LES, long-established management practices conditioned SAP implementation. It was stated that a previous LES director bullied managers into implementing the SAP strictly and they in turn “bully the staff” (040).

Further confirmation about reps’ negative perceptions about management objectives were found in the surveys. In both surveys (Table 8.15), over half the reps agreed or strongly agreed that managers were more concerned with ‘punishing’ sick workers than supporting them (51 per cent in 2010; 62 per cent in 2013), while about one in six disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposition (17 per cent in 2010; 14 per cent in 2013). Statistically, there was no difference between surveys in reps’ views in this respect ($t = 0.32, p < .05$).

Table 8.15: Agreed or Disagreed that Managers were More Concerned with ‘Punishing’ Sick Workers than Supporting Them

	2010 n=105	%	2013 n=84	%
Strongly agree	18	17	16	19
Agree	36	34	36	43
Neither	33	31	20	24
Disagree	16	15	10	12
Strongly disagree	2	2	2	2
Total	105	99	84	100

8.6.6 Weaken Union Organisation

Views were mixed whether the Council and related employers' implemented the SAP strictly to weaken union organisation, to 'tie up' the union in individual rather than collective representation. A Finance rep thought that the employer's strategy was clear: "They'll argue...they just want to cut costs, encourage a culture of attendance but...they're tying us up... [to] take our eye of the ball in other areas (022).

A Fieldwork rep felt that management sought to "bombard" reps and "stretch them to the limit" so that they are diverted away from other issues (032). Similarly, a Finance rep reported that the SAP took her away from other union responsibilities (057). A Finance rep thought management were "happy enough to see the unions tied up" in individual representation (041). An Education rep felt that she was "on [her] knees" responding to representation demands, particularly before holiday periods (050). A Chief Executives rep suggested that, since the 1980s, there was a long-term "divide and conquer" managerial strategy "to individualise... rather than collectivise issues" (033).

However, other reps doubted whether strict SAP implementation was part of a conscious employer strategy to frustrate union organisation. A Finance rep stated that "I don't think it was designed to do that" but accepted that "it has become that way" (009). Similarly, a CSG rep doubted whether managers "sit around conjuring up" an "intricate plan to tie up" the union but thought they were "happy" the SAP had an "indirect" effect, reducing union challenges (031). A LES rep stated that management pressurised reps through "victimisation", by "constantly questioning their facility time", rather than through strict SAP implementation (008).

8.6.7 Organisational Factors

Reps identified several organisational factors which influenced SAP implementation.

Some reps spoke about the role of Social Work's Absence Team. A Residential rep stated that it was "designed to bully and intimidate people back to work" (017). A Finance rep expressed the view that, generally, his department's HR section took a less disciplinarian approach than the Absence Team's "hard-line" approach which was always "discipline them, discipline them, discipline them" (041). Similarly, a Fieldwork rep felt that the Absence Team was "very Draconian" compared to other HR managers' softer approach (048). A Chief Executives rep suggested that his management's SAP implementation was strict because they

were “driving the policy across the whole council” and had to keep their “house in order” (033). A DRS Rep said that the SAP gave HR officers a purpose: “It justifies their existence” (001).

For the Council, ‘benchmarking’ its absence figures with the ALEOs, other councils and the private sector was important (GCC, 2011). Several reps explained identified inter-department SAP competition. According to a Residential rep, “It is about number crunching... it is a competitive market, Social Work versus Land Services, Land Services versus Parking. It is about...producing the lowest figures for absence” (042). Another Residential rep stated that “Everything’s judged [on] stats...But they want to outdo each other. I’ve seen a personnel manager who was delighted because they were half a point below Education for the first time in ten years” (017). Similarly, a CSG rep said that his management team were “statistically driven” and wanted their absence figures to be “as low as possible” as they were competing with other services “to show who has got the best absence [figures]” (011).

ALEO reps provided insights into how the Council influenced their employers’ policy implementation. A CSG rep reported that his organisation “does it because it is told to by the Council” (031). A Cordia rep stated that although his management reported their progress on implementing the SAP to the Council, they “Cordify” it, taking the Council’s “robust” approach “a stage further” (044). Similarly, a Transport rep reported that although his organisation had no formal links with the Council they were “tied to the Council”, albeit “indirect”. Accordingly, their similar SAP procedures applied a “laser-light focus” to reduce absences (055).

8.6.8 Summary of Reps’ Perceptions of Managerial Strategy

Cost control and workforce control imperatives were identified as important factors in explaining why a shift towards stricter SAP implementation took place although other factors also came into play. Reps suggested that the Council’s budget pressures influenced its decision to implement the SAP more punitively. Faced with reduced finances, the Council and its ALEOs attempted to control costs and increase workforce productivity by ensuring workers regularly attended work. This required a change in workers’ attitudes and behaviour with regard to reporting sick. Chiming with both internal and external pressures on management to respond to negative, stereotypical perceptions of public sector workers’ shirking, reps spoke about how workers were encouraged to take responsibility for their attendance.

In workplaces where workforce numbers were falling, workers’ sickness absence was a luxury that could no longer be afforded. There were suggestions that employer attempts to control attendance was linked to a broader employer offensive, forcing workers to “keep their

heads down” (009, 041, 059). Also while there was no evidence to suggest that management consciously attempted to use the SAP to weaken union organisation they were, as one rep stated, “happy” (031) that the union was pre-occupied with dealing with individual sickness absence representation to the detriment of collective organising. Nevertheless, UNISON linked strict attendance management to wider austerity attacks:

UNISON’s position on the financial crisis is clear. We have repeatedly stated we will not accept pay cuts and service cuts, and equally we will not accept our members being terrorised through Draconian sickness policies (*Voice*, March 2010: 4).

8.7 Summary

This chapter examined the shift within the Council and its predecessor organisations from Benign Neglect of workers’ sickness absence to the ‘War on the Sickies’. Further, it provided details of attendance management within the Council, its ALEOs and related organisations. Thereafter, the workforce impact and changed FLM’s role were examined. The chapter concluded with an exploration of reps’ perceptions of the reasons for stricter attendance management. The following chapter now considers trade union responses after the ‘War on the Sickies’ was declared.

Chapter 9: Union Representation and Effectiveness in the ‘War on the Sickies’

9.1 Introduction

Immediately after the ‘War on the Sickies’ was announced in March 2009, Glasgow City UNISON resolved to ‘use all means at its disposal’ to resist the Council’s new ‘Draconian and backward’ sickness absence proposals (BC Motion, 19th March, 2009).

Workplace reps had a crucial role in challenging management’s SAP implementation. UNISON placed great emphasis on training reps in the procedural and legal aspects of sickness absence representation. Attempts were also made to challenge management through formal and informal negotiations, an ET application, and consulting union members over an industrial action non-cooperation strategy. While Chapter 8 examined the ‘War on the Sickies’ and its preceding period of Benign Neglect, this chapter concentrates on the former, evaluating the extent to which reps challenged managerial SAP implementation and defended their members. Thus, while the previous chapter concentrated on the control aspect of the employment relationship this chapter focuses on workers’ resistance (Edwards, 1979).

Initially, the extent of representation is considered, followed by the demands placed upon reps. Then, reps’ representation activities are explored. Thereafter, reps’ critique of their effectiveness is evaluated. Then, the SAP’s impact on union organisation and strategies is examined. After that, the extent to which union members’ experiences of attendance management is a mobilising factor in taking action over other issues is discussed, concluding with an exploration of the factors which limit union organisation around attendance issues.

9.2 The Extent of Representation

In both surveys, reps were asked how many hours on average that they spent each month on union activities and on sickness absence issues (Table 9.1). Excluding branch officers with at least 70 hours a month facility time and health and safety reps (both of whom were less likely to be involved in frontline representation), the average time that reps spent on all union activities each month was 15.5 (2010) and 15.6 (2013) hours. In 2010, reps reported that about half of this time (7.1 hours, 45.8 per cent) was spent on absence related issues. By 2013, this figure had declined to a third (4.9 hours, 31.4 per cent). However, despite this reported decline in rep’s involvement in absence issues, such representation remained a central union activity.

Further, in 2010, excluding reps with less than one year's experience (who were less likely to be involved in frontline representation), branch officers with at least 70 hours a month facility time and health and safety reps, 7.5 hours (46 per cent) each month was spent on absence issues, while in 2013 it was 5.7 hours (32.9 per cent).

Table 9.1: Extent of Representation

Year	2010 n=86 (%)	2013 n=68 (%)	2010 (excl. reps <1yr) n=80 (%)	2013 (excl. reps <1yr) n=58 (%)
Av. hours spent per month on union activities	15.5	15.6	16.3	17.3
Av. hours spent per month on sickness absence issues	7.1 (45.8)	4.9 (31.4)	7.5 (46)	5.7 (32.9)
Av. hours spent per month on other issues	Not asked	4 (25.6)	Not asked	4.4 (25.4)
Av. hours spent per month on attending meetings	Not asked	5.6 (35.9)	Not asked	6 (34.3)

In interviews, there were numerous examples of the intensity and frequency of SAP representation. For instance, a Daycare rep who usually representing four members on his union facility day reported that “The majority of my day is going to absence meetings...We don’t have enough stewards...I need to cover everywhere they don’t have a steward” (005).

Similarly, a Residential rep stated that she was often involved in three absence cases on her facility day (006). Two Fieldwork reps said that eighty per cent of their working week could be taken up with absence cases (007, 059). A Finance rep reported that “nearly every case” he was involved with was absence related (035). However, not all reps agreed that absence cases dominated. A Glasgow Life rep reported that most of the disciplinary issues that he was involved in were related to conduct issues (049). An Access rep stated that sickness absence is not “a big thing in Access” (053).

9.3 The Demands on Reps

In interviews, reps provided frequent accounts of the time pressure and emotional demands that they experienced representing members under the SAP. A Finance rep, daily “mired” in demanding representation cases, found it challenging hearing about union members’ “personal and private” lives (041). A Fieldwork rep stated that the union was “firefighting”, “stretched to

the limit”, as a result of the volume of absence cases (032). A Branch Officer (022) reported that reps were ‘getting fed up and pissed off, demoralised by going into meetings and getting the same bloody answers...stewards and activists’ stress levels are going through the roof’ (BC Notes, 29th August, 2013).

Similarly, a Residential rep confirmed that SAP representation was demanding; reacting “on the spot” left reps “totally drained” (010). A Fieldwork rep agreed that such representation was “completely draining”, resulting in “mental tiredness”. Although reps needed preparation time, they often faced difficulties securing it (059). The tightening of work schedules exacerbated the time pressures that they faced. A Finance rep stated that she prepared for meetings in her lunch break as “management are trying to scale back...facility time” (062).

A Fieldwork rep reported that she spent “a lot of time” undertaking research at “home at night” (027). A Chief Executives rep stated that he used his “free time” to deal with absence cases (054). The 2013 survey found that, excluding branch officers, health and safety reps and those less than one year’s experience, reps (n= 58) spent 2.8 hours, on average each month at home or outside work on absence issues and 2.6 hours on other issues.

9.4 The Representation Process

From the very beginning of the ‘War on the Sickies’, UNISON saw stricter SAP implementation as a threat to its members. As evident from its minutes, the City Branch’s SCF meetings, which were attended by Branch Officers and section Convenors, regularly discussed the union’s strategic responses to SAP implementation. There reports were heard how, section-by-section, managers were implementing the policy. From the beginning UNISON sought to collectivise its approach to member representation and placed an emphasis on reps’ training. In a branch training event, a legal officer explained to reps that “attendance managing someone out of the door is the cheapest and easiest way to sack someone unless we legally challenge it” (Absence Seminar, 11th February, 2010):

Absence management...is a way for the employer to get an employee on their own when they are already vulnerable and take them through what seems at each stage a very minor process which step by step by step takes them down the road to possibly losing their job (*ibid*).

It was argued that reps played a “critical” role in challenging management decisions, explaining the reasons why union members were absent, how the SAP processes were counterproductive in facilitating a return to work, and articulating what help the employer

should offer (*ibid*). Reps were encouraged to shift the focus away from the worker's health difficulties to what supportive action the employer should take. By focusing on the reasons for the worker's absence, consideration could then be given to exploring whether the illness was related to work organisation and working conditions (Horder, 1999). If such linkages were established, the employer could be pressed to take action, for instance, to comply with health and safety regulations and reduce workloads.

9.4.1 Pre-meeting Preparation

Generally, as a Fieldwork rep stated, the first time that reps became aware that a member required representation was when they approached them and said "Management want to meet with me, can you come and represent [me]?" (007). To develop an effective case, reps generally met with their member before the formal meeting, examining management's case and checking inaccuracies: "They could be saying that somebody's hit a trigger point when they haven't" (007). Another Fieldwork rep said that she examined the absence figures closely because "quite a few times they were not accurate" (043).

A Fieldwork rep reported that because the absence policy is strictly implemented "I find myself increasingly saying to people when they come to me, not to get their hopes up": "We write down basically our line of defence...the reason why the person was absent and how we would explain that at both the formal interview and any disciplinary stage" (025). To allow preparation of the member's case, another Fieldwork rep stated that he asked members for the "full story": "is there anything that is going to bite us in the bum, anything that you haven't told me, I need to know before we go in there?" (034).

A Residential rep reported that he tried to find out as much as possible about the member's circumstances when they first met:

I would ask for a brief rundown of where they work; how long their absence has been; the reasons for their absence; whether there is any history of absences; and whether there is any underlying health condition which may directly affect the outcome (010).

An experienced LES rep felt that the information gathered at the initial meeting with the member was important: "I have a more thorough preliminary interview...than the managers will". The rep consulted medical textbooks and researched online to find out more information about the member's illness to "turn the tables" on management (008).

A Glasgow Life rep reported that he reassured the member at the initial meeting: “I tell them not to panic and not to worry too much”, advising them that they were not “getting picked on” as this was a process every worker went through when they “hit” a trigger (018). Experienced reps were able to advise members of likely outcomes. As a Finance rep stated, “I go through all their sicknesses with them. I advise them on what is going to happen and you can normally tell...if they are over the trigger” (035).

With reference to the Equality Act, an Education rep inquired whether the absence was related to an underlying health condition (022). If such linkages were not possible, a Finance rep stated that union members must “just take what it is coming” (009).

Skilled reps attempted to establish the “wider picture” (DRS rep, 051). An Education rep stated that at the first meeting, in addition to exploring the details of her member’s absence, she discussed workloads, the work environment and inter-colleague relationships (052). Similarly, a Glasgow Life rep reported that he examined the member’s absence history to explore any “connection” to the work environment (049). For a CSG rep, who read “through the relevant policies” and spoke to other reps, the most important aspect of pre-meeting activity was to “formulate a position” that they would take to the FAI, the first formal stage of the SAP (011).

9.4.1.1 Summary

Reps provided examples of how important pre-meeting preparation was in helping ensure union members received effective representation. This allowed reps to go into the FAIs forearmed.

9.4.2 Supporting Members at FAIs

An integral part of the union’s strategy to challenge management was through encouraging union members to be represented at the “earliest possible stage” (017). A CSG rep stated that “the sooner and earlier we are involved” there was a “greater chance of a more favourable outcome” (031). Similarly, a Finance rep said that “if we get in earlier enough” and members “recognise the importance of being represented then we can certainly make an impact” (009). A Residential rep agreed that early involvement “makes a difference”; “if we’re not there most...go to [a] disciplinary [hearing]” (042).

For most reps, the FAI provided the first opportunity to represent the member. Excluding health and safety reps, about eight in ten reps (80 per cent) reported in the 2010 survey that they

had represented members at a FAI. In 2013, over seven in ten (72 per cent) reported that they had done so (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2: Represented at FAI

	2010 n=98	%	2013 n=79	%
Yes	78	80	57	72
No	20	20	22	23
Total	98	100	79	100

An Education rep stated that she had not been to many disciplinary hearings because “I’ve stopped them at Formal Absence” (016). An Access rep said that at FAIs he “put a bit of pressure” on line managers: “What you need to do is put the doubt in their mind that they are not on sure ground” so that if the case went to an ET they would be “personally culpable” (053).

A Residential rep suggested that his role at the FAI was to look for “mitigating factors...why someone should not suffer punitive action” (006). A Fieldwork rep stated that if reps were able to identify underlying health problems the member might avoid disciplinary action (007). Similarly, a CSG rep indicated that there was “more scope for discretion” at the FAI if underlying health problems were identified. Anticipating an appeal may follow, the rep asked the manager at the FAI to consider mitigating factors, which “if [not] given due weight” might form the “grounds for an appeal down the road” (011).

A Fieldwork rep felt that “used by management” during absence meetings as decisions had already been made and their presence allowed managers “to tick the boxes” that procedures had been followed (058). Another Fieldwork rep said that at FAIs managers “go by the protocols and they’ve made their minds up” (006). A Residential stated that “management know what they are doing... they admit it is wrong but they carry on regardless”. This necessitated reps being “in management’s face quite a lot” (017).

9.4.3 Supporting Members at Disciplinary Hearings

A Residential rep reported that often the first time union members sought support was when they faced a disciplinary hearing as managers would frequently say at the FAI stage “It is only me and you, it is nothing to worry about” (013). Excluding health and safety reps, in both

surveys about six in ten reps had experience of disciplinary hearing representation (60 per cent in 2010; 59 in 2013) (Table 9.3).

Table 9.3: Represented at Disciplinary Hearing

	2010 n=97	%	2013 n=80	%
Yes	58	60	47	59
No	39	40	33	41
Total	97	100	80	100

Another Residential rep stated that as “there is more at stake” at disciplinary hearings, reps committed time and resources preparing for them (010). UNISON prepared a question check list which reps utilised to challenge managers. Asking questions such as, ‘What is the purpose of the Disciplinary action?’ made ‘the Presenting Officer/ Chair accountable for any decision to discipline. Most struggle with this’ (Glasgow City UNISON, 2009b: 1).

A Residential rep stated that it was “harder” at disciplinary hearings “to persuade the chair to take a different view” (013). By contrast, a Finance rep said that at FAIs, “nine times out of ten”, the manager’s view was simply that “You’ve hit a trigger and that’s it”, while at the disciplinary hearing the rep had more opportunity to argue a case (039). Similarly, a Fieldwork rep stated that at the FAI it was “more set in stone with regard to the triggers” but at the disciplinary hearing he could articulate other “points of view” and was “listened to slightly more”. At disciplinary hearings reps exploited managers’ anxieties about matters proceeding to an appeal hearing or ET where their faced further scrutiny (023).

However, a LES rep felt that at disciplinary hearings “managers are too much controlled by HR” (012). An Education rep stated that at the hearing management have already “decided what the outcome is going to be” (020). A Finance rep said that “at that point there is no way you can change their mind” (035). Similarly, a Fieldwork rep stated that at the FAI “we can force the issue a wee bit, by the time we get to the disciplinary hearing minds have been made up” (021). A Residential rep felt that “You are banging your head against a brick wall at times because you nearly know for certain that the decision has already been predetermined” (010).

9.4.4 Supporting Members at Appeal Hearings

A key aspect of UNISON's strategy to defend union members against SAP excesses was to encourage them to exercise their appeal rights. However, pragmatic and tactical considerations often came into play. A Finance rep stated that "We suggest they do appeal but ultimately the decision is up to the member...I'm never going to say I think you should appeal...one thing I don't do is...raise peoples' expectations". Because FAIs and disciplinary hearings were "alien" to members, leaving them feeling "stressed" and "intimidated", some "just want it...over and done with" (009).

According to a Fieldwork rep, although some members appealed because they felt "angry" and had "a real sense of injustice", many took the view: "I'll just better be careful over the next six months" or "I'm glad that is out of the road" (002). Another Fieldwork rep suggested that members did not appeal because of the "shame factor" and the stress involved in the process. In particular, "horrifically" worded decision letters struck "fear" into workers so they took it "on the chin" (027).

However, a Finance rep stated that, drawing upon his knowledge of previous appeal hearing decisions, his appeals were "quite often" successful on "exceptional circumstances" grounds (041). Another Finance rep reported that she recently had two "absolutely shocking decisions" overturned (039). In Cordia, a rep reported that the union won about half of their appeals because they found "fault in the manager's procedure" or established an unrecognised underlying health problem, otherwise, "it is really hard" (044). A Finance rep said that sometimes, after contacting Heads of Service, "you can get decisions reversed" (022).

When Council workers are dismissed on 'capability' grounds, their appeals are heard by the Personnel Sub-Committee on which three elected councillors sit. A Branch Officer expressed the view that management misused the SAP to "send out a message", whereby they emphasised its "punitive aspect", knowing "full well" that the union would "probably" win many appeals (064). Another Branch Office agreed that the union had "a good success rate" winning disability related dismissals and suggested that the councillors were "less punitive" than departmental managers (065). Another Branch Officer stated that councillors, aware of an ET's "reputational" damage, paid "more heed" to disability related cases (064).

9.5 Evaluation of Union Reps' Effectiveness: The "counterfactual question"

"If it wisnae fer the Union" (song by Matt McGinn)

In both surveys, reps gave their opinions on their effectiveness of representing members at FAIs and disciplinary hearings. With regard to reps' ability to influence managers' FAI decisions, there were contrasting views. In the 2010 survey, less than half of the reps (44 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed they were able to influence manager decisions whether or not to proceed to discipline while a similar number (43 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 9.4). However, statistically significant, in 2013 the number of reps who agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to influence manager decisions increased to three in four (75 per cent) while those who disagreed or strongly disagreed fell to about one sixth (18 per cent) ($t = 0.001, p < .05$).

Table 9.4: Agreed or Disagreed that Reps Influence Managers' Decisions Whether or Not to Proceed to Discipline

	2010 n=75	%	2013 n=56	%
Strongly agree	7	9	10	18
Agree	26	35	32	57
Neither	10	13	4	7
Disagree	24	32	6	11
Strongly disagree	8	11	4	7
Total	75	100	56	100

Despite reps' mixed views about their influence at FAIs, there was greater agreement in both surveys that members who brought reps to the meetings were treated more fairly than those who did not (Table 9.5). Nearly three in four (72 per cent) agreed with this proposition in 2010 and over eight in ten (84 per cent) in 2013. Statistically, this variance was not significant ($t = 0.09, p < .05$).

Table 9.5: Agreed or Disagreed that Members Who Bring a Union Rep to Meetings are Treated More Fairly than Those Who do Not

	2010 n=75	%	2013 n=57	%
Strongly agree	20	27	21	37
Agree	34	45	27	47
Neither	16	21	6	11
Disagree	3	4	3	5
Strongly disagree	2	3	0	0
Total	75	100	57	100

Reps strongly felt that their representation influenced disciplinary hearing decisions. In both surveys, over three in four reps agreed or strongly agreed that their representation influenced outcomes (76 per cent in 2010; 83 per cent in 2013) (Table 9.6). Statistically, this variance was significant ($t = 0.01, p < .05$).

Table 9.6: Agreed or Disagreed that Union Representation Influences What Happens

	2010 n=58	%	2013 n=47	%
Strongly agree	8	14	16	34
Agree	36	62	23	49
Neither	3	5	6	13
Disagree	10	17	2	4
Strongly disagree	1	2	0	0
Total	58	100	47	100

In interviews, reps were divided in their opinions regarding their effectiveness. Twenty nine (52 per cent) made statements indicating that to some extent, they felt that their representation has some impact. However, many reps interviewed expressed the view that they had little influence over management decision making. For instance, a Daycare rep stated that, faced with a “brutal regime” where everything was “black and white”, representing members was becoming “harder and harder” and she felt herself “as good as useless” (004). Similarly, another

Daycare rep thought that his representation was “pretty poor”, achieving success only when the member had an underlying health problem (005).

Often in interviews (n= 28, 50 per cent), reps expressed their view about their effectiveness in “counterfactual terms” that “if the trade union never existed” (DRS rep, 001) union members would endure harsher treatment. Creating “a different atmosphere entirely” at meetings (Glasgow Life rep, 018), it was stated that union members received “a better deal” if they were represented (Branch Officer, 065). A Residential rep felt that without the union’s presence, “the Council would have carte-blanche to do what it wants”. He thought that reps ensured management followed procedures: “If it wasnae for the unions...it would be a lot worse and a lot more people would lose their jobs” (042).

Several reps stated that without union representation, the SAP would be “horrendous” for members (002, 007, 047). Without union support, “it would be really oppressive, a horrible place to work” (033). Although reps doubted their effectiveness, strong views were expressed that their representation prevented “mayhem” (043), the situation becoming “a lot worse” (054), a “nightmare” (039) or “catastrophic” (010). Representation ensured management did not “run amok” (018), “ride roughshod” (021) and “walk all over the top” (034) of members. Without union support, reps felt that there would be more disciplinary hearings (017), heavier sanctions (022), more final written warnings (054), more capability hearings (020) and more workers “out of a job” (001).

A CSG rep suggested that without representation, members would find the SAP process “very isolating” and “a frightening experience”. Even when reps were unable to influence decisions they explained “the motivations behind the decisions”, making it clear to members that this was “no reflection” on them as they were caught up in a “stringent” SAP that was universally applied (011).

A Fieldwork rep stated that he had no evidence that the union influenced management decisions but was certain that if members “didn’t have us there worse things would happen” (003). Another Fieldwork rep said that workers came out of absence meetings “very angry, very frustrated, very upset” and thought that the union reduced this, supporting members at “a difficult time” (025). A Residential rep claimed that without the union’s “moral support”, members “would be terrified” into coming into work (006). A CSG rep stated that union support helped members feel “empowered even although the outcome may not be positive”: “If you go in and fight your cause...at least there is that sense of...I stood up for myself” (019).

A LES rep suggested that the union was a necessary check on management powers, preventing “bedlam”. Without union involvement there would be “no fair hearings” and workers would feel “intimidated” and “bullied” (008). In similar terms, a Chief Executives rep stated that without union support workers’ predicament would be “hellish” with workers being forced to “come to their work with life threatening illnesses” (033).

A Fieldwork rep stated that the union achieved “victories” when they persuaded managers that they did not have “to do exactly what HR tell them” (021). A DRS rep felt that the union put “a spanner in the work” (001). An Access rep said that the union had “a hundred per cent record winning grievances”. It was said that management avoided confrontation as “they do not wish to have any hassle with the union at all” (024). Within Access, managers were “too busy” to deal with sickness absence which was “way down the list” of their priorities (029). Another Access rep suggested that management did not implement the SAP strictly because it was “bad for business” and not “profitable”, distracting management “from what they are here for...to make money, to get things done” (053).

Reps’ ability to influence management decisions stemmed from their collective ability to challenge management prerogative. Changing, conflicted power relationships permeated every occasion when management and the union sat down together at absence meetings. As a DRS rep stated, “everybody at that table knows...we’re not going to be a push over” (001). A Finance rep stated that favourable decisions were fought “tooth and nail for”. Because the union was “submerged” in absence issues it had “no other option but to toughen up and to get the gloves off”, a “softly, softly” approach no longer worked (022).

However, power relationships were asymmetrical. A Branch Officer likened management-union struggle over the SAP to a “guerrilla war” rather than “a collective fight with two armies on the battlefield”. He described it as “hand to hand combat” in which “some we win, some we lose” (065). For a Residential rep, this was not an unfavourable terrain; the union often won “guerrilla war” battles because “we are better rebels...we’re better at fighting” and were more experienced than managers who may not have attended a disciplinary hearing before (017):

“We’ve got good back up information and we are better trained than they are...we have eight to ten very experienced stewards doing it all the time, getting very good at it and know what to look for... [We] win the battles because we have got better weaponry” (017).

However, irrespective of union members’ views on reps effectiveness, in both surveys, more than eight in ten reps (93 per cent in 2010; 83 per cent in 2013) agreed or strongly agreed

that members valued such representation irrespective of the outcome (Table 9.7). Statistically, this variance was not significant ($t = 0.75, p < .05$).

Table 9.7: Agreed or Disagreed that Members Valued Union Representation Irrespective of the Outcome

	2010 n=57	%	2013 n=47	%
Strongly agree	21	37	21	45
Agree	32	56	18	38
Neither	3	5	5	11
Disagree	0	0	3	6
Strongly disagree	1	2	0	0
Total	57	100	47	100

In interviews, forty four of the reps (79 per cent) indicated that their members valued the support that they received, irrespective of what the outcome was.

9.5.1 Summary

Reps expressed divergent views regarding their effectiveness. While some stated that they had little impact on managers' decisions, others said that it ensured their members received more favourable treatment. Strong views were expressed that, without union support, members would receive worse treatment, and irrespective of outcomes, they valued the representation that they received.

9.6 Union Strategies

Management's SAP implementation presented reps with many difficulties, in particular the challenge of making collective, individual representation. Representing members under the SAP policy was by its very nature an individualistic process. Consequentially, UNISON adopted a range of strategies whereby they attempted to collectivise union member representation by strengthening training, through negotiations, a legal challenge, procedural challenges, stress surveys, workload campaigns and by consulting over industrial action. Firstly, the union's industrial action strategy is considered as its inability to mobilise members over the SAP conditioned less offensive strategies.

9.6.1 Industrial Action Strategy

In February 2011, when Glasgow City UNISON debated a motion on the SAP its full impact was being felt. Reps agreed that in the “current climate of cuts...the threat of job losses and the increased stress because of increased workloads”, the SAP was a “stick to beat workers” (BC Motion, 24th February, 2011). In addition to strengthening its member representation, the meeting agreed “to carry out a branch-wide workplace consultation on industrial action up to and including strike action to force our employer to come up with a new Absence Policy” (*ibid*).

However, this consultation, which was carried out through workplace meetings, found insufficient support for action. A Branch Officer suggested that the union found it difficult to mobilise members to take collective action over the SAP because of the relatively small number who were caught up in the policy at any one time, and “the possible tone” that some members adopted towards their co-workers which was not as “sympathetic as it should be” (065). A Fieldwork rep stated that mobilising union members against the SAP was “never going to happen” because of a general apathetic view that “I’ve got a job, I don’t want to rock the boat” (034). An Education rep thought that workers, “fearful for their jobs”, accepted workplace wrongs: “people are saying this isn’t fair but I don’t think they are up for a fight” (050).

A CSG rep felt that there were inherent problems organising non-cooperation action as it left sick workers feeling isolated and “singled out” (014). Inevitably, they would become the campaign focus at a time when, as another CSG rep stated, they were feeling “stressed” by an “intimidating process” (011). Workers caught up in the SAP “feel very, very strongly about it” but it was “very, very difficult” to convince them to take industrial action over it as it “does not affect everybody at any one point of time” (014). A Residential rep stated that stewards had no option but to cooperate with the SAP as non-compliance would allow the Council free rein to impose “even more Draconian rules [and] regulations...refusing to participate in the long run would be detrimental to our members” (010).

UNISON consulted FLMs about them boycotting the SAP. However, this never “went any further than a few meetings” (Branch Officer, 065). Despite this, the union produced information for FLMs who chaired absence meetings in the hope that “we’re all signing off the same hymn sheet” (017). An earlier effort to encourage them to sign a protest letter to the Chief Executive (Leaflet, February 2011) did not receive widespread support. Although “a substantial

number” of FLMs were willing to take boycotting action, many feared “being disciplined if they didn’t do what they are asked” (Fieldwork rep, 048).

Another Fieldwork rep suggested that the SAP’s punitive application was now “so widespread”, that the conditions for future collective mobilisation over the policy were being created (025). However, this has not yet emerged.

9.6.2 Training

As a result of UNISON’s inability to mobilise its members to take industrial action over SAP changes, it sought other ways to collectivise its approach. Firstly, it trained its reps. In February 2010, demonstrating how “high up on each Steward’s agenda this issue has become”, over 95 reps attended a branch absence seminar (*Voice*, March, 2010: 4). A Branch Officer felt that the union was successful in “tooling” its reps to represent individual members. Reps were given “decent advice” on the legal aspects of complex sickness absence cases and were provided with “tick lists” and “tricks” that allowed them to approach their representation in a systematic and collective manner (065). A Residential rep reported that new reps were given advice on “the best tactics to use” and “best questions to ask” (042). Their representative role was emphasised: “We try and tell them there is no one best fix fits all. You have to go and listen to what the absence is and look at the underlying problem [and] mitigating circumstances (042).

9.6.3 Legal Challenge

The union also pursued legal action to defend its members, firstly through legal arguments within individual representation cases to prevent disciplinary action and secondly, when that failed, legal redress.

9.6.3.1 Underlying Health Problems

When using legal arguments, reps contended that managers were required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ under the Equality Act (TUC, 2013). A Chief Executives rep said that he looked for “flaws in the policy” or any management failure to make allowances for underlying medical conditions (045). As a Branch Officer stated in written evidence to the *Forsyth v GCC* (2012) ET, ‘The only time that employees won’t get disciplined for being off sick is if they have an underlying health problem’ (Statement, 19th June, 2012).

A Residential rep explained, how after “trawling through NHS websites for advice”, he demonstrated that a worker’s absence was related to an underlying condition, bringing to “an

end to proceedings within a minute” (012). Nevertheless, establishing what constituted an underlying health condition was contested. CSG management defined it as

‘...a significant medical condition, either physical or mental, which has been diagnosed by a GP or Specialist and is reported or recognised as such by the Company’s Occupational Health Advisor’ (Liaison Minutes, 28th April, 2011).

“Chronic” conditions such as “severe asthma, diabetes, arthritis or heart disease” were included in the definition (*ibid*). A LES rep reported that he experienced difficulties persuading management to refer sick workers to occupational health. Management were asked, “What are the medical qualifications to tell someone that they don’t have an underlying health problem” (045). However, establishing that a worker had an underlying health condition was a ‘double-edged sword’. While it lessened the threat of disciplinary action, it increased the risk of dismissal under capability procedures. As a Finance rep stated, “if you’re not covered by an underlying health problem...you will be disciplined. If you are covered by the Equality Act they’ll threaten capability. There is no middle ground (041).

A Residential rep expressed the view that management targeted workers with long-term illnesses, allowing them to “stay off as much as they want because they are eventually going to bag them because they are not attending” (042).

9.6.3.2 Employment Tribunal

A Fieldwork rep explained that the *Forsyth v GCC* (2012) ET application was a union initiated “collective response” to the SAP (002). Ms. Forsyth, a UNISON member was put forward by the union as a test case. After hitting sickness absence triggers, she was disciplined, receiving a written warning and was informed that her OSP would be removed if she went absent in the next 6 months. Following the disciplinary hearing, Ms. Forsyth was hospitalised for a short period and lost her OSP. At the ensuing ET in July, 2012, UNISON’s legal representatives argued that OSP removal broke nationally agreed ‘Red Book’ (UNISON Scotland, 1999) conditions of service and represented an unlawful wage deduction.

The ET hinged on managers’ decision making with the union arguing that managers “did not have any discretion” (009). However, taking the view that there was no automaticity to workers being disciplined, Judge Bell adjudicated that the Council’s decision to withdraw Ms. Forsyth’s OSP payments was legal; while the Council’s guidance to managers ‘has narrowed the area of discretion; it has not eliminated it’ (*Forsyth v GCC*, 2012). Nevertheless, following the tribunal judgement the union sought clarification about manager’s discretion. In December

2012, Social Work management confirmed that ‘Trigger points give the line manager an opportunity to assess the individual situation and consider several options’ (Liaison Minute, 14th December, 2012). It was made clear that if an employee had an underlying health problem ‘there will be no disciplinary hearing’ and that there were also ‘a wide range of exceptional circumstances which can negate the need for a disciplinary hearing’ (*ibid*). Management stated that

Line managers do indeed have the responsibility and discretion to assess each situation and action it appropriately, while the Attendance Management Team provide them with robust advice and guidance on GCC Policy (*ibid*).

Reps had conflicting views whether the tribunal decision had any impact on SAP implementation. Many stated that it made no difference. A Residential rep said that he would be “very surprised if half of the managers in the Council are aware of that case” (006). A Fieldwork rep stated that she showed managers the judgment but it made no difference. She stated that they would say “I know it is terrible, it is shocking” but they would “still go ahead and take it to discipline” when workers hit the triggers (043).

However, other reps felt that the judgment led to their members receiving more favourable treatment. A Residential rep stated that managers became more cautious and “check a lot more now” with HR before taking any action (013). A Fieldwork rep reported that he used the ET decision as leverage in absence meetings, embarrassing managers into recognising that they should take decisions, not a “faceless, nameless bureaucratic HR” (021). One LES rep reminded managers that the Council’s lawyer argued at the tribunal that they “had a choice” (008). Nevertheless, when interviewed in 2013, one year after the tribunal judgement, one Fieldwork rep said that SAP implementation was “worse this year”, stating that management “seem to be more...punitive and rigorous” (027).

9.6.4 Procedural Challenges

Representing members under the SAP stretched union resources particularly with regard to reps’ time. But absence procedures also placed great demands on managers and HR too. UNISON encouraged their members to be represented at every stage of the SAP. As a CSG rep stated, reps “very quickly” became “entrenched in the policy and its application and operation” (031). A Branch Officer said that reps were skilled in SAP representation, “throwing spanners in the works” as they went through the “tick list” of issues that they raised to defend members (066). A Fieldwork rep indicated that one “element” of union representation was about “making

life difficult” for managers: “We can take these things to the end of the line and take up a lot of time and energy” (021).

A Finance rep stated that he encouraged members to appeal against decisions as they “have got nothing to lose”: “A lot of them do, some of them don’t” (022). A Residential rep said that the union’s strategy was to “tie the council up” (042). Describing the disciplinary process as “a game”, “you’re wasting their time. We do to them what they do to us; we appeal everything now” (042).

A College rep stated that when faced with an “unreasonable” management which “targeted” members, reps took out a collective grievance. This gave reps access to the College Board. Managers found this time consuming and potentially embarrassing. “Going above” managers was something which they “fear most of all” and was a dynamic which College reps “increasingly” exploited (036).

9.6.5 Stress and Workload Campaigns

A Finance rep expressed the view that although absence was an “individual issue”, the union could collectivise its approach by identifying common, reoccurring issues that were linked to work processes and the work environment: “If there [are] three people or four people in an office off with stress that becomes a collective issue. They’re all off for a reason, it could be workload, it could be management style”. He explained that UNISON’s “No to Overwork” campaign, which sought to prevent workers being stressed through high workloads, was a collective response to SAP implementation (022).

Many Council reps reported that workers faced increased pressure as a result of rising service demands and staff shortages. A Fieldwork rep stated that such pressures were particularly acute in Social Work with “huge” numbers absent with work-related stress. She stated that she witnessed “a lot of stumbling from one crisis to the next” but little management effort to manage workloads. Raising workload issues in absence meetings was one way the union could collectivise its response. She reported that reps were considering “collective grievances about overwork” as a “preventative” measure to avert workers “going off sick with stress” (002).

A Daycare steward stated “workload affects everyone”, reporting that in one Fieldwork office, workers were coming in at weekends to “catch up on their workload”. She suggested that management “pretend[ed] they did not know that was going on” (004). A CSG rep observed

that in absence meetings, managers would say “You are having an impact on the service”. However, he stated that management’s refusal to take “responsibility for not...filling posts” increased workloads and affected service provision (019). Another LES rep said that agile working resulted in “the overwhelming majority” of workers not having “a fixed desk”. The resulting daily pressure of having to find a space to work raised stress levels (045).

Several reps explained how they were collectivising stress issue. According to a LES rep, under health and safety legislation, stress audits forced management “to change things” (047). Another LES rep hoped that stress survey results would persuade management to take action but was worried they would be “sanitised” and “swept under the carpet” (040). Similarly, DRS reps were planning to carry out a stress survey to “target” teams where they thought stress levels were “high” (051). By identifying underlying work issues that contributed to absence levels, the reps hoped to shift workers’ sickness away from being an individual issue, where workers had to take responsibility for their illness and improve their attendance, to one where management were forced to change the work environment and work organisation.

9.6.6 Management-Union Negotiations and Liaison Arrangements

Management-union liaison meetings epitomise the structured antagonism of conflict and co-operation that characterise work relationships (Edwards, 1995: 15). Here, around a table, workplace effort bargaining takes place. Although no formal negotiation took place over the SAP’s introduction, reps were able in some areas to slow down and mitigate the terms of its application, utilising long-established formal and informal liaison channels.

9.6.6.1 Formal Liaison Arrangements

DRS provided the best example of how reps used local liaison arrangements to influence SAP implementation. According to one DRS rep, in the “first few months” following the Council’s shift towards stricter SAP implementation it was “pandemonium”. Then, through formal liaison meetings, DRS reps convinced management that there were financial and productivity costs associated with the time managers, HR, reps and union members spent in attending absence related meetings: “We put the argument to them in a number of different ways and this seemed to strike a chord with them...it wasn’t saving them any money” (001).

Utilising partnership-working terminology, a DRS rep wrote to management expressing concern that at

...a time where management and UNISON should be working closely together on issues such as Tomorrow's Office and Tomorrow's Council, absence management is taking up an increased amount of time (Email, 21st April, 2010).

The rep highlighted the costs of workforce presenteeism and its impact on workers who were "getting stressed and angry and therefore laying themselves open to making mistakes" (*ibid*). According to another DRS rep, senior management informed the union "We never asked for this" (001). DRS management perceived strict SAP implementation as a centrally imposed policy that did not fit their department's needs. A DRS rep reported that absence was discussed at liaison meetings and it was agreed that a punitive approach was not necessary. The strong management-union relationships at directorate level filtered through to workplaces where informal "chit chat" with managers before meetings often produced positive results for members (051).

Similarly, within GHA there were long-established management-union relationships. A GHA rep believed that the organisation's approach to sickness absence mirrored its industrial relations. It was stated that there was "good" management-union industrial relations at corporate level which "permeate down to local managers" who were aware that reps could take disagreements back "upstairs" (056). However, strong bargaining relationships "didn't happen overnight" and were "fought long and hard" for (056). When GHA was formed in 2003, in the face of an initially hostile management, a "stand up fight" took place and the union threatened a dispute. However, with full time officer assistance, "support [from] the stewards and the members", the disagreements were resolved through negotiations (038).

Initially, when Access was established, it was an "uphill struggle" to force management to accept the rep's role as some senior managers "had never come across a trade union" before and "didn't understand" its role (029). Highlighting how conflict and co-operation coexist (Edwards, 1979; Edwards, 1995), Access management eventually accepted the union and regular liaison meetings then took place: "We're probably the best first port of call if they want to run something by...to say 'Is it Ok, if we did this would we start a war'? And we can say 'Don't...not a good idea'" (029).

9.6.6.2 Informal Liaison Arrangements

Informal management-union relationships appeared synonymous with formal ones. Both existed hand-in-hand. A Chief Executives rep indicated that his "good relationship" with senior managers occasionally allowed him to approach HR informally to call in "a couple of favours" that prevented a union member's dismissal. He felt that his managers were "strong enough, wise

enough and have enough compassion” to consider the member’s circumstances and “make a judgement...based on the facts...presented”. He sought opportunities where he could work with management “rather than having a fight with them every time we go in a room” (033).

An Access rep stated that the union’s ability to have informal discussions with managers was one reason why no worker there had been disciplined in the previous five years; management “have been supportive as they can be, they really are” (024). Another Access rep stated that management “learned to work with us rather than against us” (029).

A Finance rep highlighted how long established union-manager relationships often resulted in informal discussions: “If you have a good relationship with your managers and...they respect you as a steward then you more often get a decision or outcome you are looking for”. However, if the manager did not respect the rep this could “work against” the member. According to the rep, although many of the pragmatic managers who were open to informal discussions had left the service, some were still approachable, taking “on board” what the rep said. Sometimes, if the manager was “a bit of an arse”, the rep approached the “bosses’ boss”. However, there were limits to how often this could be done particularly if the member was “ripping the arse out of it”. Sometimes a frank conversation was necessary to inform the worker that if they kept “ripping the piss” they were going to upset the manager and affect the reps credibility which would “impact on other members”. Reps had to consider that they “don’t just have one member”, they have “thousands”. Without such honest relationships there would be a counterproductive “constant war of attrition” (009).

College reps spoke about the importance of informal relationships acting as a block on strict SAP implementation. Although management circumvented recognised agreements, a rep reported that he responded to “aggressive” managers by going to “chap the Principle’s door”. Aware of management hierarchies, the rep could go to the “right person...if there is an issue with HR or a particular manager” (028). Another College rep stated that although FLMs did not have “a consistent approach” there was an “open door” policy (036).

A Finance rep reported that although local managers were accommodative she never went in to meetings “unarmed” as they would “shoot you down in two seconds”: “You have to very clear in what you are bringing up...You need to know your game before you walk in there” (039). A Construction rep reported that he always tried to resolve issues informally: “If I’ve got a problem...I can lift the phone to the HR manager” and, although not agreeing, “she’ll always

listen to what I'll say". Sometimes, the rep's ability to approach senior management directly had positive results as FLMs wished to avoid scrutiny from the "upper echelons" (046).

Within Transport, reps had "really good relationships" with management at all levels "because we've always been constructive". Despite this, reps had "no influence" over absence cases: "It is the same every time I go in...they are going to give everybody a written warning" (055). A CSG rep stated that their senior management paid "lip service" to its, often, "quite fractious" trade union relationships and would "happily not have us". Despite this, at operational level the relationship with managers was "relatively good" and this was "down to the work...front line stewards do in maintaining that relationship" (031).

9.7 Impact on Union Organisation

This section examines the SAP's impact on union organisation in terms of recruitment, retention, motivating members to become reps and improving their skills.

9.7.1 Recruitment and Retention

In both surveys, over eight in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that SAP implementation motivated workers to join the union (83 per cent in 2010; 80 per cent in 2013) and stay in the union (90 per cent in 2010; 84 per cent in 2013) (Table 9.8). Statistically, the variance in relation to staying in the union was significant ($t = 0.04, p < .05$) but joining the union was not ($t = 0.16, p < .05$).

Table 9.8: Agreed or Disagreed that SAP Implementation Motivated Workers to Join and Stay in the Union

	Strongly Agree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Agree 2013 no (%)	Agree 2010 no (%)	Agree 2013 no (%)	Neither 2010 no (%)	Neither 2013 no (%)	Disagree 2010 no (%)	Disagree 2013 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2013 no (%)
join the union (2010 n=105; 2013 n=82)	25 (24)	14 (17)	62 (59)	52 (63)	16 (15)	10 (12)	2 (2)	5 (6)	0 (0)	1 (1)
stay in the union (2010 n=105; 2013 n=82)	36 (34)	19 (23)	59 (56)	50 (61)	9 (9)	10 (12)	1 (1)	2 (2)	0 (0)	1 (1)

In interviews, reps expressed divergent views on the impact of SAP representation on union organisation. However, although negative views were expressed, forty four reps (79 per cent) felt that their representation activities encouraged union recruitment.

A Fieldwork rep stated that if a member did not get “a good result” they will “tell everybody and their granny...the union is no use” (043). A Chief Executives rep said that “a few members...resigned from the union” because they felt that it had not “done enough for them” (054). However, a Colleges rep stated that he had “never heard of anybody” leaving the union because of the representation that they received (028). According to a Finance rep, some members said that they intended to leave the union but this did not happen (035).

Although some members were “disgruntled” about absence meeting outcomes, others joined “through word of mouth” (Residential rep, 010). Similarly, an Education rep stated workers tell their workmates “I would join the union if I was you” (050). A Residential rep suggested that union members joined the union for “personal protection” of their job, salary and conditions: “They don’t join UNISON when they first come into the workplace” but when “they’re...told they’re going to a fact-finding or...a disciplinary (042). A Finance rep suggested that workers joined the union for “insurance” purposes. Many, with lengthy service, “have never been near a disciplinary” before but were disciplined as a result of the SAP (009). Like the pensions issue, a LES rep felt that sickness absence stimulated recruitment: “Everybody reacts to pensions because everybody is going to be a pensioner. And everybody’s thinking ‘I could be sick one day’” (008).

Although the union had a high density within LES’ office based sections, it was recruiting manual workers “in the depots” because of its absence representation (008). An Education rep suggested that the SAP “certainly encourages” union retention and “others to join up” when they saw the treatment workmates received. While initially some workers took the view “I don’t need the union, I’m against striking”, they later joined because “absence management affects everybody”: “You can have your views on strikes...but your health affects everybody” (020).

A Finance rep stated that the SAP “definitely” encouraged members “to stay in the union” and fostered recruitment when workers saw the union “successfully defend somebody” and “get a decision overturned” (022). A Chief Executives rep stated that the union’s reputation rose when a worker told colleagues “I would have got sacked” without representation (033). Another Finance rep said that the SAP presented the union with a workplace organising focus as most “big ticket issues” such as workers’ terms and conditions were negotiated elsewhere (009).

A Residential rep reported that the SAP was stimulating union membership growth in her section because of workers “fear for their job” (013). Raising the union’s “profile”, a Fieldwork rep said that “word of mouth” communication helped foster the belief that the union assisted workers in their “hour of need” (007).

Even within GHA, where attendance management was generally benign and the union had a high profile, a rep said that the SAP was “a good recruitment tool” and aided retention (038). Similarly, a Glasgow Life rep reported that workers “regularly” joined UNISON when “they were in trouble” and faced an absence meeting. In particular, young workers did not “realise how important a union is” until they went off sick and needed representation (018). A Finance rep transferring to CBS said that job insecurity and management’s “hard line” on absence encouraged union recruitment as workers wanted a “security blanket” (039).

9.7.2 Making Reps – Rejuvenating the Union

Several reps reported that after being represented under the SAP, several members became involved in union activity. A LES rep stated that the union “often” recruited new reps who realised “how important the trade union is...when they’ve need help” (045). Another LES rep stated that two members he represented became reps, one becoming a senior steward (008). A Residential rep said that several new reps came “on board” after they saw the “worth” of the union when it “helped” and “supported them” (017). Another Residential rep stated that she recruited six new reps after representing them in absence meetings (013).

Several reps described how management’s implementation of the SAP strengthened union organisation. A LES rep suggested that workplace “confrontation” resulted in members becoming reps: “Nobody wants to see their fellow worker picked upon and unfairly dealt with... they come forward to say ‘What can I do to help?’” (012).

A Fieldwork rep explained how a union member “decided to fight back”, and became a rep after a disciplinary hearing (022). A Finance rep said that she appreciated the help the union gave her when she was at her “most vulnerable during long-term sickness absence”: “I turned to the union and they stood by me right throughout my illness...I though there were other people...in my position [and] the least I can do is try and help (039).

Yet despite these reports, some members drew the opposite conclusion after seeing the demands placed on reps. A Finance rep suggested that some members were put off becoming a

rep after seeing “the work” that reps were “putting in”, concluding “I can’t afford to do that because of my workload” (023).

9.7.3 Developing Skills

Several reps said that representing members under the SAP was a positive experience that allowed them to improve their union skills and knowledge. A Finance rep stated that a FAI was “a great way for [reps] to get experience” as it was often “quite straight forward” (009). A LES rep said that there was “predictability” about absence meetings unlike other disciplinary issues where “bizarre” decisions sometimes occurred: “With absence you tend to know what you are getting involved in” (012). A Residential rep stated that supporting members under the SAP was “easier and simpler” than other representation because “everything” was “factual”, “based on figures as opposed to perceptions or suggestions” (017). A Chief Executives rep said that SAP representation was crucial to “skilling up trade union activists” and “the best way of getting training” was “on the job” (033).

9.8 Union Profile

In interviews, twenty six reps (46 per cent) felt that representing union members under the SAP providing an organising focus, increasing its visibility and standing amongst its members. A Residential stated that “before the absence policy came in people never saw a union rep”. The policy increased reps’ contact with union members, providing an opportunity to gain “a feel for what is going on round about you” (006). Another Residential rep stated that the increased number of members who faced a disciplinary hearing made the union “real” and “accessible” as workers knew “they just have to lift the phone” (017).

A Chief Executives rep agreed that the SAP raised the union’s profile: “A lot of people are getting to know me and... approach me”. While absence issues predominated, members also sought advice on “other aspects of their work” which they would not previously have done (054). While a Fieldwork rep accepted absence issues took her away from “union building” activities, she said that SAP representation was a vital “bread and butter” aspect of union organising:

“If people are about to get kicked out of the door...it is important that we’re there. Members are increasingly having contact with a shop steward...so they’re having experience [of] how important a union is...fighting for them” (002).

9.9 SAP Implementation and Union Mobilisation

This section explores reps' perceptions as to what extent union members' feelings about the SAP impacted on employer-employee relationships, discontents and propensity to take action over other issues.

In both surveys, about eight in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that their members' treatment under the SAP fostered adversarial "us-them" employer-employee relationships (82 cent in 2010; 84 per cent in 2013) and fuelled member discontents with their employer (78 cent in 2010; 81 per cent in 2013) (Table 9.9).

Table 9.9: Agreed or Disagreed about SAP Implementation's Impact on Employer-employee Relations and Fuelling Discontents

	Strongly Agree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Agree 2013 no (%)	Agree 2010 no (%)	Agree 2013 no (%)	Neither 2010 no (%)	Neither 2013 no (%)	Disagree 2010 no (%)	Disagree 2013 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2010 no (%)	Strongly Disagree 2013 no (%)
fosters "us-them" employer-employee relationships (2010 n=106; 2013 n=82)	37 (35)	29 (35)	50 (47)	40 (49)	15 (14)	8 (10)	3 (3)	5 (6)	1 (1)	0 (0)
"fuels" union member discontents with the employer (2010 n=105; 2013 n=82)	38 (36)	25 (30)	44 (42)	42 (51)	18 (17)	9 (11)	4 (4)	5 (6)	1 (1)	1 (1)

Leaving them "totally undervalued", a Cordia rep stated that, there was an "increasing awareness" amongst union members that their SAP treatment, reflected management's view that they were "just a commodity that once you've been used...we no longer require you" (044). An Education rep said that the policy created "ill feeling" amongst workers who felt that their manager had "got it in" for them (020).

However, although reps' perceived that their members' SAP experiences fostered adversarial employer-employee relationships and increased discontents, they were less certain that it affected their willingness to take action over other issues. In both surveys, about half the reps agreed or strongly agreed that their members' decisions to participate in collective

decisions such as voting in a pay ballot was affected by their treatment under the SAP (54 per cent in 2010; 53 per cent in 2013) (Table 9.10).

Table 9.10: Agreed or Disagreed that the SAP influenced Other Union Member Decisions (e.g. in pay ballot)

	2010 n=104	%	2013 n=82	%
Strongly agree	14	13	12	15
Agree	43	41	31	38
Neither	36	35	30	37
Disagree	8	8	7	9
Strongly disagree	3	3	2	2
Total	104	101	82	101

In interview, several reps suggested that their employers' disciplinary approach to absence made it less likely workers would respond positively to union mobilisation over other issues, such as pay. As reported previously, several reps stated that, in the face of strict attendance control and a more generalised employer offensive, workers felt the need to "keep their head down" (009, 019, 041). However, other reps felt that workers' SAP experiences led to an increased bitterness towards their employer and this influenced collective action decisions. Nevertheless, while such feelings may be a factor in deciding voting intentions, it is difficult to untangle their full significance.

A DRS rep stated that there had been high member participation in the Pensions Dispute (2011). However, he felt that the main motivation for taking action was members' opposition to government policies rather than their perceptions of unfair work treatment. He said that the voluntary severance programme took "a lot of tension and heat" out of workplaces (001).

A Residential rep felt that workers' resentment about management actions fed into industrial action strike ballots: "We didnae find we had to work too hard to get a good ballot result because management did the work for us" (017). The residential workers' combative spirit was evident when they took strike action in 2014 following the imposition of new 12 hour shift patterns (*Socialist Worker*, 25 March, 2014). The rep thought that residential workers' anger about work treatment was a reason why one-in-three voted against the negotiated settlement which increased staffing and awarded a £1,495 compensation payment: "I

understood where they were coming from...they are getting treated badly, the absence stuff...they've got to come in at weekends, they get treated like shit". It was said that residential workers had a "stuff it" attitude where they were prepared to confront management "because every chance they get into us" (017). After the dispute, union organisation was strengthened and several new reps were elected. According to a Residential rep, workers exercised "a wee bit of power for a short piece of time and they enjoyed that" (*Socialist Worker*, 25 March, 2014).

A LES rep reported that his traditionally "very conservative" members' attitude to taking industrial action was changing. He said that several issues, such as pay, pensions, flexible working restrictions and the absence policy were fusing together to heighten workers' frustrations (008). A Fieldwork rep stated that her members were "making the connections" between "austerity measures, the cuts, the volume of work" and "the big waggy finger" of absence interviews where workers felt "put upon...victimised even" (058). An Education rep said that members' "ill feeling" towards the SAP was stronger "than not getting a pay rise" so when an opportunity to vote for industrial action presented itself, their workplace grievances came to the fore. Workers were now less "tolerant" about accepting pay restraint to protect jobs: "You've had the cold...you've been battered in the playground, you've been absence managed, it is making you more determined...I'm coming out for the slightest wee thing" (020).

Similarly, a CSG rep said that workers' grievances about the SAP affected recent pay ballot voting (031). Another CSG rep agreed that strict SAP implementation influenced how workers felt about other issues:

If they work for an organisation that treats them unfairly and has really punitive policies then they are looking at it from a wider perspective...if you've been off sick, got a doctor's line, you're then...disciplined. It does not leave you with a lot of faith in the organisation (019).

Other reps reported that workers' SAP treatment affected their attitude to collective issues, making them "angry" (Finance rep, 039) and helped "galvanise a spirit of militancy" (Fieldwork rep, 021). However, another Fieldwork rep said that workers do not always make the link between workplace grievances and other issues. She felt that workers focused on what was happening to them at a particular time; "sometimes there is a frustration...if you don't win something, [sigh] ah, what's the point?" (002).

A LES rep suggested that union members viewed the SAP "very separate" from other issues; the determining factor was "How does it affect me?" (040). Feeling that the SAP did not affect voting intentions on other issues, a Fieldwork rep stated that members

“compartmentalise” issues; when “big issues” arise “they tend to galvanise people in a way the absence policy doesn’t” (025). Similarly, a Branch Officer said that while “some” workers “might “make connection between the SAP and pay, most did not. Despite some workers’ reluctance to take strike action they still instinctively wished “to support the trade union” (066).

A Fieldwork rep indicated that union members had “very mixed” responses towards taking industrial action. While some took the view “We need to stand and do something about it”, others adopted the attitude “We’re lucky to have a job” (043). A Chief Executives rep stated that workers’ perceptions that the union was ineffective in absence meetings meant that they were pessimistic about mobilising over pay: “If...the union has done everything it can and you feel as if that is not helping you, you’re not going to feel any confidence” (054).

Although there were doubts about the union’s ability to protect members under the SAP impacted on their willingness to fight over other issues, a converse view was also expressed. It was suggested that the union’s inability to make progress on pay and pensions negatively affected members’ willingness to fight over absence. As a Fieldwork rep stated, union members feelings that they were “badly let down” during the Pensions Dispute led to “much” workplace “apathy” as members said “What’s the point...of collective action or even striking” (034).

9.10 Barriers to Mobilisation

Reps identified a range of factors that made it difficult for the union to organise collectively against the SAP. Such factors included the individual nature of absence-related union representation, the relative small number of members involved with the policy at any one time, the heavy demands on reps’ time and the union’s failure to mobilise FLMs.

9.10.1 Individual Nature of Sickness Absence Union Representation

Limiting mobilisation, by its very nature sickness absence affects a relatively small percentage of the workforce at any one time. As a Fieldwork rep stated: “Absence is personal to you or the member and to be honest I think people tend to be selfish” (034).

A Residential rep said that with pay and pensions issues there is “a common denominator” which required a collective response while sickness absence was “about you personally” (042). Union reps heard “horror stories” of how members were treated but ordinary members do not:

If...my pension's going to be slashed it affects all of us so we are collectively aggrieved...but if it is only me in that office who's getting disciplined...everybody else has gone home happy and not known about it (042).

A Fieldwork rep said that union members were not interested in the SAP “unless they are personally affected”. Then, their attitude “shifts” from disbelief to questioning why has the union not taken action to prevent its implementation (043). A Glasgow Life rep suggested that “ninety per cent” of members did not know what the trigger points are: “It’s not affecting them. They don’t know [the] policy and how it is implemented” (049). A LES rep stated that workers who were sick did not see SAP implementation as a collective issue, instead perceiving it as an issue for the sick worker (045). A Residential rep said that there was sympathy for workers with “genuine” illnesses was but not for those who were perceived to be misusing the policy (006). A Residential rep suggested that workers were now “casualties” in management’s “one glove fits all” approach, paying the price for management’s past failure to deal with those who were “abusing the system” (013). Similarly, an Education rep said that while HR accepted that some workers’ absence was genuine they felt that there were “a lot of skivers”: “...they are trying to hammer...people who are dogging it...But everybody is tarred with the same brush” (016).

A Finance rep suggested that some members did hold negative views of fellow workers who were “swinging the lead”: “I go to my work; I’m never off sick, so why therefore would I want to bother about people who are of sick ‘at it’”. However, he did not sense that this was a widespread feeling (009). A Branch Officer maintained management exploited such opinions to foster divisions, to “divide and rule” the workforce (065). A Fieldwork rep, while accepting that divisions existed, reported that she had not seen any. She found that workers who were not sick sympathised with those who were, accepting that they too could face illness (002). A CSG rep, while accepting that in the past some workers may have gone “off at the drop of a hat...for silly things”, stated that this “doesn’t happen anymore” (014).

A Chief Executives rep stated that sickness absence was “very personal” to the sick worker, occurring when they were “at their lowest level”. Stressed workers did not have any “fight in them because they are so deflated and run down” (054). Some workers felt “apologetic” about their sickness, internalising it rather than seeing illness as a natural aspect of life. Workers were made to feel that “the spotlight” was on them, leaving them feeling “isolated” and “to blame for their absences” (002). A CSG rep said workers were too “embarrassed” to tell fellow workers that they were facing an absence disciplinary hearing, feeling that they have “done something really bad, something really wrong”, so they “keep it to themselves” (019).

9.10.2 Number of Union Members Involved with the SAP

According to a Fieldwork rep, sickness absence affected a “small and sometimes disparate” group of union members: “You’ve maybe got...one person in a team affected...that is why it is difficult to collectivise an issue” (002). In similar terms, another Fieldwork rep felt “collectivising” absence issues were “almost impossible” because it was “still a minority of people who are involved in the absence process”. He reported that work colleagues will “get quite adamant if somebody in my room gets disciplined...you hear how dreadful it is” but this sentiment “fades quite quickly” (021). A Residential rep explained that the relatively low numbers involved in the SAP made “it is very difficult to mobilise...the large number that you would need for a dispute”. Although members were “very wary” of the SAP and knew it was “not fair”, it was “very difficult to organise a dispute” on the issue (017).

9.10.3 Demands on Reps

According to a Fieldwork rep, the individual nature of SAP-related union representation took reps away from “being able to organise in a grass roots, collective way”. She felt that reps were effectively “concentrating” their time on assisting management’s policy administration. This was “time consuming” and meant reps found it difficult to get to union meetings (002). Another Fieldwork rep stated that reps were “tied up” with representing members in absence managements meetings while their own work demands were increasing: “I think it has made the trade union...less effective than as it was in the past in terms of campaigns for collective issues, like wages and pay” (003).

9.10.4 Front Line Managers

Consistent with general trends towards devolving HR functions to FLMs, managers had a crucial role in workplace SAP implementation (Evans and Walters, 2002: 59). UNISON found it difficult to mobilise FLMs to take collective action against the policy. However, although a “substantial number” of FLMs wanted to take action and some “polarisation” about their role emerged, this sentiment was not widespread. While many FLMs were unhappy with their “punishing” and “policing”, rather than “supporting” role, this did not translate into them feeling confident enough to take action, despite reps efforts to encourage to see themselves as “part of the union”. The union encouraged FLMs to “put their head above the parapet in the way lots of members have to” but most wanted “to keep their position, kudos and status” (002).

9.11 Analytical Framework: Push-Pull at the Frontier of Control

Before concluding this chapter, this section attempts to synthesise the findings of this and the previous chapter within an analytical framework. In Chapter Eight, a patchwork quilt of varying (sometimes contingent) managerial responses to SAP implementation emerged, mediated as evidenced in this chapter by the strength of union organisation. This reflected the dynamic (and sometimes unchanging) push-pull interaction between management action and (utilising a range of strategies and tactics) union mobilisation and resistance. The analytical framework below (Figures 9.2 and 9.3) highlights the variations in management SAP implementation and union strength between 2010 and 2013.

Managerial implementation is defined in terms of how strictly the policy is implemented (the use of FAIs and triggers were scored 1 each), whether FLMs had discretion (scored 1), and to what extent there was a disciplinary approach (in respect of the use of disciplinary sanctions, OSP withdrawal and capability procedures, all scoring 1 each). The figures (Appendices 6 and 7) were obtained by examining in detail, service by service, questionnaire responses to relevant statements which was cross-referenced with interview data. When reps interview responses contradicted questionnaire data (as in Access, Colleges, DRS and Education), greater weight was attached to what reps said in interviews. In areas where there was no questionnaire response (Transport and Construction in 2010 and 2013 and Finance Co in 2013), scoring was based on interview data.

Steward organisation figures (Appendices 8 and 9) are measured in terms of the number of reps (less than 5 scored 1, 5-9 scored 2, more than 9 scored 3), their experience (average length of service more than two years scored 1), whether there were regular meetings (scored 1), elected officers (e.g. Convenor) (scored 1) and established bargaining and liaison arrangements (scored 1). It was thus assumed that a strong stewards committee will have more reps than a less strong one, will meet regularly rather than intermittently or not at all, will have developed such a level or organisation to have elected officers, and will have established lines of communication with management (either formal or informal or both). The number of reps was taken from 2010 and 2013 union lists. Data about reps experience was contained within questionnaire responses. Information about the regularity of meetings, elected officials and bargaining arrangements was obtained from research interviews and the researcher's observations and knowledge of the research sites.

Utilising the *managerial implementation* and *steward organisation* scores, the data is presented figuratively in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 below (and detailed in Appendix 10). For instance in 2010, Finance has a *managerial implementation* score of 6 and *steward organisation* score of 6 (6x6), placing it in the high *managerial implementation*/strong *steward organisation* cell.

Firstly, figure 9.1 highlights that high managerial SAP implementation in 2010 was matched by high steward's organisation in Social Work (6x7), Finance, Glasgow Life (6x6), Colleges (5x7), CSG and LES (5x6). In Social Work, where there were high levels of conflict, the SAP was strictly implemented, matched by strong union organisation. Against a backdrop of service reorganisation and budgetary pressures, several strikes had taken place in the department (Appendix 5). There was high managerial implementation in Cordia (6x4), the Chief Executive's, Parking and Transport (5x5) but less strong union organisation. In Construction (3x3) and Finance Co (3x2) union organisation was weaker but SAP implementation was not high. In Education (2x7), Access, DRS (2x6) and GHA (0x7) there was strong union organisation but weak managerial SAP implementation. Although the Council pursued a modernising agenda, with the introduction of market and commercial practices, DRS managers embraced the department's long-established public sector ethos and were reluctant to take disciplinary action against the workers they supervised (DRS Rep, 001).

Figure 9.1: Managerial SAP Implementation and Steward Organisation, 2010**Managerial
Implementation**

6	Social Work (6x7) Finance/ Glasgow Life (6x6)	Cordia (6x4)	
5 High	Colleges (5/7) CSG/ LES (5x6)	Chief Exec/ Parking/ Transport (5x5)	
4			
3 Medium			Construction (3x3) Finance Co (3x2)
2	Education (2x7) Access/ DRS (2x6)		
1 Low			
0	GHA (0x7)		
	7 Strong	5 Medium	3 Weak 1

Steward Organisation

Figure 9.2 highlights that by 2013 a shift to stricter SAP implementation had taken place in Education (6/7) as it moved from the low *managerial implementation/ high stewards organisation* cell in 2010 to high *managerial Implementation/ high stewards organisation* cell then. Again in 2013, SAP implementation was high in Social Work (5x7), matched by strong union organisation. However, reps' questionnaire responses indicated that some slackening of managerial implementation was detected there as managers exercised greater discretion. Managerial implementation in both the Finance and Chief Executive's departments remained high in 2013. However, the Finance reps' organisation had become weaker while the Chief Executives became stronger as a result of Finance reps transferring to its CBS section. In CSG and LES, union organisation remained strong but there was a tightening of an already highly implemented policy.

Figure 9.2: Managerial SAP Implementation and Steward Organisation, 2013**Managerial
Implementation**

6	Education (6x7) LES/ CSG (6x6)	Finance (6x5) Cordia (6x4)	
5 High	Social Work/ Chief Exec/ Colleges (5x7)	Parking/ Transport/ Glasgow Life (5x5)	
4			
3 Medium	DRS (3x6)		Construction/ Finance Co (3/3)
2			
1 Low	GHA (1x7)		
0	Access (0/6)		
	7 Strong	5 Medium	3 Weak 1

Steward Organisation

DRS moved from the low *managerial implementation/high stewards organisation* cell in 2010 to medium *managerial implementation/high stewards organisation* in 2013 (3x6). Access remained in the low *managerial implementation/high stewards organisation* cell in 2013, scoring 0x6. SAP policy implementation in 2013 was lower than 2010 (2x6). The UNISON reps who transferred from the Council to Access understood the importance of maintaining strong union organisation. They thought that Access avoided confrontation with the union as this was “bad for business” (053) and that management’s priority was ensuring that they met the terms of their contract with the Council (024,029,053)

GHA remained in the low *managerial implementation/high stewards organisation* cell in 2013, scoring 1x7. In interview, reps reported that the GHA was not subject to the Council’s budgetary pressures and implemented the SAP in a non-disciplinary, welfare-orientated manner.

9.12 Summary

SAP representation placed many demands on reps as they supported members in a range of meetings: pre-meetings, FAIs, disciplinary hearings and appeal hearings. More than any other issue, absence occupied the time reps spent on union representation. While reps expressed divergent views about their effectiveness, it was generally accepted that members who were represented received more favourable treatment than those who were not; that outcomes would be much worse if members had no union support; and irrespective of outcomes, members appreciated the support and assistance that they received.

Although reps wished to pursue an industrial action strategy, they found it difficult to mobilise members to take collective action over the policy. In particular, efforts to persuade FLMs to boycott the policy were not fruitful. Facing such difficulties, the union improved its reps' training, pursued a legal challenge, adopted procedural challenges, developed its stress and workload campaigns, and made use, where it could, of established management-union liaison arrangements, both formal and informal, to challenge management's stricter SAP. While representing members under the policy stretched union resources, reps felt that it generally had a positive impact on union organisation in terms of recruitment, retention, encouraging members to become reps, developing reps' skills and raising the union's profile.

Members' treatment under the SAP drove frustrations and fostered confrontational employer-employee relationships. Reps suggested that there was a dialectical relationship between members' SAP treatment and their willingness to take action over other issues. While some reps felt that their members' SAP experiences were a factor which positively influenced decisions to take action over other issues, other reps did not think that this was the case.

Chapter 10: Sickness Absence Management: The Contested Terrain

10.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the research findings' significance. The implications of the thesis are grouped around several themes. Firstly, the processes which are generating stricter local government SAP implementation, in particular the economic, organisational, political and social policy drivers are examined. Drawing on the data, the reasons for this change are considered within the context of weakened public sector workplace regulatory regimes. The extent to which strict attendance management implementation shifted the frontier of control in employers' favour is examined.

Thereafter, the effect of strict SAPs on industrial relations and the implications for union organisation are explored. In general terms, the shift towards harsher attendance management challenged reps' ability to defend their members. However, although it typified a more robust assertion of managerial prerogative it did not go unchallenged. Then, the effectiveness of union responses to management SAP implementation and the extent to which reps have been able to resist the employers' offensive is assessed.

Finally, the implications of the thesis in respect of current debates regarding the state of workplace union organisation and the role of workplace reps within that, in the face of changed workplace control regimes and current work realities, are then considered.

10.2 Local Government Attendance Management

10.2.1 The 'War on the Sickies'

Following Taylor *et al* (2010), this study is premised on the belief that much of the sociological and management literature on sickness absence and absence management does not reflect current realities. Contrary to Edwards and Greasley's (2010) suggestion that 'coercive forms' of attendance management are 'rare' (p. 25), disciplinary approaches towards workers' sickness absence have become widespread. Instead of there being a 'general neglect' of attendance issues (Edwards, 2005: 394), evidence in support of a more punitive approach, negatively impacting on union members, can be found in union sources (CSP, 2016; Dumbleton, 2011: 1; Harbinson, 2016; PCS, 2008; UNISON, 2007: 4, 2011a; Unite, 2014: 26) and from the empirical data presented here.

The Council's decision to take a tougher stand on employees' attendance, declared as the 'War on the Sickies' (*Evening Times*, 18th March, 2009), was typical of a generalised, often media-heralded, employer offensive on sick workers. For instance, the *Coventry Telegraph* (2006) announced that the council's Chief Executive 'had declared war on staff who throw "sickies" without good reason'. The stated intention was not to "nail" workers who are "genuinely sick" but to persuade those "who consistently exhibit short-term sickness where there isn't sufficient substantiation of sickness". Similarly, the *Scotsman* (2011) commented that two hundred NHS Lothian "Sicknote" staff face sack' as 'bosses declared war' on those 'pulling 'sickies"'. NHS Lothian's HR Director was unapologetic about the organisation's "aggressive" stance: "if you are pulling sickies or not bothering to come to work, we are coming after you". Similarly, Essex Police (Tahir, 2013), Tayside Contracts (*Evening Telegraph*, 2013), and council workers in Cardiff (*Wales on Line*, 2010), Kirklees (BBC, 2010) and Staffordshire (*The Sentinel*, 2010) were warned to improve their attendance otherwise they would face punitive action. As stated previously, Glasgow council workers were informed that they had to 'ditch the duvet days...or pay the price' (*Evening Times*, 18th March 2009).

Unlike Marchington and Wilkinson (2008: 299), the thesis found no evidence of a soft approach to attendance management. Instead, by tightening an existing policy, the Council proposed that, unless there were exceptional circumstances, workers faced losing OSP and disciplinary action if they hit prescribed triggers, (GCC, 2009a: 4). In both surveys, an overwhelming majority of reps (96 per cent in 2010; 85 per cent in 2013) agreed or strongly agreed that the absence policy was becoming more strictly implemented. The shift to stricter SAP implementation occurred at varying speed throughout the Council and ALEOs. In some related organisations, such as GHA and Access, there was little evidence of more robust policy implementation.

As summarised in Table 10.1, reps reported that the SAP was becoming stricter in relation to the use of triggers, advisory warning letters, disciplinary action and OSP removal.

Table 10.1: Stricter SAP

Agreed or disagreed that the SAP is stricter in relation to...	2010 Agreed or strongly agreed (%)	2013 Agreed or strongly agreed (%)
use of triggers	95	96
advisory warning letters	76	81
disciplinary action	90	93
removal of OSP	81	90

Contrary to Noon and Blyton's (2007: 88) suggestion that there was 'a widespread tendency' for managers to 'tolerate' voluntary absence, the interview data provided evidence that Council management were "tightening the screws" as they took a "harder" approach to attendance management (Daycare rep, 004). Nevertheless, by the 2013 survey there appeared to be a slackening of the SAP as there was a significant fall in all reps ($t = 0.02, p < .05$), Council reps ($t = 0.03, p < .05$) and Fieldwork reps ($t = 0.01, p < .05$) who agreed or strongly agreed that it was becoming more strictly implemented.

Table 10.2 contrasts attendance management during the period of Benign Neglect and the subsequent declaration of the 'War on the Sickies' on 18th March, 2009.

Table 10.2 Contrasting Benign Neglect SAP implementation and the 'War on the Sickies'

Pre-2009 Benign Neglect SAP	'War on the Sickies'
FLMs had discretion	FLM's discretion restricted
SAP rarely enacted	"Robust" SAP implementation
Triggers not a guide for action	Triggers became a guide for action
FAIs rarely convened	FAIs frequently convened
Disciplinary hearings rare	Disciplinary hearings regularly occurred
Disciplinary sanctions rare	Disciplinary sanctions regularly imposed
No OSP removal	OSP frequently removed

Benign Neglect was a period when FLMs had discretion over the SAP which was rarely enacted. Triggers for action were contained within the policy but did not guide FLM's action. As FAI and disciplinary hearings were uncommon occurrences, workers rarely experienced disciplinary sanctions. By contrast in the 'War on the Sickies', FLM's discretion was restricted. Integral to the Council's shift towards stricter attendance management, was its use of triggers. Widely used throughout the public sector (Wolff, 2012), they alerted managers of the need to initiate formal proceedings by first organising a FAI. Although it was claimed that "automatic triggers for discipline" did not exist, if triggers were met, unless there were exceptional circumstances such as an underlying health issue, a disciplinary hearing ensued at which a written warning was issued and OSP was withdrawn (Council officer, CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010).

Contrasting with Marchington and Wilkinson's (2008: 299) assertion that line managers had 'a wide degree of discretion' when implementing absence policies, less than four in ten agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case (27 per cent in 2010; 38 per cent in 2013). Further, over six in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that managers decided the outcome of disciplinary hearings before they occurred (63 per cent in 2010; 68 per cent in 2013). As a Residential rep stated, this made "a mockery" of proceedings (010). Nevertheless, despite the overarching shift towards a stricter approach to SAP implementation, reps in some areas such as DRS, reported that FLMs continued to exercise discretion.

Although managers may be, as Edwards (2005: 393) stated, 'often reluctant' to 'actively manage' the SAP, they were drawn into implementing it strictly. Reps offered opinions why this occurred: managers were "fearful" that if they applied discretion they would "be the subject of scrutiny" (Chief Executive's rep, 033), get their "knuckles rapped" (Fieldwork Rep, 015) or "may be disciplined" (LES rep, 045). Across Council departments and ALEOs, reps reported that the shift towards stricter SAP implementation was "very much dictated and driven by HR" (CSG rep, 031).

10.2.2 Drivers for Stricter Attendance Management

Although sickness absence levels have steadily fallen in the last decade, several factors have driven stricter policy implementation. Estimated to be £18 billion per annum in the UK (*Personnel Today*, 2017), the economic literature focuses on absence costs to organisations and the economy, either in terms of lost effort or lost productivity (OECD, 2003). However, Taylor *et al* (2010) state that absence cost figures should be treated with caution. Nevertheless,

exacerbated by lean production methods, absence represent significant employer costs (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 10). While Edwards and Greasley (2010) claimed that absence cost control pressures were being moderated (p. 25), the data presented here suggests that, despite falling absence rates (Taylor, 2013), several factors heighten rather than lessen, the drive to stricter attendance management. While cost control lay at the heart of the Council's stricter approach, inter-linked productivity, workforce control, ideological and organisational imperatives were also important.

On the face of it, if workers are attending work regularly, employers' costs will be reduced (Bevan, 2003: 7). However, ensuring workers' regular attendance at work has been a perennial employer concern since the Industrial Revolution. As stated previously, while workers may accept that they have a general duty to attend work, employers cannot take their actual attendance for granted (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Noon and Blyton, 2002: 83). Historically, harsh methods were often used to ensure that a disciplined workforce accepted work routines (Pollard, 1968: 216-226; Storey, 1983: 100). Downplaying soft HRM, the 2008 financial crisis accentuated the dominance of hard HRM practices on issues such as performance management, attendance management and work intensity (Thompson, 2011: 261-4). As a result of 'shifts in the dynamics of capital accumulation', employers broke agreements made in less straitened economic conditions (*ibid*, p. 361).

By making "examples" of absent workers (Fieldwork Rep, 015), the Council's need "to save money at every turn" (Fieldwork rep, 021) drove them to demonstrate that they had "power over" workers and could "control the workforce" (Education rep, 020). Reps said that "fear" forced workers to come to work when unwell (Fieldwork rep, 027; CSG rep, 031, Cordia rep, 044). Even within Access, where no disciplinary approach existed, it was reported that management wished to send a message that they were "always in control" and that workers "should fear us" (Access rep, 053). As a CSG rep stated, the SAP allowed management to demonstrate that they were "in charge", so that workers who are kept "under tight control" will "do what they are supposed to" (019).

The SAP disciplinary procedures were highly visible and known to all employees.⁷ Their effect was felt not only on those who were disciplined. As one rep stated, "the impact can be the same upon the people who haven't been disciplined", sending out the message "this is the way

⁷ Although the thesis is not rooted within a Foucauldian framework, Foucault's (1977: 153) conceptualisation that modern hierarchical organisations enact disciplinary systems based on 'continuous surveillance' provides insights. Viewed in such terms, sick workers can only escape the SAP's gaze by coming to work when unwell.

things are” (Fieldwork rep, 025). Workers could only avoid discipline by attending work regularly, even when unwell. In such terms, stricter attendance management, in tandem with performance management, work intensification, and the downplaying of occupational health and safety typify changed, harsher workplace regulation (Green, 2001; Taylor, 2013: 30-31). Although reps were not sure that strict attendance management was intended to weaken union organisation, some expressed the view that it was indicative of a harsher approach to workforce discipline, forcing union members to keep their “head down” (Finance rep, 09, CSG rep, 019, Finance rep, 41, Fieldwork rep, 59). Even although doubts were expressed whether strict SAP implementation actually saved money, some reps felt that management took advantage of the situation to reduce union challenges.

There are claims that prescriptive performance management and trigger-based attendance management have institutionalised workplace bullying as ‘layers of managers are forced to ‘cascade’ pressures to workers below them to meet their targets’ (Hardy and Choonara, 2013: 119). Supporting this view, half the reps surveyed in this study agreed or strongly agreed that managers were more concerned with punishing sick workers than supporting them (51 per cent in 2010; 62 per cent in 2013).

Soft HRM practices such as appraisals and team working, were visualised as supportive and enabling, led by a line manager who had ‘discretion over operational issues, labour utilisation, recruitment, training, reward, appraisal and above all performance’ (Taylor, 2013: 30). However, the empirical data demonstrated that in many areas of the Council and some ALEOs, FLM’s discretion had been considerably eroded. Strict SAP implementation typified hard HRM where ‘disciplinary or punitive outcomes’ were as prevalent ‘as developmental or supportive measures’ (*ibid*, p. 30). FLMs participation in the disciplinary aspects of the SAP jarred with their putative facilitating and supporting role.

Reps spoke about the pressures that were arising as a result of the Council’s transformation programme. Particularly within Finance and the Chief Executives’ CBS sections, lean-type processes⁸ (Womack *et al*, 1990) were beginning to emerge. Amidst work intensification and a rigorous performance management regime, reduced staffing created “stress” and “pressure” as the workloads of workers who left were “spread out more”, increasing pressure on remaining

⁸ By stripping out ‘wasteful’ processes, Lean has found favour with local government managers as austerity measures restricted budgets (Taylor, 2013: 32). However, as lean-type processes were only beginning to emerge towards the end of the research data gathering phase, their full implications were not being felt. The connections between lean-working and SAP implementation is suggested in Chapter 11 as an area of further research.

workers to meet targets through working unpaid, “excessive hours” (033). Workers felt they were being “micro-managed” in an “intense” work environment (Chief Executives, 054). In such circumstances, just “one or two” workers reporting sick created stress on co-workers and impacted on service delivery as “work gets backed up and clogs up the system” (Finance rep, 035). As workforce numbers reduced and workloads increased, the Council “need[ed] people to be at their work” (Access rep, 024). Workers felt under “constant” disciplinary pressure to maintain their performance and attendance (Finance rep, 063). Workers who had been disciplined under the SAP felt themselves vulnerable to performance pressures. It was reported that performance management and SAP procedures were used to “get rid of” underperforming workers “to save money” (Finance rep, 062).

Horder’s (1999) study viewed the introduction of stricter attendance management ‘as a strategy designed to facilitate change beyond the specifics of attendance at work’ as it attempted ‘to promote a new emphasis on quality and accountability; a new purposefulness and dynamism’ (p. 267). Likewise, reps reported that the Council’s stricter approach to absence management weakened opposition to management. As a Fieldwork Rep stated, it made the workforce “more malleable” (025). Concerns were expressed that a “demoralised” workforce’s resistance to management’s “unpalatable” policies was weakened (Fieldwork rep, 003). As McGovern *et al* (2007) observed, employers pursue policies that ‘harness the motivation of insecurity’ to ensure compliant workforces acquiesce to intensified work regimes (p. 135). Taylor (2013) argued that market discipline and organisational bureaucratic control were ‘dialectically connected’ (p. 34). According to Taylor, ‘harsher market discipline organisations translate the market signals and pressures into tighter control over workers in the form of measurable (bureaucratic) performance criteria’ (*ibid*, p. 35).

Scholarios and Taylor (2014) argued that, ‘in the post-2008 context of cost cutting and downsizing’, changed HRM policy has led to the ‘adoption of system-generated statistics reflecting individual performance’ (p. 334). Women, black, disabled and older workers may be more vulnerable to disciplinary action as a result of failing to meeting performance targets (*ibid*, p. 334-5; French, 2016: 10-12). Call centres studies (Taylor *et al*, 2005; Taylor and Bain, 2007); found that senior management formulated their organisational business objectives in comparison with their competitors. Eventually these objectives were communicated throughout the organisation and were expressed at operational level in terms of departmental goals and worker specific targets. Similarly throughout the public sector,

KPIs and targets cascade down through business unit, centre or facility and then to the team, and are finally disaggregated to employee level in the form of individual balanced scorecards, a plethora of quantitative metrics and qualitative evaluations of performance (Taylor, 2013: 22).

Reflecting Thompson and Vincent's (2010: 61) 'logic of morphogenetic cycles' to connect agency to structural dimensions, Figure 10.1 draws the linkages between day-to-day SAP implementation and attendant union representation. While accepting that 'there are analytical challenges in making links between workplace action...and broader structures and practices where a variety of interest groups...are part of that action' (*ibid*, p. 61), it is possible to draw the linkages between strict SAP representation, union activity and underlying structural processes.

Figure 10.1: SAP Representation, Union Activity and Underlying Structural Processes



Thompson and Vincent's schema viewed 'the political economy of capitalism as a series of stratified entities' (*ibid*, p. 63). Representing one aspect of changing regimes of accumulation, with the introduction of market and commercial methods and philosophies, NPM has transformed the public sector and its labour processes (Hood, 1991, 1995).⁹ Viewed in critical realist terms (Bhaskar, 1978), the unseen mechanisms of the market in the *real* produce events,

⁹ Although not drawn diagrammatically in Figure 10.1, as Thompson and Vincent's (2010: 63) schema demonstrated, regimes of accumulation work themselves though in many complex ways, not just in the linear fashion presented here for simplification.

such as cost control and productivity strategies in the *actual*. Although workers are unable to observe market mechanisms, they experience their effects in the *empirical* as they attempt to meet targets. Following the 2008 financial crisis, local government budgetary constraints were induced in the *real*, producing events in the *actual*, such as cost control strategies (e.g. attendance management policies and procedures), which led to observable events such as absence meetings in the *empirical*.

Since the 1990s, absence control has been intimately linked to productivity and cost control strategies (HM Treasury, 1998). At the *macro* level, the public sector has faced intense budgetary pressures. The extent to which local councils could control absence levels became a measure of their good governance (Audit Scotland, 2015: 28). Unable to raise council tax levels and constrained by UK and Scottish government budget allocations, the Council was forced to make the most efficient use of its resources. This underpinned its shift towards stricter attendance management which was centrally driven by senior management and rolled out throughout departments and ALEOs. At the *meso* level, targets were “filtered down” (Fieldwork rep, 058) through HR and then on to the *micro* workplace level where FLMs enacted the SAP and reps defended their members who were subject to it.

While cost reduction and workforce control imperative drove strict attendance management, reps also explained how ideological factors, both internally and externally to the Council, influenced the tougher approach. Supporting Taylor *et al*'s (2010: 271) proposition that government and employers' focus on sickness absence represented a ‘moral panic’, a Finance rep stated that there was a media constructed narrative of “public sector skivers; private sector hard workers” (022). It was suggested that strict SAP implementation emanated from the “ideology of bashing council workers” (Fieldwork rep, 003), who were perceived to have “an easy time of it” (Finance rep, 009). There were suggestions that councillors supported strict attendance management because of their “inherent disciplinarianism”, sending out the message that employment relationships had changed (DRS rep, 001).

10.2.3 Shifting the Frontier of Control

Hyman (1987) bemoaned the (then) state of industrial relations theory for its failure to address the political aspect of the social relations of production such as ‘the internal politics of management, the linkages between capital and the state’ and ‘the structured conflict inherent in the labour process itself’ (*ibid*, p. 33). According to Hyman, labour process theory’s important contribution to understanding contemporary industrial relations was its stress on ‘the workplace

as a site of class struggle' and its attempt to understand 'the role of management as an agent of capitalist control' (p. 27). In this study attendance management was considered within the dynamics of the employment relationship (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Edwards and Whitson, 1993) where it is seen as an (ever increasing) aspect of labour control. Thus, following Hyman (1987) an attempt was made, through the prism of workplace reps, to understand managements' strategic choices which shifted the frontier of control in their favour.

The Council took that view that falling sickness absence levels justified their strict attendance policy. Instead, falling absence rates may suggest that workers are coming to work when unwell, while at the same time having to cope with intensified work demands and the threat of disciplinary sanction or dismissal. In both surveys, high levels of 'presenteeism' (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 282) were reported. More than nine in ten reps agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP pressurised workers into coming to work when unwell and forced sick workers to return to work prematurely. Undoubtedly, the Council's strict SAP implementation had a dramatic effect on workers' behaviour.

This shift in the frontier of control in the Council's favour occurred at a time when workers were generally feeling insecure as a result of workforce reductions, changing work practices, and threats to employment terms and conditions. This took place against a background of straitened economic circumstances as austerity's full effects were being felt. This led to all-pervasive feelings of workers being "scared about their jobs" (Education rep, 022), losing OSP and being disciplined. In both surveys, more than 9 in 10 reps (92 per cent) reported that it was fear of discipline and being scared of the SAP which resulted in workers' presenteeism.

However, although the Council's stricter absence policy was a strategic decision, it was not made in circumstances of its choosing. Instead, as argued previously, it was austerity driven. However, although the Council hoped to cut labour costs in the pursuit of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, while simultaneously tighten and extend control over the labour process, (Thompson, 1989; Thornley *et al*, 2000), it faced stiff union opposition. Within capitalism, such conflict between workers and employers is 'inevitable' as their relationship 'is dominated by the drive to extract surplus value' from workers' labour (Hyman, 1984: 189). In capitalist society, the state plays a central role in capital accumulation although 'its involvement may be direct and overt and indirect and tacit' (*ibid*, p. 189). Although public sector managers are not concerned about profit maximisation, market and cost control pressures force them to take action to control their employees' sickness absence. As stated previously, public sector managers' central problem is that of 'converting the indeterminate labour power of welfare

workers...into concrete labour performed in line with predetermined outcomes' (Law and Money, 2007: 43). However, heightening the indeterminacy gap, when sick pay is provided, employers continue to purchase absent workers' labour power, yet no labour is undertaken.

Further, public sector workers like their private sector workers counterparts also face low pay, job insecurity, extended control, increased performance management, long hours and work intensification. Irrespective of the debates over productive/ unproductive labour and state ownership, all workers, whether they work in the public or private sector, must sell their labour and are, in Marx's (1990) terms, exploited. Like private sector workers, public sector workers have responded to exploitation by joining unions and taking part in industrial action to pursue collective bargaining objectives (Ironsides and Seifert, 2000: 3).

10.2.4 Workplace Discipline

Discipline at work is an integral aspect of managerial control regimes. The employment relationship is asymmetrical with workers generally employed on terms favourable to employers (Clancy and Seifert, 2000). This creates the conditions for workers' exploitation which 'is never complete' and has to be 'constantly fought for' by managers as workers resist 'in a thousand different ways...individually and collectively, this form of oppression' (*ibid*, p. 2). Since Donovan (1968), workplace rules and procedures have been part of the formalisation of workplace regulation (ACAS, 2016) through which conflict becomes channelled. In earlier periods, when employers were on the ascendency, forcing managers to follow agreed rules and procedures was necessary to protect union reps and members against arbitrary treatment (*ibid*, p. 3). Post-Donovan, employers made greater use of formalised rules and procedures to regain workplace control. For Clancy and Seifert (2000), 'the enforcement of discipline' should not be viewed

...as a simple case of an individual breaching a work rule and needing to be represented, but as a central part of the power and control mechanisms established by managers on behalf of employers and owners to secure the ability of managers' right to manage (p. 5).

According to Edwards and Whitson (1989), the contested nature of capital-labour relations underlie all models of discipline, and it is only 'by grasping the ways in which managers and workers are bound together by relations of conflict and co-operation can the dynamics of discipline be understood' (p. 6). Workplace rules are forged out of the dynamic of worker-management relations, often the results of compromise and negotiation at the frontier of control. As Batstone *et al* (1977) stated, the 'web of rules and agreements' which guides everyday action 'reflected the continual accommodation between management and worker' (p. 265).

Traditionally, public sector approaches to discipline combined both corrective and accommodative elements (Henry, 1982, 1987). Following (collectively) agreed procedures, dismissal was seen as a last resort as the stated aim was to improve or change behaviour. In the last two decades, employers have emphasised their right to manage and accommodative approaches to discipline waned. While elements of the corrective approach remain, the thesis supports the view that the punitive element of punishment was on the ascendency as employers adopted a harder attitude to workplace discipline, particularly with regard to sick workers (Taylor *et al*, 2010: 275-6). In the thesis, reps viewed management's stricter SAP implementation as indicative of a harsher workplace disciplinary regime. Previously, workers would have received an informal warning about workplace transgressions, now "things have been notched up", resulting in formal action (Residential rep, 017).

By tradition, workplace disciplinary processes centred on maintaining effort, attendance, time-keeping and any workplace conduct which upset ordered work rhythms (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). In the contemporary workplace, workers can find themselves caught up in their employer's disciplinary procedures in respect of an increasing list of prescribed activities and behaviours. New technology has facilitated greater surveillance of workers' performance (Taylor, 2013). Data security breach, the loss of memory sticks and laptops, and new technology miss-use can result in punitive action. Nevertheless, changed workplace regulation has brought about a renewed and heightened focus on traditional concerns such as workers' attendance at work. As a Residential rep stated, "sickness absence has become the new time keeping" (042).

The Council's implementation of its SAP provided insights on the balance, and nature, of management-union power relationships. According to Terry (1977: 77), the 'source of authorship' and content of work rules are important. Indeed, Terry viewed the process of rule formalisation itself as 'a negotiation'. Under joint-regulation, where employers and unions are involved in collective bargaining, 'new rules and procedures which regulate work behaviour will have been negotiated every bit as much as any substantive agreement'. As Terry stated, agreed procedures typically represent a compromise between both parties, 'reflecting in some way the interests of the parties to the agreement, and limited by the power which each side can exert on the other to contain their discretion to act' (*ibid*, p.77).

Procedures provide a snapshot, captured at the moment that they are agreed, of the relative state of bargaining relationships. Depending on each side's strength and negotiating skills, agreements may favour one or other of the parties, or be mutually beneficial. However, in the

same way that agreed procedures shed light on the state of bargaining relationships, so do those which have been imposed. In recent decades, joint regulation at work has dramatically reduced, to be replaced ‘by consultation and the simple provision of information’ (Terry, 2010: 279-280). The Council’s decision to implement its SAP without union agreement was significant, particularly as the use of disciplinary sanctions was an integral element of the policy. As a Council officer stated, even although UNISON was consulted “there was not an awful lot of negotiation” (CIPD/ SU seminar, 14th April, 2010). During *negotiations*, ‘parties adopt positions, and the two sides attempt to close the gap by finding a mutually acceptable agreement’ (ACAS, 2011: 8). Though *consultation*, ‘the employer puts forward a proposal and asks for the views and concerns of the employees and, where possible, takes these into account in what is ultimately a management decision’ (*ibid*, p. 8). Thus, although employees’ views may be listened, ‘it is a process that retains the managerial right to take the final decision’ (Terry, 2010: 281).

The ACAS Code, *Discipline and Grievance at Work*, emphasises individual worker representation rights (ACAS, 2016: 13). While the Council’s absence policy allowed such rights, its overarching disciplinary approach typified a harsher, rather than consensual, approach to managing workforce relations. Implicit in the Council’s strategic decision to ‘widen the area of manifest conflict and challenge the existing accommodation’ (Batstone *et al*, 1977: 265) was its calculation that it was sufficiently strong to impose its will and able to withstand workforce opposition. However, while the Council shifted the frontier of control in its favour, it met continual union resistance as reps fought to defend their members.

10.3. Frontier of Control Resistance

This section considers the significance of reps’ frontline resistance to strict SAP implementation.

10.3.1 Defending Union Members

Consistent with the shift in recent decades towards individualised employment regulation, individual casework now takes up the majority of union reps’ time (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 89; Darlington, 2010: 128; Wanrooy *et al*, 2013: 16). As Terry (2003) stated, ‘working people have always joined, and continue to join, trade unions’ for ‘support and assistance’ (p. 262). In both surveys, excluding those with less than one year’s experience, reps spent more than 16 hours each month on union activities of which less than half (7.5 hours, 46 per cent) in 2010 and about a third (5.7 hours, 32.9 per cent) in 2013 was related to absence issues.

Further, highlighting reps' 'complex' and 'stressful' role (ACAS, 2008: 3), the interview data confirmed that representing members under the SAP was a core union activity and provided examples of its intensity and frequency. Individual casework was often emotionally demanding as hearing about members' "personal and private" lives (Finance Rep, 041) left reps "totally drained" (Residential Rep, 010). Rep sometimes worked on cases in their own time away from work, undertaking research by consulting medical textbooks and online resources (LES Rep, 008). Reps felt frustrated "firefighting" volumes of cases which "stretched [them] to the limit" (Fieldwork Rep, 032).

At UNISON's National Delegate Conference in 2016, the pressure that reps were under was highlighted. One delegate stated that increased workload demands on reps "comes at a great cost personally" and arises because they "don't feel they have control over their situation" (UNISON, 2016). Similarly, a Branch Officer (022) stated that "stress levels are going through the roof" and reps were becoming "demoralised" as a result of the demands placed upon them (BC Notes, 29th August, 2013).

10.3.2 Defending the Frontier of Control

As the employment relationship is asymmetrical (Hyman, 1975), it was only through combining and using their collective strength that union reps were able to challenge management prerogative. In the thesis, reps' use of military metaphors provides an insight into how they viewed their day-to-day member representation as part of a continuous struggle in the 'War on the Sickies'. A Branch Officer likened it to a "guerrilla war", rather than "a collective fight with two armies on the battlefield" (065). SAP representation was "trench warfare" (DRS, 001) in which the union threw "spanners in the works" (Branch Officer, 066). The union's ability to win cases depended on reps being "better rebels" and "better at fighting" than management (Residential rep, 017).

Such conflicted employment relations contrasts with strategic HRM perspectives in which the 'old' industrial relations of 'trench warfare' had been supplemented by the 'journey' of 'the wagon train' which symbolised 'inner commitment rather than external control' (Grieves, 2003: 105). However, SAP implementation should not be seen simply as the bureaucratic application of organisational rules but as one aspect of a constant trial of strength between management and union at the frontier of control. As Hyman (1975) stated, 'an unceasing *power struggle*' lies at the heart of industrial relations in which there is a 'continuous process of pressure and counter-pressure, conflict and accommodation, overt and tacit struggle' (p. 26).

However, protracted conflict imposes costs on management, union and the workforce (Rose, 2008: 435). Not only did strict SAP implementation have negative workforce consequence but it “totally changed” employer-employee relationships (DRS Rep, 001), causing resentment with a ‘corrosive effect’ on ‘all areas of the management of work’ (Leaflet, February 2011). Upsetting the informal psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989; Guest and Conway, 2004) which underpins organisational functioning (Dibben *et al*, 2010), reps reported a “loss of goodwill” (021) with workers less prepared to go “the extra mile” in their jobs (025, 033, 053, 055). Differences between employers and employees’ perception of the SAP created ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Sutherland and Cranwell, 2004: 39) amongst workers. As a Fieldwork rep stated, the policy created a “disconnect between the Council and its employees” (025).

Although management SAP implementation presented reps with many difficulties, they continued to organise to defend their members. Viewing strict attendance management as an attack on its membership and a cheap and easy way to sack workers (Absence Seminar, 11th February, 2010), rather than a simple application of work rules, UNISON attempted to collectivise its approach to the countless individual representation requests it received. For instance, it trained its reps in the legal aspects of sickness absence and, resulting in *Forsyth v GCC* (2012), encouraged them to seek legal opinions.

Although there were contrasting views about reps’ ability to influence managers’ decisions at FAIs, by 2013 there was a significant increase in those who agreed or strongly agreed that they did so ($t = 0.001, p < .05$) and also that their representation influenced outcomes at disciplinary hearings ($t = 0.01, p < .05$). As previously reported, by 2013 there was a significant decrease in the percentage of reps that agreed or strongly agreed that the SAP was becoming more strictly implemented ($t = 0.02, p < .05$). Considered together, these findings may indicate that the reps’ organising efforts were taking effect; as reps’ ability to influence managers’ decisions increased, a corresponding slackening of the policy occurred. Supporting this, as previously stated, by 2013 reps were spending less time on SAP related representation.

As reps’ skills in the “hand to hand combat” (065) of individual casework improved, their knowledge of procedures was often greater than managers (017). At least six in ten reps had represented members at FAI interviews and disciplinary hearings. Reps met members before formal meetings to develop an effective case, to examine management’s case, to look for “mitigating factors” (006) and check inaccuracies. During meetings, reps focused on work-related reasons for their member’s illness, emphasising that it should not be seen in isolation from work environment and work organisation issues (Holder, 1999). Reps often made

reference to employers' Equality Act obligations (TUC, 2013) and insisted managers consider underlying health conditions and make reasonable adjustments. At FAIs, reps sought to prevent their member being sent to a disciplinary hearing. If this occurred, reps made sure that the manager knew that they were "personally culpable" for all decisions taken (053). Although it was suggested that members were reluctant to exercise their appeal rights as they wanted the process "over and done with" (009), reps won some appeals by highlighting 'exceptional circumstances', management's procedural failings and over-punitive disposals.

Although reps had mixed views regarding their effectiveness, in both surveys, more than eight in ten reps reported they felt that their representation was valued by members irrespective of meeting outcomes. Often reps posed the "counterfactual question", suggesting that if the union was not involved in representing members, they would endure harsher treatment (Fieldwork rep, 001). As a Residential rep stated, without union involvement management would, "carte-blanche", do what it wanted (042). Although in general terms unions have declined in their effectiveness (Terry, 2003: 263), the reps in this study forced management to follow procedures and placed limits on managerial decision making. Further, in their efforts to collectivise their approach to the SAP, reps conducted health and safety stress surveys, organised workload campaigns and (unsuccessfully) consulted members about the possibility of taking industrial action over it.

10.3.3 The 'Last Hurrah' or Building 'Ramparts of Resistance'

A public sector HR director, who responded to a CIPD (2012b) industrial relations survey, characterised the (then) resurgence of industrial action as 'a last hurrah for old-style union militancy', stating 'the union knows it can't win' but it will take 'a long time to play out' (p. 7). This raises a question, do the reps' mobilising efforts in this study represent a futile, last gasp effort to maintain union organisation, in the face of an overwhelming employer offensive? Or, through asserting their agency, are they building 'ramparts of resistance' (Cohen, 2006), strong, combative workplace based union organisation? The thesis does not seek to provide definitive answer to such questions. Nevertheless, even although SAP representation placed demands on UNISON reps, the data gathered provided evidence of them maintaining union organisation strong enough to defend members.

Notwithstanding, the decline in the spread and scope of collective bargaining and falling union membership since the late 1970s (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 75; McIlroy and Daniels, 2009c: 140-14; Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 126), union organisation has remained resilient in

many workplaces, particularly in the public sector (Upchurch, 2015: 193). Although workplace organisation has been weakened as a result of general union decline, changes in work organisation, work intensification, economic restructuring and the reassertion of managerial prerogative (Moore, 2011: 30-31), unions have found ways to adapt to changing workplace regimes (Gall and Cohen, 2013). While shop stewards may lack the ‘strong’ bargaining relationships that ‘leader’ stewards in Batstone *et al*’s (1977) study sought, and the joint regulation and collective bargaining of the 1950s and 1960s is a distant memory (McIlroy, 2009b: 23), workplace reps remain involved in a wide range of organising activities. As well as performing shop steward and health and safety duties, the workplace representation role has been augmented with the introduction of equality and union learning reps (DBERR, 2009: 15-6; Moore, 2011: 2; Terry, 2010: 290-91). This study illustrated how, despite employer attempts to bypass the union and impose their SAPs, union members’ representation rights created a space for union mobilisation. Albeit placing great demands on reps’ time and skills (ACAS, 2008), SAP representation rights, similar to those afforded under health and safety legislation, ensured that reps had a purposive workplace role, upholding workers’ interests. “Entrenched in the policy and its application and operation”, reps made “life difficult” for managers (CSG rep, 031). In such circumstances, when managers come face-to-face with skilled reps, managerial prerogative was challenged. While workplace procedures and rules can frustrate reps’ organising efforts, disagreements over their interpretation can also foster mobilisation (Batstone, 1998: 225).

Despite reduced collective bargaining, the increased emphasis on individual employment rights, the ‘often crushing activism’ of weighty individual casework and ‘the emotional injuries of class’, reps in Moore’s (2011) study sustained collective organisation ‘against the stream’ (p. 165). Although individual member representation reduced the time reps spent on organising activities it checked managerial supremacy in the workplace (*ibid*, p. 166). Through articulating workers’ ‘individual experiences of discrimination in a collective context’, union reps can ‘generate collectivism’ (*ibid*, p. 118). By contrast, Ellis and Taylor (2006: 119) suggested that UNISON’s reluctance to engage in ‘the politics of production’ helped explain the lack of workforce resistance within British Gas to organisational restructuring. Ellis and Taylor argued that the union concentrated on ‘national and institutional priorities’ rather than ‘championing’ the issues which affected union members the most, those which arose ‘out of conditions at the point of production and service delivery’. Ellis and Taylor suggested that ‘the lack of collectively generated resistance’ left workers ‘to their own devices’, resulting in many quitting (*ibid*, p. 119).

Instead, the thesis showed the possibilities for strengthening workplace organisation that arise when the union takes up issues which immediately affect their members. Although management set the agenda by introducing a strict SAP, the union's absence representation efforts strengthened union organisation by encouraging workers to join the union, to remain union members, to become reps and to develop their skills.

Examination of Glasgow City UNISON's membership figures suggests that, despite the voluntary severance programme and non-filling of posts, the branch maintained its membership numbers, increasing density in some areas. Membership reduction within Council departments was offset by growth in Cordia, CSG and Education. It is unclear whether this growth was specifically motivated by workers' SAP concerns. Nevertheless, SAP representation increased the union's visibility and standing amongst its members. As a Residential rep stated, it made the union "real" (017).

While the decline in collective strike action and rise in individual grievance characterises the contemporary workplace, Joyce (2015: 139) argued that individual member representation should not be regarded as 'a simple retreat from taking on employers'. Instead, during a period when shop stewards have 'no simple recourse to strikes', individual casework is 'the continuation of workplace struggle by other means' (*ibid*, p. 139). Although many union activists view individual member representation as 'a necessary burden' that had to be undertaken to allow them to 'retain creditability' with members (Morgan, 2016), the data presented in this study established that, rather than being a chore which took reps away from collective organising, individual casework strengthened workplace union organisation.

The thesis established that workers' treatment under the SAP fuelled workforce discontents and antagonised employer-employee relationships. However, workers' perceptions that the SAP was unfair did not translate into them taking industrial action against it. As Kelly (2005) observed, there is no automaticity that widely felt grievances will lead to collective action. Not only should an issue be perceived as unjust and the result of employer action, it should be seen as affecting workers collectively; workers should have a belief that the action they intend to take will be successful; the benefits of taking action outweigh costs; and their organisation is strong enough to take successful action (p. 286). A Branch Officer stated that reps found it difficult to persuade their members to take action over the policy because some workers had negative attitudes toward sick work colleagues. Also, only a minority of workers were caught up in the policy at any particular time (065). Further, not enough workers saw the absence

policy as a collective issue; some were “fearful for their jobs” (Education rep, 050) and did not wish “to rock the boat” (Fieldwork rep, 034).

Although the ongoing strike action which took place within the Council and ALEOs during the research period was not a subject of study, it formed an important backcloth. Efforts were made to explore whether there were any linkages between workers’ treatment under the SAP and their attitudes to taking collective action over other issues. Although not conclusive, as approximately eight in ten reps in both surveys reported that strict SAP management fostered adversarial ‘us-them’ workforce relations and fuelled member discontents, absence policy perceptions may have been a mobilising factor in the industrial disputes.

10.4 Organising in a Weakened Regulatory Work Environment

We are facing a tsunami of cuts...absence management strategies and tactics we have never seen [before]...they are upping the ante big time...we have to raise our game...I have seen an increase in bullying...they think they can get away with it because of the climate of fear. People are worried about losing their jobs (Branch Officer, Health and Safety Seminar, 8th October, 2014)

The Branch Officer’s comments convey the sense of embattled reps under siege, defending members (who were fearful of losing their jobs) in the face of a managerial offensive in which SAP implementation was intrinsically linked to severe budget cuts. This expressed feeling of being under attack is one that many union activists recognise. With limited workers’ voice, having experienced four decades of neo-liberal assault, British workers ‘are among the most insecure, unhappiest and stressed workers in Europe’ (Ewing *et al*, 2016: 3). Further,

On average, British workers work more hours per week, more days per year, more years before they retire, after which they receive lower levels of pension than most of their European counterparts...Their pay is so low that a great proportion of them are in poverty (*ibid*, p. 3).

Hyman (1987) suggested that the ‘terrain of industrial relations is above all conditioned by capital’ (p. 27). Far removed from its 1970’s high point, its landscape has radically changed. Originally conceived by the Webbs as the means by which organised labour could improve ‘social welfare and social control of industry’ (Hyman, 1989: 6), collective bargaining was widespread until Thatcher’s assault on unions. As Hyman observed, the stable collective bargaining arrangements that typified post-war industrial relations were underpinned for many years by British capitalism’s predominant economic position, its social liberalism’s which emphasised compromise and the unions’ ability to keep their members in check (pp. 10-11). Then, the 1970s ‘economic crisis...consumed the margin for compromise’ (*ibid*, p. 11).

Pressure to control costs forced employers to reassert managerial prerogative and roll back many of the gains which shop stewards in many industries had won through workplace bargaining. As Block (1980) commented,

It is generally accepted that a capitalist offensive began in the early seventies throughout the developed capitalist world that was designed to erode working-class living standards by reducing wage gains, increasing 'normal' levels of unemployment, and cutting state provided services (p. 236).

The three decades since 'Thatcher's 1980s assault on the bastions of union power' have been characterised by 'the *longue durée* of coordinated employer attacks on working conditions, social benefits and pay' (Upchurch, 2015: 198). In general terms since the 1980s, 'shop stewards role and activity have diminished' (Terry, 2003: 257). Following the 2008 financial crisis, public sector unions have come under pressure as they have become more exposed to market and commercial pressure which eradicated the last vestiges of the 'model' (Mailly, 1989: 6) public sector employer. Changes in the nature of work have brought about a more atomised, individualistic work environment and collective employment rights have been weakened whilst individual rights have increased (ACAS, 2011: 8; Dickens and Hall, 2010: 317). According to Upchurch (2015), the low level of UK strike statistics highlighted the reality that 'labour has not yet gathered its own energies to regroup and fight back on a consistent front' from the 'major change in the forces of production' and attendant employers' offensive since the late 1960s' 'crisis of profitability' (p. 195).

In the 1960s, collective bargaining was 'the primary mechanism for regulating the labour market and class relations, with statutory individual rights playing a limited role' (Howell, 2004: 19). As collective bargaining declined (Waddington, 2012: 333-4), New Labour placed an increased emphasis on workers achieving limited individual rights at work through legal and statutory means (Howell, 2004: 19). However, although New Labour strengthened individual rights, enforcing them was often problematic (Smith and Morton, 2006: 411). Signifying that workers should 'bear more labour market risks' (Dickens, 2014: 238), the Coalition government's introduction of ET fees weakened workers' rights and led to a dramatic reduction in tribunal applications (Busby and McDermont, 2014: 1).

UNISON pursued *Forsyth v GCC* (2012) to highlight Council managers' lack of discretion. However, doubts have been raised as to what extent limited legal protections assist workers (Bain and Taylor, 2007: 54). Unions initiate legal action when an issue cannot be resolved within the workplace through collective means (Renton, 2009: 193). At ET's, unions enter 'a hostile terrain' (*ibid* p. 195). Although characterised by procedural fairness, they are based upon

a ‘constant systemic assumption that employers are basically right and claimants wrong’ (*ibid* p. 201). At this ‘quasi-legal institution’ (Rose, 2008: 529-530), ‘a very private system of justice’ characterises the ET system as, unlike Parliamentary legislation, ‘management are the lawmakers’ and draw up the organisation’s rules and procedures to ‘protect their own interests’ (Rollinson, 1993: 530). Labour law reflects capitalist employment relationships: ‘it is above all the law of *dependent labour*’ (Deakin and Morris, 2005: 1). As Anderman (1998) stated, employment law should be more accurately regarded as ‘a form of regulation of managerial decisions’ rather than a source of workers’ rights (p. *vii*). At ETs, a balance is made between ‘the interests of workers’ protection’ and ‘the unfettered discretion of employers to take decisions in the course of their business activity’ (*ibid*, p. 1). Privileging employers, the ‘reasonableness’ test assumes that the employer’s action was legal if it was what any other ‘reasonable’ employer would have done in the same circumstances (Renton, 2012: 121).

Nevertheless, UNISON’s ET application was seen as a ‘collective response’ to the SAP (Fieldwork Rep, 002). Although Judge Bell did not uphold the union’s claim that Ms. Forsyth’s loss of OSP was an unlawful wage deduction, she took the view that, although constrained, managers still had discretion. Following the tribunal, reps used the judgement to pressure FLMs, often tying them “in knots” at absence meetings (Fieldwork Rep, 025). Even though reps differed in their views whether the judgment led to increased manager’s discretion, they used it as leverage.

10.5 Organising Individually and Collectively: Both Sides of the Same Coin

Despite the difficulties shop stewards face, they ‘remain the dynamic heart of the British union movement’, the ‘activists of many parts’ (Terry, 2003: 257). For most union members, shop stewards, ‘the lieutenants of the rank and file’ (Gall, 2005: 8), personify trade unionism (Goodman and Whittingham, 1969: 15), playing a ‘central role’ in the union movement, ‘most often’ constituting ‘its contact with members and external actors’ (Pilemalm, Hallberg, Timpka, 2001: 571). Without their activism, the union would be an abstract entity rather than the instrument for resisting management encroachment at the frontier of control. Workers leave or join unions depending on their effectiveness ‘at defending and promoting’ workers’ ‘interests’ (Simms and Charlwood, 2010: 141). Although the 2004 WERS survey found that many union members doubted shop stewards’ effectiveness, perceiving that they have ‘too little power’, 46 per cent still believed that they made a difference to their working lives (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 91). In the thesis, a clear majority of reps surveyed felt that they influenced managers’ decisions and their members valued the representation that they received.

Edwards *et al* (1992) suggested that employers and unions ‘labour under a legacy of the past’ as they pursue their separate agendas of rationalisation and renewal (p. 61). Past formed, pre-existing conditions influence the present. Previous successes and defeats affected how the reps in this study, many of whom had taken part in branch disputes (Appendix 5), organised. While the reps demonstrated a high commitment to representing individual members, similar to those in Moore’s (2011: 49) study, their collectivist perspective influenced how they constantly sought ways to mobilise *collectively* around *individual* absence representation. Although they were unable to persuade union members to take industrial action over the SAP, they still attempted to collectivise their approach by deploying a wide range of strategies and tactics to defend them. For instance, UNISON placed great emphasis on training reps so that they adopted a consistent approach. Further, legal and procedural arguments were used. Also, managers were urged to take action on stress and workload. Often reps used formal and informal management-union liaison arrangements to influence how managers implemented the policy. Invariably, in absence meetings reps sought to make “life difficult” for managers (Fieldwork rep, 021) to reduce the severity of disciplinary sanctions.

According to Darlington (2002), workplace reps remain ‘absolutely central to the articulation of workers’ views’. As Darlington stated,

...whilst environmental (or what might be termed objective) factors provide potential power resources within the bargaining process, it is the subjective factor which is also important in terms of the forms to which they are mobilised (p. 97).

The relationship between structure and agency is complex (Reed, 2009). While they are ‘ontologically and analytically distinct’ they ‘interact and combine in complex ways’, generating dynamics which can ‘transform social situations and the manner in which they are institutionally structured and reproduced’ (p. 433). As Darlington (2002) stated, ‘Workers are not the passive recipients or objects of structural processes but are constructively engaged in the processes of collective mobilisation’ (p. 98). For Upchurch (2015),

The shift from workers viewing themselves as objects or subalterns, caged and commodified within the confines of their labour power, into conscious subjects who can determine their own future is a dialectical process’ (p. 190).

Thus, while unions are shaped by the social, political and economic conditions that they face, the agency of their members and activists is important too. Accordingly, within the thesis, objective factors such as employers’ budgetary responses, market and commercial pressures, service demands, workforce reduction and performance management came into play. These set the context for employers’ strict SAP implementation, and more generally, their industrial

relations policies. However, subjective factors were also important. Reps refused to accept without question the Council's modernisation agenda, in which strict attendance management was an integral aspect.

The relationship between individual and collective union activity is dialectical. Viewing the absence policy as a 'stick to beat workers' (BC Motion, 24th February, 2011), reps questioned its fairness and mobilised to defend their members. However, reps fought on many fronts. Concurrently, many of the reps involved in *individual* SAP representation also led *collective* strike action in job evaluation grading disputes. As Gall (2014), observed there is 'no Chinese Wall between the individual and the collective' (p. 212). Even when militant, collective workplace based trade unionism was at its strongest in the 1960s, like the reps in this study, shop stewards defended individual workers subject to disciplinary procedures (McCarthy, 1966: 12-13). Correspondingly, while union paid 'greater attention' to collective bargaining in the 1970s, representing members in grievance and disciplinary hearings was of 'vital importance...in winning membership loyalty and commitment' (Terry, 1995: 208). In other words, individual and collective union activities are both sides of the same coin.

This simple observation has profound implications for trade union activists. Trade unions have to get the right balance between individual and collective activity. While improving wages and defending the collective union membership's employment conditions is an essential trade union purpose, protecting individual members from arbitrary management action is also important. To maintain its collective strength in the face of a strong employer, unions must ensure that their members are not subject to over-punitive disciplinary processes, otherwise they lose credibility. In such circumstance, even although representation is often difficult, union activists have no alternative than to get involved in this activity and support their members. However, they should not view individual representation as a requisite chore that is disconnected from collective organising. Day-to-day individual member representation is the bedrock upon which union organisations' 'strike readiness' (McAlevey, 2018) can be built. By making *collective* the *individual*, reps can defend their members from capricious treatment, renew and strengthen their organisations, articulating the essential union axiom, "an injury to one is an injury to all".

10.6 Conclusion

In recent years there have been a debate, whether within the contemporary workplace, employment relationships are based on trusting, mutual-beneficial relationships or are

adversarial (Cunningham *et al*, 2006: 209). In this debate, questions are raised whether workers have more say about what happens at work and feel more empowered to carry out their job in the way that they think best, leading to greater satisfaction and improved morale, or, whether in the face of a neo-liberal employer offensive, are haunted by impossible work demands, job insecurity and an absence of voice. The thesis supports the latter view, particularly as workers' work attendance is closely linked to issues of work effort and productivity, at a time when employers face severe cost and budgetary pressures.

The thesis also highlighted the ways in which traditional ways of workplace regulation are being re-cast, leading to a rise in managerial prerogative which legitimises management interests and actions (Smith and Morton, 2006; Taylor *et al*, 2010: 274-5). The thesis examined how such change impacted on the specific methods and practices of workplace attendance and absence control regimes. Although the tightening of SAPs has largely been a negative experience for workers and challenged the union's ability to defend its members, it provided an organising focus. While the Council was able to shift the frontier of control in its favour, it met sustained resistance from reps who, highlighting the push-pull nature of employment relations, placed limits on managerial prerogative.

As all workers were subject to the absence policy, the reps viewed this as a *collective*, rather than *individual* issue and constantly sought ways to defend their members. Without their efforts, many union members would have received harsher treatment. Emphasising reps' agency, the data gathered here found them, albeit heavily constrained in difficult circumstances, organising to defend their members and make a difference. Without such activity, management would "walk all over the top" (Fieldwork rep, 034) of union members. As Hyman (1979) observed, 'if shop stewards did not exist' they would have 'to be invented' (p. 59).

Simms and Charlwood (2010: 144) envisaged 'no immediate reason to imagine that working people are likely to turn to trade unions to develop collective responses'. Instead, the thesis found that, even although strict attendance management resulted in a shift in the frontier of control in management's favour, individual representation strengthened union organisation by aiding recruitment and retention. Further, although representing a stronger re-assertion of managerial prerogative, workers' treatment under the policy opened up new possibilities for collective action as it fuelled workplace discontents and adversarial employer-employee relations (Danford *et al*, 2003).

To conclude, changes in the nature of work have brought about a more atomised, individualistic work environment. Within trade unions therein lies a perpetual tension between individual and collective activity (Moore, 2011: 42). The challenge that unions face in the wake of increased individual representation demands (Charlwood and Forth, 2009: 89) is how to reassert its collective role within the modern workplace. Although weakened, this study suggested that one way in which unions can stem membership decline and find renewal is to engage in ‘the politics of production’ (Ellis and Taylor, 2006: 119) and defend members at the frontier of control by making collective the myriad individual acts of representation which harsher workplace regulation has brought about. To paraphrase C. Wright Mills (1959), this enables workplace reps to translate individual ‘private troubles’ at work into ‘public issues’ which permit collective responses.

Chapter 11: Conclusion and Summary

11.1 Introduction

The thesis has explored the processes which have resulted in stricter SAP implementation within local government, in particular the economic, organisational, political and social policy drivers. Further, it has investigated the impact that strict SAP implementation had on workers and trade union responses. Additionally, its effect on industrial relations and the implications for union organisation were considered. Data was gathered from a wide range of sources, including union and employer documentation, questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews.

This final chapter is structured as follows. Initially, with reference to the research questions the main research findings are restated. Then, the study's contribution to knowledge is laid out. Thereafter, its generalisability and limitation are considered. Finally, suggestions for further research are explored

11.2 Main Findings

Within the context of changing public sector workplace regulation regimes, to what extent has there been a shift towards stricter SAP implementation?

Trade union sources (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, PCS, the Society of Radiographers, UNISON, Unite, CSP, 2016; Dumbleton, 2011: 1; Harbinson, 2016; PCS, 2008; UNISON, 2007: 4, 2011a; Unite, 2014: 26) and the empirical data gathered support the view that a shift towards stricter SAP implementation has taken place (LRD, 2010; Taylor *et al*, 2010). Similar to the Council's 'War on the Sickies' (*Evening Times*, 18th March 2009), a wide range of public sector employers, for instance, Essex Police (Tahir, 2013), NHS Lothian (*Scotsman*, 2011), Tayside Contracts (*Evening Telegraph*, 2013), Cardiff (*Wales on Line*, 2010), Coventry (*Coventry Telegraph*, 2006), Kirklees (BBC, 2010) and Staffordshire (*The Sentinel*, 2010) councils announced that they had adopted a stricter approach to attendance management.

Within the chosen case study, what are the reasons for this change?

Reps provided evidence that the inter-related aspects of cost control, productivity, workforce control, ideological factors, employers' workforce attacks and organisational factors came together to explain the shift towards stricter SAP. The severe budgetary pressure that the

Council, its ALEOs and related organisations faced was identified as an important driver for stricter SAP implementation. This was also made explicit within Council documentation. While reps generally did not feel that the objective of strict attendance management was to reduce workforce numbers, the view was expressed that it allowed managers to get rid of “deadwood” (underperforming workers) who were absent.

Reps articulated the view that cost control and productivity concerns were closely linked to workforce control imperatives. To reduce costs, management need workers to attend work regularly. Further, showing that they had “power over” workers, managers instilled a “fear factor” amongst the workforce that changed their behaviour, for instance coming to work when unwell. Across the Council and related organisations, a reducing workforce was facing increased service and workload demands. In these circumstances, employers required all their workers to attend work. Just “one or two” workers going sick impacted on service delivery. The introduction of Lean-type processes and performance management regimes into some sections contributed to the creation of an “intense” work environment where work pressures on co-workers increased when workers went sick.

Several reps also reported their view that their employers’ strict attendance management was linked to attempts to engender workforce change, keep workers’ “heads down” and weaken union organisation.

Within the chosen case study, to what extent has management utilised strict SAP implementation to shift the frontier of control in their favour?

To reduce sickness absence costs and ensure workers regularly attended work, employers attempted to change workers’ attitudes and behaviour with regard to reporting sick. The clearest indication of management’s success in shifting the ‘frontier of control’ was reps’ view that the absence policy coerced workers to come work when unwell and pressured sick workers to prematurely return to work.

Strict absence control sent out the message that management were “in charge”, adding to the insecurity many workers felt. “Hitting” workers over their absence was viewed to be part of a generalised attack on the workforce that left them in a “state of fear”, making them “more malleable”, thinking that “they can’t win”. Some reps expressed the view that this enabled managers to push through “unpalatable” changes. Other reps felt that strict attendance management typified employers’ general approach to workforce discipline.

While reps were divided whether management's SAP implementation was designed to "tie up" the union in individual representation, it certainly increased reps' caseloads, stretching their organisational capabilities. Reps expressed the view that employers "divide and conquer" tactics were designed to take reps' "eye of the ball". Some reps expressed their frustration about their inability to defend their members from harsh treatment.

Within the chosen case study, to what extent have workplace union reps been able to develop resistance to this management offensive, in terms of individual representation and collective organisation?

Although reps faced many challenges representing their members and were unable to persuade them to take industrial action over the SAP, UNISON constantly sought to collectivise its approach by "tooling" up reps through strengthening training, through negotiations, a legal challenge, procedural challenges, conducting health and safety stress surveys, and workload campaigns.

SAP representation provided a focus for reps' workplace organising efforts. Reps fought "tooth and nail" for favourable decisions for their members. Although SAP representation stretched union resources, skilled reps made "life difficult" for managers by putting "spanners in the works". Even although reps expressed mixed views regarding their ability to influence managers' decision making at FAI and disciplinary hearings, there was agreement that members who were represented were treated more fairly. This view was often expressed in counterfactual terms that without union representation, members would have received harsher treatment as, "carte-blanche", the Council would "walk all over the top" of them. Reps fought to reduce the sanctions that their members faced. Reps expressed the view that without their activity, members would have received more punitive treatment.

Further, reps' efforts to defend their members strengthened union organisation by encouraging union recruitment, union retention, developing their skills and them becoming reps. Such representation made the union "real", increasing its profile and status amongst its members. In areas where the union was effectively organised, such as GHA, DRS and Access, through formal and informal liaison arrangements meetings, reps persuaded managers not to implement the SAP strictly. Although reps were not certain whether workers' treatment under the SAP influenced their willingness to take action over other issues, they held the view that it fostered adversarial employer-employee relationships, increasing workers' discontents.

11.3 Contribution to Knowledge

By synthesising the literature on sickness absence management, labour process theory, workplace union organisation and workers' representation, the thesis brings new insights to the sickness absence phenomenon, workers' resistance, union revitalisation, and the dialectics of individual and collective union representation.

Edwards and Scullion (1982) and Edwards and Whitson (1993), considered managerial SAP implementation within the dynamics of the employment relationship. However, amidst settled bargaining arrangements, Edwards and his co-writers depicted a lost world of benign neglect attendance management (where workers could report absent with little sanction) which bears little resemblance to current workplace realities. Since Edwards *et al* there has been a lack of empirical study of workplace control regimes, sickness absence and absence management which arguably has resulted in influential writings in this area (Edwards, 2005; Edwards and Greasley, 2010; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008; Noon and Blyton, 2007; Noon *et al*, 2013), taking the mistaken view that there had been no generalised shift towards strict policy implementation with FLMs continuing to exercise discretion in policy application.

Instead, the thesis overcomes this deficit by contextualising SAP implementation within a local government setting at a time of austerity when union organisations were struggling to cope with neoliberal attacks (Bach, 2012; Nolan, 2011). The thesis found that there has been a shift towards stricter SAP implementation which considerably reduced FLM's discretion. Also, the thesis established that representing union members under the absence policy had become a central preoccupation for reps as they resisted managerial prerogative at the frontier of control. Although this is known from the WERS studies, the thesis put flesh on the bones of such work by providing empirical evidence of the extent and nature of reps' representation of their members in the contemporary workplace.

Utilising labour process theory concepts such as labour indeterminacy, the structured antagonism between capital and labour, management control regimes, the frontier of control and competitive accumulation imperatives, the thesis affirmed the theory's continued relevance to the study of work and work organisations (Taylor and Moore, 2015: 80). The workplace was viewed as a 'contested terrain' where structured antagonism between employers and employees take place (Edwards, 1979). Strict absence management was perceived as an 'effort bargain' issue (Behrend, 1957) at the frontier of control, which employers attempt to shift in their favour. Workers' absence from work was seen as an additional aspect of labour indeterminacy (Taylor

et al, 2010: 273). The thesis highlighted how workers' attendance at work remains a conflicted issue as reps challenged management's SAP implementation, resisting managerial attempts to extend and increase workforce control in an attempt to cut costs and increase productivity.

Unlike previous studies which reflected managerial control concerns (Edwards and Scullion, 1984: 549), by examining union responses to SAP management, this study gives voice to often-neglected workers' perspectives. As the sickness absence problem is examined through the prism of shop stewards, this study makes a real contribution to understanding the current realities of workplace union organisation and resistance. Although depicting a by-gone era of strong factory based union organisation, the strength of Beynon's (1973) *Working for Ford* was its contextualisation of shop steward' organising efforts within the realities of Merseyside car workers' working lives, reflecting changing patterns of managerial control strategies and employer-employee relations (Edwards, 2014: 7). Beynon provided a vivid insight of factory working life then and how the dynamic relationships between shop stewards, their members and management, played out as the reps maintained and renewed union organisation, dealing with the multiplicity of issues that they faced. Inspired by Beynon's work, by locating union responses to employer SAP implementation within its political, economic and historic context, the thesis explored contemporary local government work realities and gave voice to workers' representatives as they attempted to make sense of their changing world.

Thus, the thesis draws the linkages between localised employer attendance management strategies and a broader political-economy. By examining union response to managerial SAP implementation and employer control strategies, this study also made a contribution to our understanding of workers' resistance in the contemporary workplace as unions organise in the face of an employers' offensive. The reps were not only witnesses to developments but were key participants in events as they attempted to resist management attempts to re-define the 'frontier of control' in their favour. For reps, their member representation was part and parcel of the day-to-day struggle where they fought (in Gramscian terms) a 'war of manoeuvre' to maintain their influence and power. While generally union organisations have been on the defensive since Thatcherism and have come under further attack since the 2008 financial crisis, the reps' organising activities are far removed from that suggested in the dominant industrial relations narratives of 'hollow shell' workplace trade unionism (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2009). By drilling down to the workplace level and examining their day-to-day organising efforts, a more optimistic picture emerges than writers who largely focused on broad structural factors and statistical analysis (Charlwood and Forth, 2009; Simms and Charlwood, 2010).

Providing an account of ‘the underlying interplay between objective and subjective elements’ (Darlington, 1994: 3), the empirical evidence presented in the thesis chimes with those writers (Darlington, 2009, 2014; Upchurch, 2015), who highlighted the continued resilience of workplace union organisation, albeit in difficult circumstances.

Further, by exploring the dialectics of individual and collective union representation, the thesis adds to our understanding of union revitalisation and renewal. Although there is an *individual* aspect to SAP representation, the reps constantly sought *collective* ways to defend their members, for instance through legal challenge and bargaining structures. Irrespective of the outcome, reps’ representation efforts were valued by union members, strengthening union organisation in terms of recruitment and retention. And, as stated previously, union members’ treatment under the policy may fuel workplace discontents and adversarial workplace relations, thus becoming a precursory factor in future mobilisation.

11.4 Study’s Generalisability

This section considers the extent to which this research’s findings are externally valid with general import.

This is a single case study, albeit a case study of many parts, which additionally has a longitudinal aspect. Therefore, its focus on UNISON activists’ responses to SAP implementation within the Council, its ALEOs and related organisations cannot be regarded as representative of local government organisations elsewhere. However, the thesis examined processes which are typical throughout local government, such as the introduction of market and commercial methods; efforts to control labour and other costs in the face of an unparalleled financial crisis; and attempts to change the terms of the effort bargain, resulting in workers in this sector being asked to *do more with less* as they face increased workloads, low pay and worsened terms and conditions. Not all local government organisations will chose to adopt such strict attendance management policies as the Council did but they all face similar cost control pressures and attendance issues.

Also, while smaller trade union branches may not have the resources that the large City branch has, the thesis explored the essential union concern of balancing individual and collective activity, suggesting that to build workplace organisation that is strong enough to defend their members, union activists must address this issue.

11.5 Study's Limitations

Unlike earlier studies of shop stewards' activity (Beynon, 1973; Darlington, 1994), the thesis did not consider the relationship between union activists and full-time union officers. Certainly the Glasgow City and GHA branches have links with full time officers but there was no evidence of the tensions present in earlier studies of workplace based union organisation. Provided branch activists operated within the rules of the union, they were afforded a large degree of autonomy to run branch affairs, regularly securing official union backing for industrial action ballots.

Additionally, the thesis did not examine reps' political outlook, an issue that Darlington (1994) felt was a neglected factor in understanding the dynamics of shop stewards' organisation. Further, it did not explore the importance of reps' gender on workplace union activities (Moore, 2011). Also, as the focus of the thesis was examining SAP implementation through the prism of shop stewards, managers were not interviewed.

11.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The thesis examined trade union and member responses to SAP implementation. Individual member representation took place against a background of sustained industrial conflict which has continued since the period studied (Appendix 5). Paradoxically, while there has been a decline in strikes throughout the economy, including the public sector, Glasgow City UNISON branch has been involved in sustained industrial conflict for several years. An attempt was made in the thesis to explore the links between union members' treatment under the SAP and whether it influenced their willingness to engage in collective forms of action. Through the prism of workers and union reps who have been involved in such action, further research could explore the factors in play that generate such conflict, including the extent to which strikers' attitudes have been hardened by their treatment under workplace control regimes, of which attendance management is an integral aspect.

Since the research data was gathered, the Council's transformation programme has continued and has seen wide application of Lean-type processes (*Insider*, April 2016). The connections between lean-working and SAP implementation could be another area for further research. Finally, as the thesis is being concluded management and trade unions are negotiating a new SAP, one which removes disciplinary sanctions. Further research could explore whether this represent the union's victory in the 'War on the Sickies' or merely a temporary halt if conflict shifts to the terrain of defending sick workers who face dismissal through capability

procedures. Also, further research could provide insights regarding to what extent the SNP controlled-Council's absence proposals herald a less confrontational approach to managing its employee relations than enacted by the previous Labour administration.



Pupil Support Assistants Mass Meeting (pic. Duncan Brown)



UNISON 2015 Conference Delegates March in Support of Glasgow Homeless Caseworkers

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Appendix 1: 2010 Questionnaire

SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

UNISON REPRESENTATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questionnaire **only** if you a UNISON rep (branch officer, shop steward, or health and safety rep). Please answer every question. If any box does not exactly fit your response please tick the one which is closest.

Thank you for your co-operation .

Section 1: About you and your members

1.1 Who is your employer (e.g. Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association, Cordia, City Building etc.)?

1.2 How long have you worked with your employer? Include previous employer if transferred/ seconded. _____

1.3. For how many years have you been a union rep? _____

1.4 How old are you? _____

1.5 What is your gender? 1. Male _____ 2. Female _____

1.6 In which service/department are these members?

1.7 What are their jobs?

1.8 How many hours each month on average do you spend on union representation?

1.9 How many hours each month on average of your union representation is sickness absence related? _____

1.10 Have the number of sickness absence cases where you have represented union members changed over time?

Please tick one box	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	Not appropriate
1. In last 12 months				
2. In last 2 years				
3. In last 5 years				

Section 2: Sickness Absence Policy

2.1 Your perceptions of the sickness absence policy

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Sickness absence policy is fair					
2.	Sickness absence policy is applied fairly					
3.	Sickness absence policy is applied consistently					
4.	Sickness absence policy pressurises workers to come to work when unwell					
5.	Sickness absence policy forces sick workers to return to work too soon					
6.	Line managers have discretion over the policy's implementation					
7.	Managers are sympathetic to sick workers' personal circumstances					
8.	Workers feel obliged to take holidays/ flexi time rather than report sick					
9.	Genuinely sick workers should not be disciplined					
10.	Absence policy makes it harder for some sick workers to return to work					
11.	Workers disciplined for their sickness absence no longer go "the extra mile"					
12.	Workers are angry about their sick colleagues' treatment					
13.	Sickness absence policy has a negative effect on workplace morale					
14.	Sickness absence policy is becoming more strictly applied					

Any comments _____

2.2 If you believe the sickness absence policy is becoming more strictly applied in which way is this so?

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	In relation to reporting sick					
2.	In respect of initial face to face contact after returning from sick leave					
3.	In the use of triggers to decide management action					
4.	In the use of advisory warning letters					
5.	In the use of disciplinary action					
6..	With the removal of occupational sick pay					
7.	In the use of dismissal and 'lack of capability'					

Section 3: Coming to work when sick

3.1 What percentage?

Please tick one box		None	1 to 25%	26 to 50%	51 to 75%	76 to 100%
1.	Approximately what percentage of union members come to work when sick?					

3.2 How often?

Please tick one box		At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Occasionally	Never
1.	How often do union members come to work when sick?					
2.	How often have you come to work when sick?					

3.3 If your union members come to work when sick what do you think the reasons are? Please tick any that apply. TICK

1. Do not want to let employer down	
2. Do not want to let service users/ the public down	
3. Do not want to let work colleagues down	
4. Want to get job done/ complete work tasks	
5. Worry about heavy workload waiting on return from sick leave	
6. Not ill enough to justifying taking time off	
7. Scared of the sickness absence policy	
8. Management/ Supervisor pressure	
9. Pressure from work colleagues	
10. Fear of being disciplined	
11. Worried about promotion prospects	
12. Worried about being on a temporary contract	
13. Worried about occupational sick pay being withdrawn	
14. Fear of losing job	
15. Other (please specify)	

4. Section 4: Positives and Negatives

4.1 What three aspects of the absence policy do you like most? (If none, please indicate)

4.2 What three aspects of the absence policy do you dislike most? (If none, please indicate)

Section 5: Work Context

5.1 Do any of the following job aspects contribute to sickness levels in your section/department/service? Please tick (or mark X) as many boxes that you think apply.

1. Too much work	
2. Not enough time to complete work tasks/ duties	
3. Having to work faster to meet deadlines	
4. Too difficult /too complex work	
5. Physically demanding work	
6. Emotionally demanding work	
7. Not enough workers to do the job properly	
8. Not enough resources to do the job properly	
9. Poor workplace morale	
10. Friction between colleagues	
11. Bullying from work colleagues	
12. Poor support/supervision from line managers	
13. Too close supervision/ work performance monitoring	
14. Bullying from supervisors/ managers	
15. Having no influence how job is done	
16. Injuries at work	
17. Physical assaults from service users/ public	
18. Threats of violence/ verbal abuse from service users/ public	
19. Poor physical working conditions (e.g. overcrowded, too hot/ too cold)	
20. Workplace stress	
21. Illness/ infection acquired at work	
22. Difficulties taking holidays/ flexi leave	
23. Difficulties taking regular lunch/ tea breaks	
24. Difficulties getting time off for personal reasons (e.g. doctors, dentist)	
25. Having to work extra hours/shifts on a regular basis	
26. Having to work extra hours/shifts at short notice	

27. Uncertainty regarding organisational change	
28. How organisational change is managed	
29. Not being able to influence organisational change	
30. Other reasons (please specify)	

Section 6: Management Action

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Managers support workers when they are off sick					
2.	Managers support sick workers return to work					
3.	Managers ensure health and safety policies are implemented					
4.	Managers take violence at work issues seriously					
5.	Managers are more interested in getting job done than reasons why people are sick					
6.	Managers are more interested in statistics than the reasons why people are sick					
7.	Managers make allowances for job demand pressures when implementing the absence policy					
8.	Management take into account workers' injuries at work when implementing the absence policy					
9.	Manager take into account the Disability Discrimination Act when implementing the policy					
10.	Managers pressure workers to take holidays/ flexi time rather than report sick					
11.	Managers take firm action against workplace bullying					
12.	Managers ensure workers have reasonable workloads					
13.	Managers take action to prevent stress at work					
14.	Managers consider gender equality when implanting the sickness absence policy					
15.	Managers are more concerned with 'punishing' sick workers than supporting them					
16.	Management is good at consulting over sickness absence policy changes					
17.	Management is generally good at consulting over workplace change					

Section 7: Union Representation

7.1 Have you have represented members at a *formal absence interview* (not a *disciplinary hearing* or *'lack of capability' review meeting*)?

Yes _____ No _____ If you answer 'no' proceed to question 7.3

7.2 Please answer these questions if you have represented members at a *formal absence interview*

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Union reps influence manager decisions whether or not formal absence letters are issued					
2.	Union reps influence managers decisions whether or not to proceed to discipline					
3.	Members who bring a union rep. to meetings are treated more fairly than those who do not					

7.3 Have you have represented members represented members at a *sickness absence disciplinary hearing* or *'lack of capability' absence review meeting* (where dismissal could be an option)?

Yes _____ No _____ If you answer 'no' proceed to question 8

7.4 Answer these questions if you have represented members at a *sickness absence disciplinary hearing* or *'lack of capability' absence review meeting*

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Union representation influences what happens					
2.	Union representation makes no difference to what happens					
3.	Managers decide outcomes in advance before the hearing					
4.	Disciplinary sanctions imposed are often too harsh					
5.	Members value union representation whatever the outcome					

Section 8: Managerial Strategy

8.1 What do you think management hope to achieve though sickness absence policy implementation? Please rank answers from 1 to10 (improve workers health 1, save money on staff costs 2, etc.)

RANK

Reduce sickness levels	
Improve workers' health	
Demonstrate managers are in control of the workforce	
Scare workers from going sick	
Help sick workers return to work	
Maintain services	
Bully workforce	
Help workers access occupational health services	
Promote an attendance culture	
Sack workers	

Section 9: Union Implications

9.1 What implications does the absence policy have for union organisation?

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Fosters "us-them" employer-employee relationships					
2.	Motivates individuals to join the union					
3.	Motivates individuals to stay in the union					
4.	"Fuels" union member discontents with the employer					
5.	Likely to influence wider union member decisions (e.g. in pay ballot)?					

Any comments _____

Section 10: Union Action

10.1 Which aspects of the sickness absence policy is the union most successful in representing members?

10.2 Which aspects of the sickness absence policy is the union least successful in representing members?

10.3 How can the union improve its representation of members within the sickness absence policy?

Section 11: Any Comments?

Are there any other comments you would like to make? (Please add separate sheet if necessary)

PLEASE RETURN TO "UNISON ABSENCE SURVEY", GLASGOW CITY UNISON, 4th Floor,
18 ALBION STREET, GLASGOW, G1 1LH

If you have any queries please contact james.main@strath.ac.uk or telephone xxxx

Appendix 2: 2013 Questionnaire

SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

UNISON REPRESENTATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE - 2013

Please complete the questionnaire **only** if you a UNISON rep (branch officer, shop steward or health and safety rep).

DID YOU COMPLETE THE PREVIOUS QUESTIONNAIRE IN 2010?

Yes ___ No ___

Section 1: Trade Union Representation - You and Your Members

1.1 **Who is your employer (e.g. Glasgow City Council, GHA, Cordia, SPT, City Building, Stow College etc.)?**

1.2 **How many years have you been a union rep? _____**

1.3 **Which of the following union positions do you currently hold? (please tick)**

Branch officer ___ Shop steward ___ Health & safety rep ___

1.4 **In which service/department do you work? _____**

1.5 **Please describe the jobs and roles of the members you represent?**

1.6 **Please give an estimate of the number of hours IN TOTAL that you spend on average each month on union activities?**

_____ hours

1.7 **How many per month on average hours are spent on...**

...shop stewards/ reps meetings _____ hours

...representing members on sickness absence issues _____ hours

...representing members on other issues _____ hours

1.8 **How much facility time do you have each month? _____ hours**

1.9 **How many hours do you spend on union matters over and above facility time on average each month**

_____ hours

1.10 How many hours do you spend on union work at home or away from the workplace on average each month on...

...preparing sickness absence cases for members? ____ hours

...preparing other cases on behalf of members? ____ hours

1.11 Has the number of sickness absence cases where you have represented members changed over time? (If you were not a rep over any of these periods please tick n/a)

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same	n/a
Over the last 12 months				
Over the last 2 years				
Over the last 5 years				

Section 2: The Sickness Absence Policy

2.1 What are your perceptions of the sickness absence policy? To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Sickness absence policy is fair					
Sickness absence policy is applied fairly					
Sickness absence policy pressurises workers to come to work when unwell					
Sickness absence policy forces sick workers to return to work too soon					
Line managers have discretion over the policy's implementation					
Managers are sympathetic to sick workers' personal circumstances					
Workers feel obliged to take holidays/ flexi time rather than report sick					
Genuinely sick workers shouldn't be disciplined					
Absence policy makes it harder for some sick workers to return to work					
Workers are angry about sick colleagues' treatment					
Sickness absence policy has a negative effect on workplace morale					
Sickness absence policy is becoming more strictly applied					

- 2.2 **If you believe the sickness policy is being more strictly applied in which way is this so? If you do not think the policy is being more strictly applied proceed to Section 3.**

<i>Sickness policy is being more strictly applied in relation to...</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
...procedures for reporting sick					
...return to work interviews					
...the use of triggers to decide action					
...the use of advisory warning letters					
...the use of disciplinary action					
...the removal of occupational sick pay					
...the use of dismissal/lack of capability procedures					

Section 3: Coming to Work When Sick

- 3.1 **In your experience what percentage of the workforce has ever come to work when sick? _____ %**
- 3.2 **In your experience what percentage of the workforce regularly comes to work when sick (at least several times a year)? _____ %**
- 3.3 **In your experience what percentage of the workforce frequently comes to work when sick (at least several times a month)? _____ %**

3.4 If your union members come to work when sick what do you think the reasons are? Please tick any that apply.

Do not want to let employer down	
Do not want to let the public / service users down	
Do not want to let work colleagues down	
Want to get job done/ complete work tasks	
Worried about heavy workload waiting on return from sick leave	
Not ill enough to justifying taking time off	
Scared of the sickness absence policy	
Management/ Supervisor pressure	
Work colleague pressure	
Fear of being disciplined	
Worried about poorer promotion prospects	
Worried being on a temporary contract	
Worried about occupational sick pay being withdrawn	
Fear of losing job	
Other (please specify)	

Section 4: You and the Sickness Absence Policy

4.1 How often do you come to work when sick?

At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Occasionally	Never

4.2 What are the reasons why you have come to work when sick?

Do not want to let employer down	
Do not want to let the public / service users down	
Do not want to let work colleagues down	
Want to get job done/ complete work tasks	
Worried about heavy workload waiting on return from sick leave	
Not ill enough to justifying taking time off	
Scared of the sickness absence policy	
Management/ Supervisor pressure	
Work colleague pressure	
Fear of being disciplined	
Worried about poorer promotion prospects	
Worried being on a temporary contract	
Worried about occupational sick pay being withdrawn	
Fear of losing job	
Other (please specify)	

4.3 What aspects of the absence policy do you like most? (If none, please indicate)

4.4 What aspects of the absence policy do you dislike most? (If none, please indicate)

Section 5: Work Context

5.1 Do any of the following job aspects contribute to sickness levels in your section/department/service? Please tick (or mark X) as many boxes that you think apply.

1. Too much work	
2. Not enough time to complete work tasks/ duties	
3. Having to work faster to meet deadlines	
4. Too difficult /too complex work	
5. Physically demanding work	
6. Emotionally demanding work	
7. Not enough workers to do the job properly	
8. Not enough resources to do the job properly	
9. Poor workplace morale	
10. Friction between colleagues	
11. Bullying from work colleagues	
12. Poor support/supervision from line managers	
13. Too close supervision/ work performance monitoring	
14. Bullying from supervisors/ managers	
15. Having no influence how job is done	
16. Injuries at work	
17. Physical assaults from service users/ public	
18. Threats of violence/ verbal abuse from service users/ public	
19. Poor physical working conditions (e.g. overcrowded, too hot/ too cold)	
20. Workplace stress	
21. Illness/ infection acquired at work	
22. Difficulties taking holidays/ flexi leave	
23. Difficulties taking regular lunch/ tea breaks	
24. Difficulties getting time off for personal reasons (e.g. doctors, dentist)	
25. Having to work extra hours/shifts on a regular basis	
26. Having to work extra hours/shifts at short notice	

27. Uncertainty regarding organisational change	
28. How organisational change is managed	
29. Not being able to influence organisational change	
30. Other reasons (please specify)	

Section 6: Management Action

Please tick one box		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Managers support workers when they are off sick					
2.	Managers support sick workers return to work					
3.	Managers ensure health and safety policies are implemented					
4.	Managers take violence at work issues seriously					
5.	Managers are more interested in getting job done than reasons why people are sick					
6.	Managers are more interested in statistics than the reasons why people are sick					
7.	Managers make allowances for job demand pressures when implementing the absence policy					
8.	Management take into account workers' injuries at work when implementing the absence policy					
9.	Manager take into account the Disability Discrimination Act when implementing the policy					
10.	Managers pressure workers to take holidays/ flexi time rather than report sick					
11.	Managers take firm action against workplace bullying					
12.	Managers ensure workers have reasonable workloads					
13.	Managers take action to prevent stress at work					
14.	Managers consider gender equality when implanting the sickness absence policy					
15.	Managers are more concerned with 'punishing' sick workers than supporting them					
16.	Management is good at consulting over sickness absence policy changes					
17.	Management is generally good at consulting over workplace change					

Section 7: Union Representation

7.1 Have you represented members at a *formal absence interview* (not a disciplinary hearing or 'lack of capability' review meeting?)

Yes _____ No _____ If you answer 'no' proceed to question 7.3

7.2 Please answer these questions if you have represented members at a *formal absence interview*

Please tick one box	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a union rep I have been able to influence manager decisions whether or not formal absence advisory letters are issued					
As a union rep I have been able to influence managers decisions whether or not to proceed to discipline					
Members who bring a union rep. to meetings are treated more fairly than those who do not					

7.3 Have you represented members represented members at a sickness absence *disciplinary hearing or 'lack of capability' absence review meeting* (where dismissal could be an option)?

Yes _____ No _____ If you answer 'no' proceed to question 8

7.4 Answer these questions if you have represented members at a sickness absence *disciplinary hearing or 'lack of capability' absence review meeting*

Please tick one box	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Union representation influences what happens					
2. Union representation makes no difference to what happens					
3. Managers decide outcomes in advance before the hearing					
4. Disciplinary sanctions imposed are often too harsh					
5. Members value union representation whatever the outcome					

Section 8: Managerial Strategy

8.1 What do you think management hope to achieve though sickness absence policy implementation? Please rank your TOP THREE answers. RANK

Reduce sickness levels	
Improve workers' health	
Demonstrate managers are in control of the workforce	
Scare workers from going sick	
Help sick workers return to work	
Maintain services	
Bully workforce	
Help workers access occupational health services	
Promote an attendance culture	
Sack workers	

Section 9: Union Implications

9.1 What is the impact of the absence policy on union organisation?

Please tick one box	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither/ Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fosters "us-them" employer-employee relationships					
Motivates individuals to join the union					
Motivates individuals to stay in the union					
"Fuels" union member discontents with the employer					
Likely to influence wider union member decisions (e.g. in pay ballot)?					

Any comments _____

Section 10: Union Action

10.1 What aspects of the sickness absence policy has the union been most successful in representing members?

10.2 What aspects of the sickness absence policy has the union been least successful in representing members?

10.3 In what ways can the union improve its representation of members within the sickness absence policy?

Section 11: Work pressures

11.1 To what extent has voluntary severance/ unfilled posts had an impact on your workplace?

11.2 To what extent do you feel pressurised as a result of work on a normal working day? Please tick one box.

Not at all pressurised	
Not very pressurised	
Quite pressurised	
Very pressurised	

11.3 If you do feel pressurised, to what extent do the following aspects of your work contribute to pressures of the job? Please tick one box for each aspect:

	A great deal	To some extent	A little	Not much	Not at all	Does not apply
Work loads						
Dealing with backlogs of work						
Having to meet targets/Performance Indicators						
Fear of mistaking mistakes						
Fear of becoming an underperformer						
Not given enough information to do the job						
Not given sufficient training to do the job						
Having to complete paper work/clerical tasks						
Breaks not long enough						
Inadequate staffing levels						
Pressure from a supervisor						
Not enough time to talk to colleagues						
Having to work as part of a team						
Physical discomfort at work station						
Monotony of the job						
Having to 'juggle' different tasks						
No gaps between tasks or jobs						

Section 12: More about you

12.1 How old are you? ___ 12.2 Your gender? 1.male __ 2. female __

12.3 When did you start employment with Glasgow City Council? _____

12.4 If you were transferred to an ALEO or other body when was this? ___

Are there any other comments you would like to make? (Please add separate sheet if necessary)

**PLEASE RETURN TO "UNISON ABSENCE SURVEY", GLASGOW CITY UNISON, 4th Floor,
18 ALBION STREET, GLASGOW, G1 1LH**

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

How long have you been a union member/ union rep?

Why did you join the union/ become a union rep?

What is your job/ what are your members' jobs?

How long have you been doing this?

What was the job like when you first started?

What is the job like now compared to then?

Why do you think your job has changed?

What are the levels of sickness absence like at your work?

Are there any aspects of your job or work environment that contribute to sickness absence levels?

Can you describe how this affects sickness absence levels?

How do management implement sickness absence levels within your workplace?

Has the policy become more strictly implemented?

If so, in which way has it become more strictly implemented?

If so, when did the policy become more strictly implemented?

Do managers make any allowances for the type of work individuals do when implementing the policy?

If the policy is more strictly implemented, what do you think are the reasons for the change?

What impact is the policy having on you and your workmates?

How effective is the union in representing union members under the policy?

In what areas is the union good at representing members (e.g. at Formal absence interviews / Disciplinary Hearings)?

Does management listen to what union reps are saying?

Do union members value union representation?

Has union representation under the SAP any impact on union organisation (e.g. leave/ join union; take part in more general collective action)?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



Name of department: Human Resource Management

Title of the study: Sickness absence policy implementation within local government: implications and consequences for industrial relations, trade unionism and workers' experiences

Introduction: I would be grateful if you could read this statement which explains the research purpose. Hopefully this will inform you whether you wish to take part or not.

I am a part time PHD student at Strathclyde University Department of Human Resource Management. I am also a full time employee of Glasgow City Council and elected UNISON representative.

I can be contacted by email at james.main@strath.ac.uk or by telephone at xxxxxxx

What is the purpose of this investigation?

My area of study is the changing nature of sickness absence management policies within local government. My proposition is that a shift is taking place towards stricter policy implementation and this is having largely negative workforce consequences.

The research aims are

- To explore the processes which are resulting in stricter absence policy implementation in Local Government
- To consider the impact this is having on workers, and individual and collective responses
- To consider the effect on industrial relations and the implications for trade union organization

Do you have to take part?

You are free to choose whether you become involved in this research or not. You should not feel obliged in any way to take part. If you decide to become involved you can withdraw at any point.

What will you do in the project?

You may be asked to complete a questionnaire, attend a focus group interview and individual interview. Interviews will take place at /// on ///

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a UNISON representative who may have some knowledge of the workings of the sickness absence policy within the organisation you are employed. It may be the case that you have either positive or negative experiences of the policy. The study is seeking to hear the views of workers and their representatives so that better understanding of policy implementation can be gained.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

While some managers are aware of the research permission has not been sought from your employer. You are being asked to participate as a UNISON union member and consequently involvement in research activities will take place during breaks or when off shift.

What happens to the information in the project?

Any information provide with be kept confidential and anonymous. When the research is completed and written up or published care will be taken to ensure any comments made either by questionnaire or interview cannot be identified as having being made any participant.

Information provided will be kept secure and accessible only to the researcher and supervisors on a non-network personal computer.

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.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved please sign the attached consent form. If you do not wish to be involved I thank you very much for your interest.

Once the research has been undertaken written reports will be distributed through UNISON union communication networks. It is hoped that the research findings will be published in academic journals.

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Human Resource Management department's ethics committee.

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:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee, Research & Knowledge Exchange Services, University of Strathclyde, Graham Hills Building, 50 George Street, Glasgow. G1 1QE Tel: 0141 548 3707 Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Researcher Contact Details: James Main james.main@strath.ac.uk

PHD Student Supervisor: Professor Phil Taylor philip.taylor@strath.ac.uk

Participant Consent Form

Name of department: Human Resource Management

Title of the study: Sickness absence policy implementation within local government: implications and consequences for industrial relations, trade unionism and workers' experiences

- 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 will remain 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 as part of the project Yes/ No

I hereby agree to take part in the above project	(PRINT NAME)
Signature of Participant:	Date

Appendix 5: Glasgow City Council and Related Organisations' Disputes (1998 - 2017)

Year	Dispute	Action	Issue/ Details	No.	Outcome
May 1998- May 1999	Library Assistants	Series of 1 and 3 day strikes	Pay cuts	300	UNISON refused branch-wide ballot. Dispute ended
Aug 1998	Social Work Home Care Transfer	Unofficial stoppage	8 days duration	About 3,000	Suspended workers reinstated
Sept 1998	Housing Dept. Concierges	One day strike	Working conditions	Not known	Not known
Mar 1999	Compulsory Redundancies	Strike ballot	Branch wide	11,000	Not known
April 1999	Social Work Victimisation	Unofficial walkout	Convenor suspended	100	2 reps sacked. Final written warnings issued
Sept 1999	Social Work Victimisation	Social Work ballot	60% yes vote (38% turnout) UNISON called off planned strike	3,924	2 sacked reps won their ET case.
Aug 2000	Scottish Local Govt. Pay Dispute	One day strikes	29 th Aug, 21 st Sept, and 16 th Nov.	All branch	6.1% 2 year deal, £500 flat rate 2002-3; 4% in 2003-4
June 2002	Leisure Centres	2 days	Imposed changes to conditions	300	Not known
Oct 2002	Homelessness Workers	3 weeks all-out action	Health and safety concerns about protective screens	70	Screens introduced
Jan 2003	Housing Stock Transfer	Strike ballot	UNISON members rejected action	1000	Transfer to GHA took place
17 Mar 2003	Theatre Technicians	One day	BECTU members strike over changes to working conditions	Not known	Negotiated settlement
May 2003 to June 2004	Nursery Nurses Strike	Strikes/ boycott of duties	Following a work-to-rule which began in May 2003, 4445 Scottish nursery nurses struck between March-June 2004	1000 branch members	Glasgow nursery nurses' hourly rate increased to £9.83. National pay ended
28th Mar 2006	Public Sector Pensions Dispute	One day strike	200,000 workers took part in the "biggest strike in more than 80 years" (<i>Herald</i> , 28 th March, 2006)	12,000 branch members	Negotiated settlement
Dec 2006	Job evaluation	Branch ballot	66% yes strike vote (47% turnout)	10,620	5-7 th December strike suspended. Pay protection won

2007	Residential Workers	Overtime ban	Increased use of agency workers and increased overtime demands	1000	Improved overtime rate agreed
2007	Social Care Workers	20 days all-out-strike	Job evaluation grading dispute	600	Improved grading structure accepted
2007	Day Care Workers	8 week all out-strike	Job evaluation grading dispute	300	New grading structure accepted
Jan 2008	Polmadie Depot Mechanics	One day	Unite members job evaluation grading dispute	9	Not known
2 nd June 2008	Scottish Council Trades Dispute	One day	Council plumbers and electricians took part in all-Scotland action	Not known	Not known
July 2008	Elderly Residential Workers	Ballot	Pay review grading dispute, threatened strike resulted in negotiated settlement	700	Improved grading structure accepted
2008	Scottish Local Govt. Pay Dispute	One day strikes	20 Aug and 24 Sept, 2008	11, 500	Pay offer accepted (3% for 2008-9; 2.5% for 2009-10)
Jan-June 2009	Community Safety Workers	6 months all-out strike	Pay review grading	21	Improved grading accepted. Workers transferred to CSG
Mar 2009	Job Evaluation	Branch ballot	Over 'detriment'	12,000	Insufficient support for action.
April 2009	Library Assistants	Work to rule	Workers suspended after refusing higher graded workers' duties	30	Agreement reached on duties
June 2009	Admin & Clerical Workers	Strike ballot	58% yes vote to strike for a £521 per annum "work context payment"	400	Management offered £521 payment before planned action
Aug 2009	"Four on, four off" Cleansing Dispute	Strike ballot	Involving UNITE & GMB members	1,200	Strike called off after management made concessions
2010	Culture and Sport Glasgow (Glasgow Life)	Series of one day strikes	Dispute over changes to public holidays and overtime rates	872	New conditions imposed
2011	Social Work Asylum Team YPeople transfer	Strike ballot	Threatened transfer to YPeople, 100% yes vote (90% turnout)	34	Asylum Team workers seconded to YPeople for 12 months before returning to Council
2011	Stow College Catering Workers	One and 3 day's action	Failure to pay the Living Wage	90	College conceded Living Wage

30 Nov 2011	UK Pensions Dispute	One day strike	2 million workers took UK-wide action	10,800	Pension changes implemented
Sept. 2013	Homelessness Caseworkers	4 day	Unofficial walkout over workloads	70	Workload agreement in place
Oct 2013- Jan 2014	Education Pupil Support Assistants	Series of 2 day strikes	Grading dispute over medication dispensation	900	Regrading, increased staffing and new procedures agreed
2014	Social Work Residential Workers	Series of 2 and 3 day strikes	Changes to 12 hour shift patterns which led to some workers losing allowances	400	Compensation payment and increased staffing accepted
2014	Glasgow Life	Strike ballot	Commonwealth Games payment	321	Legal challenge to strike ballot
Sept 2014	Scottish Local Govt. Pay Dispute	Strike ballot	53.5% yes vote for industrial action	10,000	Planned strike called off. New offer accepted.
2015	Homelessness Caseworkers	17 week stoppage	Grading dispute	70	Increased grade won. Workforce reduction
2016	Community Safety CCTV Operators	Series of 48 to 84 hour strikes	Grading dispute, 100% yes vote (94 % turnout)	19	Negotiated settlement, £4,000 lump sum payment
2016	Residential and Cleansing Workers	Strike ballot	Council proposed to end premium payments for 6 public holidays	1000	Council withdrew proposals after votes for strike action
2016	Community Safety	Series of 2 day strikes	Unsocial hours grading dispute	130 UNISON & GMB members	New terms and conditions imposed
2016	FE Support Workers Pay Dispute	Two 1 day strikes	Glasgow City UNISON FE members took part in all-Scotland action	800 branch members	Improved flat-rate payment (£450) added to £100 initially offered
2016-2017	Access ICT workers	Ballot	Threatened privatisation	200	Privatisation threat withdrawn
2016-2017	Cordia Janitors	Series of 3 and 5 day strikes	Grading dispute	130	Improved grading and staffing offer accepted

Appendix 6: Managerial SAP Implementation 2010

Employer	FAI	Trigger	No Discretion	Discipline	OSP	Dismissal/ Capability	Total
SWS	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Education	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
LES	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
DRS	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Finance	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Chief Exec	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Cordia	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
CSG	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
GHA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gl. Life	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Finance Co	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Access	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Construct.	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR
Parking	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Colleges	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
Transport	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR

NQR = No Questionnaire Return

Appendix 7: Managerial SAP Implementation 2013

Employer	FAI	Trigger	No Discretion	Discipline	OSP	Dismissal/ Capability	Total
SWS	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
LES	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
DRS	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Finance	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Chief Exec	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Cordia	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
CSG	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
GHA	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Gl. Life	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Finance Co	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR
Access	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Construct.	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR
Parking	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Colleges	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
Transport	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR	NQR

NQR = No Questionnaire Return

Appendix 8: Stewards' Organisation 2010

Employer	< 5 reps	5-9 reps	> 10 reps	> 2 av. Experience	Regular Meetings	Officers	Bargaining	Total
SWS	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Education	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
LES	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
DRS	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
Finance	x	2		1	1	1	1	6
Chief Exec	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5
Cordia	1	x	x	1	0	1	1	4
CSG	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
GHA	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Gl. Life	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
Finance Co	1	x	x	0	0	0	1	2
Access	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
Construct.	1	x	x	1	0	0	1	3
Parking	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5
Colleges	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Transport	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5

Appendix 9: Stewards' Organisation 2013

Employer	< 5 reps	5-9 reps	> 10 reps	> 2 av. Experience	Regular Meetings	Officers	Bargaining	Total
SWS	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Education	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
LES	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
DRS	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
Finance	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5
Chief Exec	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Cordia	1	x	x	1	0	1	1	4
CSG	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
GHA	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Gl. Life	x	2	x	0	1	1	1	5
Finance Co	1	x	x	1	0	0	1	3
Access	x	2	x	1	1	1	1	6
Construct.	1	x	x	1	0	0	1	3
Parking	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5
Colleges	x	x	3	1	1	1	1	7
Transport	1	x	x	1	1	1	1	5

Appendix 10: Management Implementation and Stewards' Organisation, 2010 and 2013

Employer	MI 2010 Total	MI 2013 Total	SO 2010 Total	SO 2013 Total
SWS	6	5	7	7
Education	2	6	7	7
LES	5	6	6	6
DRS	2	3	6	6
Finance	6	6	6	5
Chief Exec	5	6	5	7
Cordia	6	6	4	4
CSG	5	6	6	6
GHA	0	1	7	7
Gl. Life	6	5	6	5
Finance Co	3	NQR (3)	2	3
Access	2	0	6	6
Construct.	NQR (3)	NQR (3)	3	3
Parking	5	5	5	5
Colleges	5	5	7	7
Transport	NQR (5)	NQR (5)	5	5

NQR = No Questionnaire Return, bracketed are estimated scores from qualitative data