GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

THE PAST IN PLAY

TRADITION AND COLLABORATION

PART I

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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This work is dedicated to the memory of

Bill Phillips

ABSTRACT

The thesis presents the results of an investigation into the role of *tradition* in *interorganizational collaboration*. The main part of the research was conducted in three collaborative contexts: a regional business network; a network of national science groups; and a European science network. The situations were researched over a period varying from one to three years. The findings provide indications of the role of tradition in the conflicts and complexities of collaboration and therefore contribute to an understanding of the difficulties of collaborative practice. Inferences about the inter-relation of tradition with structures, notions of identity and knowledge are developed and linked to a collaborative interaction in relation to small groups, networks and broad societal patterns. These inferences help to provide a more developed conceptualization of the role of tradition in collaborative situations. Since these points are grounded in the data collected during this research – but are also connected to relevant theories of tradition, identity, social structure and knowledge – they are of direct relevance to the consideration of collaboration, but may be of utility in other areas of organization studies.

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Of course I also have to thank my family and friends for keeping me sane, and for offering limitless encouragement – especially, but not only, Sue and Mum and my friends Craig and Lynne. I conclude with a special message for my god-daughters Abbie and Martha: Uncle Paul says 'Hi', and promises to see you more often now!

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ABOUT THIS WORK

This thesis presents the results of research into the role of tradition in interorganizational collaboration, conducted between April 2001 and October 2005. Although this is a discrete piece of research, it is connected to the long-standing and ongoing programme of research into interorganizational collaboration led by Chris Huxham at the University of Strathclyde, and to other research activities within the Graduate School of Business. The list of other written works (that is, in addition to this thesis) presented in the appendix, provides an indication of these overlaps and connections.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND APPROACH

The initial broad area for investigation was related to understanding 'what makes collaboration work'; this effectively connects with the broad programme of research on collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) conducted for some years at Strathclyde, but also with my own interest in understanding the problems I encountered in collaborative groups in my industrial and consultancy career.

This rather loose interest in 'what makes collaboration work' was first investigated in an exploratory fashion, to suggest some potential themes for more detailed investigation which might make a useful contribution to the developing literature. The identification of tradition as a theme proceeded from this first phase of the research, which is discussed fully in later chapters. Tradition presented itself as an interesting area for exploration since there was a small but coherent body of sociological theory about it (most particularly Shils, 1981) but no empirical research

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in the organizational domain in which it was grounded. Tradition was most often alluded to in connection with culture – for example, Alvesson (2002) describes organizational cultures as being anchored in traditions. However, neither the nature of this connection nor tradition itself is transparent in such allusions.

Having identified a suitable theme for the research, a compatible methodology was also developed. The approach to investigating the theme of tradition in relation to interorganizational collaboration in this study was built on the style of action research developed by Eden and Huxham (1996), and took a 'partial ethnographic' stance as suggested by Alvesson and Deetz (2000). Importantly, this means that an interpretive approach was central to the conduct of the research. This reflects the nature of the methods employed – and their suitability to the study of tradition – but also a personal interest in the role of hermeneutics in the human sciences (for example Gadamer, 1998; Ricoeur, 1981). Three separate 'cases' – a regional business network, a collection of national science groups and a European science network – were the focus of the principal part of the investigative work, which followed the preliminary 'scoping' research.

FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTION

The findings from this research help to develop the body of theory relating to both collaboration and tradition, in three ways. Firstly, the findings on structures and tradition help to demonstrate that, in patterns of interpretation, different scales of community may be having an influence within the same set of events. Secondly, the findings on tradition and knowledge show tradition to have a performative as well as

a communicative function. Finally, the findings provide a characterisation of multi-level traditionally-anchored flows in the construction of identities and identity positions in collaborations. Such findings also have implications for informing practice in collaboration, which are explored in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The findings also make a contribution in relation to theories of tradition. They provide an empirical grounding of sociological theories of tradition in organisational studies, and support the development of a richer understanding of tradition as inter-related process and content. In particular the findings characterise the temporal and structural dimensions of tradition, and develop a richer conceptualisation of the processes supporting identity and knowledge/interpretation within those dimensions.

These findings of course need qualification in relation to the limitations of the scale and scope of this study – such issues are elaborated in the concluding chapter of the thesis – but it is argued that this work both enriches existing theory in this area and sets the stage for future studies.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This concluding section of this introduction provides a very brief overview of the contents of the remaining chapters of the thesis, set out below:

- Chapter 2 details the initial exploration of the literature on collaboration, which provides the general framing, both for the initial exploratory research on 'what makes collaboration work', and for the study as a whole. This is contained within

broad notions of success in collaboration, and most particularly in relation to the theory of collaborative advantage.

- Chapter 3 explains the methodology for the study. This includes a philosophical grounding of the approach and a discussion of problems and strategies, as well as an explication of the method as applied both to the initial, exploratory work and the focussed research on tradition and collaboration.
- Chapter 4 sets out the findings from the exploratory phase of the research, which helped to identify tradition as a relevant theme for detailed exploration amongst other possibilities, in order to develop a better understanding of collaboration.
- Chapter 5 provides the second part of the literature review, in this case focussed more explicitly upon tradition and collaboration, and themes which were found to be related – knowledge, identity, structures, culture and power. An integrated perspective on these themes is developed, and in the concluding part of this chapter 'hooks' for engaging with the empirical data are presented.
- Chapter 6 provides a case-based[1] presentation of the findings. This presentation of the material is in the form of narratives constructed from, and in the context of, the empirical data. This leads to the identification of key observations in the findings which are developed in the following chapter.
- Chapter 7 provides a connection and exploration of the links between the theoretical framework presented in chapter 5 and the findings set out in chapter 6. It includes the development of richer theoretical pictures – in the context of collaboration – of tradition in relation to structures, identity and knowledge. To

[1] That is, each of the three collaborative situations central to this research is presented and discussed individually – these are not presented as 'case studies' *per se*. Throughout this thesis 'case' is used to refer to a particular research situation / researched collaboration.

complete the comparisons with the literature in chapter 5 some inferences in relation to culture are also developed.

- Chapter 8 provides a summary of the contribution of this work. This contribution is characterised in relation to theories of collaboration and tradition and in the development of some implications for practice. The final chapter also suggests some limitations of the study and scope for further work.

Having set out the outline structure of this thesis, the discussion turns to the initial literature explorations, set out in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature I – Framing the Research

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the main elements of the theoretical background for the exploratory phase of the research (the phased approach was discussed in the preceding chapter), but should also be seen as informing the broad context of the explicitly focussed phase of the research on collaboration and tradition. Importantly, literature exploration continued throughout the study; the presentation here therefore sets out a final understanding, developed with later readings, of the initial exploratory position. The chapter addresses two general areas, namely: how collaboration might be defined; and similarly how *'what makes it work?'* might be defined. These areas provide (together with the discussion of my 'philosophical position' in chapter 3) the broad intellectual context for the exploratory work, but the literature reviewed here also overlaps with the more thematically focussed theoretical readings presented in chapter 5. That is, the particular readings in chapter 5 connect with the more general readings presented here but are focussed on the final research question. The first step in progressing towards that final question is the elaboration of the general literature, which follows below.

ABOUT COLLABORATION – AND 'MAKING IT WORK'

Defining collaboration

For the present discussion, the recent definition of collaboration suggested by Everett and Jamal (2004) is a useful starting point *"Stakeholders engaging in an interactive process to act or decide on issues related to a problem domain"* (p57). This definition seems to be useful since it is very inclusive, but perhaps a little more

exploration of the possible classes of interaction might be useful – especially connecting these more explicitly to *interorganizational* forms. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) suggest that there is the potential for both horizontal and vertical forms of interorganizational interactions to be encompassed in collaboration. Thus interorganizational collaboration might be defined as problem solving, either within or across different organizational sectors (private, public, charitable – for example). This might include formal collaborations between organizations or many forms of cooperative effort involving individuals, such as professional networks and communities. An explicit interorganizational focus has largely been adopted in this thesis, but establishing the broad definition above allows the work to draw upon some pertinent inter-group / inter-community papers which enrich the discussion. As the later discussion will show, concepts and theories from these overlapping areas can provide some relevant contributions to explaining and understanding interorganizational forms and processes. For similar reasons of overlap and utility, definitions which restrict the term 'collaboration' to specific sectors (such as non-profit initiatives – Mattesich, Murray Close and Monsey, 2001) or treatments focussed on specific interorganizational forms (such as alliances – Inkpen, 2002) have not been adopted. It is important to note that the focus on *process* implicit in the Everett and Jamal (2004) definition presented at the outset of this discussion is coherent with this generalist approach.

The notion of collaboration as process (and not just as an interorganizational form) is an important point. Throughout this work collaboration has been approached as a process, which is more likely to result in failure or *inertia* than *advantage* (Huxham

and Vangen, 2005). The broad, 'catch-all' approach to collaboration is also somewhat justified in that *collaborative inertia* has been observed in studies within and between sectors (Gray, 1989; Gray 2004; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Huxham and Vangen, 2005). This work – and this chapter in particular – therefore takes the position that *processes* within multi-party interorganizational interactions within *and* between sectors are *both* worthy of consideration in the analysis of the processes and problems of collaboration in general; that is, it is expected that findings from a particular form or instance of collaboration may generate relevant process insights which might apply to quite different instances (with all the usual caveats). Going further, the limits, boundaries and categorizations of collaborative initiatives are frequently complex and transitory (Huxham and Vangen, 2005); this means that helping to understand how collaborations might succeed – how the possibility of collaborative advantage might be supported – requires that one connects with the complexity of the field in as general a way as possible.

Although it might be argued to be relatively straightforward to approach an inclusive definition of collaboration as a process and problem, highlighting a *definitive theoretical basis* for talking about it is not so straightforward – as Everett and Jamal (2004) have commented:

> *"This is not to say, however, that the field coheres theoretically. Insights into collaborations are still the product of numerous and diverse perspectives..."*
>
> Everett and Jamal (2004:p57

This breadth of perspectives can be underlined by comparing the theoretical diversity in talking about collaboration identified in three recent reviews:

Theory / domain / perspective	Everett and Jamal, 2004	Gray, 2004	Van Raak et al, 2002
Action research	✓		
Communications theory	✓		
Contingency theory	✓		
Discourse theory	✓	✓	
Institutional theory	✓	✓	✓
Learning	✓	✓	✓
Negotiated order theory	✓		
Network theory & social capital	✓	✓	
Political economy	✓		
Power / critical perspectives		✓	
Resource dependency theory	✓		✓
Stakeholder theory	✓		✓
Strategic management / strategy		✓	✓
Transaction cost economics		✓	✓
Trust		✓	

Figure 1: Some theoretical bases for collaboration research

The breadth in the table provided as figure 1 seems remarkable in two ways: firstly, for the sheer scope of (sometimes contradictory) perspectives in the field; and secondly, the different conceptions of theory itself that the authors have identified. This seems to support the position of Van Raak et al (2002) that there should be a *blending* of theories to provide a better understanding of collaborative situations. For this reason, in this chapter and the later discussion of elements of the literature in chapter 5, as broad a perspective as possible is adopted – with issues, problems and inconsistencies that are evident in trying to integrate material being pointed out where this is appropriate (my own interpretive standpoint is explored in chapter 3).

In beginning to engage with the breadth of possibilities in this research, however, it was necessary to have some relatively flexible conceptual 'handle' on the issue – to facilitate engagement without being confounded by the diversity of possible theoretical approaches presented in figure 1. The position that was adopted, therefore, was to begin with the *theory of collaborative advantage* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) as a starting point. The central dialectic of the theory relates to the opposed concepts of *collaborative advantage* and *collaborative inertia*; that is, between the potential synergistic benefits of collaboration – in particular the notion that it is capable of achieving outcomes beyond the scope of individual organizations – and the more usual outcome, that collaborations make marginal, slow and difficult progress (Parise and Casher, 2003). The theory is constructed around the development of conceptualizations of aspects of collaboration practice. It is intended to have direct relevance to practice; used in a reflective practice mode, it provides conceptual handles that are accessible to practitioners who need to act in collaborative situations (Huxham and Beech, 2003).

An important aspect of supporting reflective practice is centred upon providing practitioners with a helpful vocabulary to enable their own theorising as they learn to navigate management challenges in practice. In essence, the stance taken at the beginning of this research connects strongly with the reflective practice concept. That is, in starting to develop the study it in necessary to adopt the stance of a *reflective researcher* – accepting that there is a significant learning task which requires personal attention, in relation to the need to grasp the conceptual vocabularies of both extant research and evolving practice.

The first stage in grasping the conceptual vocabulary was to explore definitions and frameworks, as discussed above. In going forward to address this as an area for research, there is a need to begin to see what the outcomes of collaboration as a problem might be, before thinking about particular aspects of process which might lead to such outcomes. In the context of collaboration this is not a straightforward matter, as the involvement of multiple parties brings with it multiple levels of (and opinions about) outcomes. At the simplest level, it seems sensible – if the study is to provide some degree of input to understanding 'what makes collaboration work' – to at least explore how 'success', in a possible complex of outcomes, might be characterised. It is to this question that the discussion now turns.

Making it work – what is 'successful collaboration'?

So, having discussed notions of what 'collaboration' is and how it is talked about, it is worthwhile to consider what the literature has to say of *collaborative advantage*, about the possibility of a *successful* collaboration.

Before doing so, there is perhaps one useful preliminary step. That is, it is worthwhile to consider how success in a collaboration is evaluated, given that such a broad range of outcomes (and perceptions of outcomes) can be envisaged. Whilst it can be suggested that evaluation might be relatively unproblematic in some cases – particularly in clearly contracted commercial alliances with a definite profit aim – it can also be suggested the problem of evaluation is most complex in not-for-profit and public-private partnerships. With these more complex situations in mind, Sullivan

and Skelcher (2002; p205-206) suggest that there are four important elements to the evaluation of collaborations:

- An approach that is capable of disentangling implementation, outputs and outcomes; that is, distinguishing whether the initiative has gone forward as planned and what actual intended and consequential benefits were obtained.
- A framework that allows the implementation process to be examined; that is, how successful the initiative was as a collaboration, per se.
- An approach involving a range of stakeholders in a way that is mindful of the power structures in which they are situated.
- A degree of assessment of the ability of partners to learn, on the premise that this is an important factor in the achievement of collaborative goals as well as an important factor in longer-term capacity building.

It is to be expected, following the level of complexity involved in evaluation suggested by the argument above, that characterising success and its antecedents will be also be complex. Some simple characterizations have been offered, however. For example Mattesich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001) summarised some not-for-profit collaboration case studies to develop a compendium of factors which can influence successful outcomes, related to the collaboration environment, membership characteristics, processes / structures, communication, purpose and resources. Amabile et al (2001) similarly cite three potential determinants of success in collaborative relationships which have some overlap with the preceding work: collaborative team member characteristics (including project capabilities and collaboration experience); attitudes and motivation; and collaboration environment

characteristics (including resources). Similar points about the collaborative environment (access to funding and appropriate infrastructure) and member characteristics (in particular community skills) are made by Osborne, Williamson and Beattie (2002). The importance of experience is also noted by Child and Yan (2003) and Zollo, Reuer and Singh (2002); the latter suggest that prior alliance experience *of the specific partner* is positively associated with alliance performance. In the main, then, such characterisations as those described above identify resources, processes and people as the *determinants* of success – although there might equally be successful *outcomes* in relation to these three elements.

Unsurprisingly then, these determinants are complex and also have structural connections and connotations. For example, in considering resources beyond a simple funding perspective, Child and Yan (2003) suggest that is not just the amount but also the quality that is important. The stability of, and access to, resources are also suggested to be important; in the context of networks for the delivery of public services, Milward and Provan (2004) suggested that the conditions for effectiveness are integration around a central agency, with few layers between agencies and funders and stable, well funded systems.

This leads to the consideration of processes, and in particular the mechanisms for participation and involvement. In contrast to Milward and Provan's centralising perspective, Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence (2003) suggested that collaborations that had high levels of involvement (that is at many levels across the partnering organizations, with partnership structures and bilateral information flows rather than

transactional bases of relation) were found to be associated with important strategic outcomes. Similarly Elliot and Homan (1999) and Assimakopoulos and Macdonald, (2003) also recognised the importance of high levels of involvement, as well as emphasising the need for 'connectedness' – including communication and feedback mechanisms and the importance of a champion or lead change agent (connecting with the 'people' element discussed earlier), especially early in the collaborative process.

There is much in the literature then, which is *broadly* connected to conditions for success, involving work in many sectors – the works already discussed are *examples* of a much wider literature. However, works which do address the theme of success *explicitly* have largely been confined to studies of strategic alliances (for example: Cullen, Johnson, and Sakano 2000; Kale, Dyer and Singh, 2002; Kauser, and Shaw 2003; Lambe, Spekman, and Hunt, 2002; Mockler and Gartenfeld, 2001). There is also a range of studies which cover the arguably related theme of *performance* (for example: Arino, 2003; Child and Yan, 2002; Choi and Beamish, 2004; Drualans, de Man, and Volberda, 2003) which focus on either alliances or joint ventures. In contrast, studies concerned with collaboration in the public sector (and mixed-sector arrangements) tend to approach the notion of success from the standpoint of *evaluation* (for example: Asthana, Richardson and Halliday, 2002; Glendinning, 2002), as discussed at length earlier. However, from this reading it seems clear that there are potentially explanatory or constituent factors in relation to all three terms – *evaluation, performance and success* – that may be found to be applicable to many forms of collaboration. These explicit areas of commonality are addressed in more detail later, after first delving a little more deeply into the way success is

characterized in either private or public sector-focussed studies, to explore what might be implicitly generalizable from such cases. These (often) sector-specific characterizations are summarized below.

Explicit characterizations of success

- Learning
- Satisfaction levels (organizational)
- Meeting targets
- Financial results (profit and so on)
- Longevity of the collaboration
- Survival of the collaboration
- Stability of the collaboration
- Social cohesion
- Social capital
- Efficiency
- Maintenance of ethical standards

Each of these characterizations is touched upon below in more detail, in relation to the kinds of sectoral studies in which they most typically feature, to root them in their empirical context. However, presenting the summary list above at this stage is a deliberately reflective point, since it would be possible to suggest that most of them would have some applicability to most collaborations. For the present, however, the discussion continues with the presentation of explicit success characterizations in relation to either private or public sector collaborations.

Interfirm related characterizations of success

Extant private-sector focussed studies on success, performance or evaluation usually address a range of factors in relation to strategic alliances, joint ventures and looser forms of interfirm collaboration which can help to account for successful outcomes. The outcome measures for success in such studies include: learning; satisfaction levels; meeting expectations or targets; financial results; and operational measures of performance such as the longevity, stability or survival of the collaboration (Inkpen, 2000; Arino 2003; Pangarkar, 2003). Intriguingly, successful *processes* in the private sector literature are in the main treated as explanatory variables in relation to *outcome* notions of performance; for example, Mockler and Gartenfeld's (2002) discussion on the value of a negotiated alliance process and Cohen and Mankin's (2002) work on the impact of a structured design process for collaboration. Arino's (2003) work on integrating process and outcome measures within an organizational measure of performance is an exception to this means / end distinction.

Public sector characterizations of success

The characterizations of success in public sector studies tend to be on the one hand rather simple and unspecific, addressing it in terms of, for example, 'outcomes' and 'impacts' and on the other hand can be rather complex and detailed (Asthana, Richardson and Halliday, 2002). For example, Asthana et al's (2002) detailed description of the analytical components of performance overlaps with a number of other conceptualizations of factors such as ethical principles (Garcia-Canal, Valdes-Llaneza and Arino, 2003), learning (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002) and a sensitivity to context (Osborne, Williamson and Beattie, 2002). This diversity of conceptual

elements suggests that engagement with all of the dimensions, possibilities and contingencies amongst multiple characterizations makes a general notion of success rather problematic. However, others have suggested broader classes of outcome for public sector collaborations – especially when these cross sectors and involve the community – such as social cohesion and the development of social capital (Burby, 2003). Even when broad conceptualizations of successful outcomes are eschewed for more complex sets of specific evaluation criteria, these remain qualitative and open to multiple interpretations in practice – since the perspectives of multiple stakeholders are acknowledged (Asthana, Richardson and Halliday (2002); Burby (2003); Osborne, Williamson and Beattie (2002)). Overall, in comparison with the characterizations of success identified in private-sector focussed studies, there seems to be much more of a concern in the public sector for means as well as ends. That is, successful outcomes can be envisaged – but getting to *any* endpoint in the 'right way' might also be seen as a success.

Implicit characterizations of success

The discussion above has highlighted that there are a range of explicit conceptualizations of success when comparing private and public sector studies, and in particular these differ in terms of the focus upon ends alone, or upon a balance between ends and means. There is also a related range of factors *associated* with positive outcomes or processes, which might be described as supporting *implicit* characterizations of success. Such themes are not necessarily clearly linked to explicit *outcome* notions of success, but perhaps do connect with some of the explicit *process* notions of success already reviewed, such as effective governance (Carson et

al, 2003). As often seems to be the case when considering success in collaborations, in many cases it can be a moot point whether some of the implicated factors are in fact contributory elements within *signifiers* of success or alternatively *conditions* for the development of success. Such factors may indeed have a functionally dual character, with a recursive relationship between their role as conditions for success and their appearance *within* complex signifiers of it. Across public, private and mixed sector studies some of the typical implicit characterizations of success which may be thought of in this complex way are:

1. Trust (Carson et al, 2003; Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily, 2003).
2. Experience, learning and understanding (Beamish and Berdrow, 2003; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990; Knight 2002).
3. Structural complexity and connections (Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips, 2002; Mohrman, Tenkasi and Mohrman, 2003).
4. Resources (Hitt et al, 2000; Lambe, Spekman and Hunt, 2002).
5. Social and relational capital (Erridge and Greer, 2002; Koka and Prescott, 2002).
6. Stakeholder involvement (Poncelet, 2001).
7. Communication (Griffith, 2002; Durnell-Cramton, 2002).
8. Leadership (Huxham and Vangen, 2000).
9. The management of aims (Child and Yan, 2003; Schuler, 2001).
10. Managing power differentials (Mayo and Taylor, 2001; Milewa, Dowswell and Harrison, 2002).

As alluded to earlier, many of these items have a dual character, as classifications of success (in either process or outcome terms) and as conditions for it. In addition many of these also seem to be involved in more complex characterisations – or more evolved abstractions – that make the isolation of simple cause and effect relationships problematic (Huxham and Beech, 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 2005).

To provided some examples of this entanglement of characterizations and factors, the following discussion focuses on the first three of the items on the list given on the previous page. Providing examples of entanglement across the *whole* list would be a prodigious undertaking; in any case some have been touched on earlier and others might require further research. The first three factors (which are in fact often intertwined in implicitly described characterizations of success) yield some specific characterizations which can be gleaned from the literature, as well as a feeling for the broader complexity. These exemplar characterizations are:

Examples of implicit characterizations of success

- Trust (in its own right and supporting capacity building)
- Capacity (related to learning and trust)
- Process adaptation (related to learning)
- Institutional evolution (related to structural complexity)

Each of these four examples is discussed further below.

Trust: incremental trust development and capacity building

The extant literature suggests that trust has a role in the success of collaborations in a four main ways. Firstly, trust has been simply identified as a direct or mediating factor in the performance of collaborations (Child, 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2003; Morrow, Hansen and Pearson, 2004), suggesting a role in successful processes.

Secondly, in a similar process vein, trust-based governance has been suggested to be a more successful form of governance (connected to notions of efficiency) than contractual forms (Carson, et al, 2003; Cullen, Johnson and Sakano, 2000). There are a range of alternative conceptualizations of trust-based governance, involving such notions as participative planning (Kauser and Shaw, 2003) and split control (Choi and Beamish, 2004); but in general these are thought to be underpinned by some activity-related and cognitive overlap between the partners in the collaborative endeavour.

Thirdly –connecting with notions of governance – it has been argued that there is a dialectic tension between trust and vigilance (de Rond and Bouchiki, 2004). However it has also been suggested that shared values can help to make the reliance on trust-based governance more plausible (Mockler and Gartenfeld, 2002), support contractual flexibility (Luo, 2002) and lessen the fear of political machinations (Shenkar and Yan, 2002).

Finally there is a 'feedback loop' suggested, in that the performance that results from trust is argued to support increased commitment (Cullen, Johnson and Sakano, 2000;

Kauser and Shaw, 2003; Lambe, Spekman and Hunt, 2002; Mockler and Gartenfeld, 2002) which in turn reinforces trust.

One important matter to note at this point is that although the theme of trust has largely been addressed from studies concerned with determining performance in the private sector, the content of the discussions does not seem to suggest any reason why these arguments should not also apply to public and mixed-sector collaborations. Indeed, trust is well represented in the public sector focussed literature, but in general it is not so *explicitly* linked to notions of success or performance outcomes. However as an exception, Fiol and O'Connor (2002) suggest that to have a better chance of achieving radical change, a 'small wins' initiated framework is appropriate since it supports the development of trust (this also connects with the non sector-specific notion of the 'trust-building loop' developed by Huxham and Vangen (2005)).

The problem of outcome or cause debates in relation to trust is never far from us; Cullen, Johnson and Sakano (2000) suggest that *trust* and *commitment* are important to the performance of joint ventures and alliances, although they also recognize that they *may* be the *results* of success. It may also be argued that, in as much as trust is intimately involved in effective forms of collaborative governance, it may be said to indicate success both in terms of effective process for current collaborations and the development of capacity for future endeavours. That is, it necessarily has an irreducibly dual character, as the experience of vindicated trust in the past supports the confidence and goodwill necessary for future collaborations.

Experience, learning, understanding: capacity development and process adaptation

The role of experience in relation to success in collaboration has been noted earlier in the discussion, particularly in relation to previous relationships with partners (Sobrero and Roberts, 2001; Zollo, Reuer and Singh, 2002) which might perhaps have been gained in other cooperative endeavours (Luo, 2002).

This suggested role for experience has some connections with learning, since it has been suggested that learning is related to prior joint venturing experience and previous partner selection experience (Child and Yan, 2003). It has also been suggested that lessons learnt from evaluations can improve the potential for success in future collaborations (Osborne, Williamson and Beattie, 2002). On the other hand, it has been suggested that learning has no role in the performance of collaborations (Beamish and Berdrow, 2003). However, this might be qualified by the suggestion that the involvement of the right stakeholders is necessary (Burby, 2003) in order to gain access to the necessary knowledge to support the goals of the collaboration. The suggestion that there may be a trade-off between learning and effectiveness (Sobrero and Roberts, 2001), perhaps implies that there is some balance to be struck which explains, in part, the conflicting views noted earlier.

A need for learning in developing successful collaboration might also be inferred from the ways in which impeded understanding has been identified as problem (Chikudate, 1999) – and the ways in which this problem of understanding has been associated with several issues. These issues are similar in character and include cultural differences (Cullen, Johnson and Sakano, 2000; Sirmon and Lane, 2004),

differences in professional languages (Chaserant, 2003; Mockler and Gartenfeld, 2002) and communication problems (Cullen, Johnson and Sakano, 2000; Shapiro, Furst, Spreitzer and von Glinow, 2002). As with earlier concepts many of these could be argued to have a dual character, representing either factors for success (for example, the need for effective communication) or characterizations of success (for example, having *established* successful communication). Whether or not they are best thought of in the latter way, they reinforce learning as an important issue in overcoming potential problems of misunderstanding. Therefore, as argued earlier in the case of trust, it can be suggested that learning is both a condition for and an indicator of success. In addition to the points discussed above learning may be closely related to the maintenance of effective *processes* in changing environmental circumstances, but it may also represent an increase in collaborative capacity within participating organizations and across inter-organizational structures.

Structural complexity and connections: 'institutional evolution'

The problems of structural complexity associated with collaborative endeavours (Huxham and Vangen 2005) in some ways overlap with the issues of language and culture discussed above. At the 'simplest', interpersonal level, issues of signalling – and the framing and reasoning that are involved in the interpretation of signals – have been argued to have an impact on the individuals involved (Chaserant, 2003). Thinking about this in relation to structural considerations, it is clear that these cultural-communicative processes can impact on collaborations at other levels; Chikudate (1999) has suggested that individual learnings can be translated into changes at the organizational level and affect approaches to relationships and the

ways in which they unfold. Going further, it has been suggested that through reflexive participation in social networks such relationship patterns might have upscale (macro level) and downscale (micro level) structural effects (Chaserant, 2003; Sydow and Windeler, 2003). On the micro scale, there is a recursive shaping of the interpretive frames of individual collaborators, which will influence individual conceptualizations of how success may be characterized. On the macro scale, the embeddedness of collaborators within networks might help to maintain institutionalized notions of success in terms of both processes and outcomes (Sydow and Staber, 2002).

This potential for complex flows and recursive effects in the development and understanding of notions of success in collaboration seems to be interesting on several levels. Firstly, it suggests that there is a need for sensitivity to *context* in the evaluation of collaborations (Asthana, Richardson and Halliday, 2002; Osborne, Williamson and Beattie, 2002) – success may be determined in multiple structural interactions and conformations. It also suggests that the interplay of different modes of reasoning or patterns of understanding in collaboration can have performance outcomes at a deep structural level, through the 'evolution of institutions' (Sydow and Windeler, 2002) which both support and define success. That is, the complex, structurally mediated conceptualizations of success might also inform the ways in which structures are themselves organised.

The issue of structural complexity in the conceptualization and formation of success might be approached in a relatively simple, concrete manner through considering the

ways in which success might be contingent upon the scale and form of the collaboration. For example – linking up with earlier points about the importance of governance approaches, as well as scale and form issues – Garcia-Canal, Valdes-Llaneza and Arino (2003): suggest that:

- Self-enforcing agreements (based upon the development of relational assets between partners) are more successful and appropriate for dyadic JVs.
- Formal control mechanisms (equity based and related to management positions and processes) are more successful and appropriate for multi-party JVs.
- Success is more likely in dyadic JVs rather than multi-party forms.

However, even within the relatively simple propositions concluding the discussion on structural complexity above, it is clear that more than just simple structural dimensions (scale, number of partners) are involved. In fact the problem with exploring the notion of success throughout this chapter has been the inter-related nature of many (if not all) of the terms and concepts. Attempting to define a broad research approach which engages with this complexity requires that some suitably loose and flexible framework be adopted, which reflects some 'overall character' of the diverse range of conceptualizations. Some initial inferences about this framework and the common character of the conceptualizations are discussed in the section that follows.

INITIAL INFERENCES

The practical conclusion from this review is that to investigate the possibility of successful collaboration in the broadest sense, it is necessary to be open to a wide

range of possible dimensions and conceptualizations of what that success might look like. It is also necessary to be aware of the possibility of factors which may support either successful *outcomes* or *processes*, and a mixture of manageable and/or purely contingent factors which may help to provide some purchase on the reasons behind this. The dialectic *theory of collaborative advantage* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), as discussed earlier, helps to provide a loose framework for engaging with such complexity. Against all of the notions of causality in collaborative success, however, De Rond and Bouchiki (2004) suggest that the way alliances unfold is largely due to the unintended consequences of actions, or unforeseen events; what happens in them cannot simply be categorised as functional or dysfunctional, the performance of the alliance being open to multiple socially constructed interpretations. The range of theoretical discourses about the nature of collaboration, and the diversity of interpretations about success in this field – discussed in the preceding material and summarised in figure 2 – seems, intuitively, to lend some support for De Rond and Bouchiki's (2004) perspective.

Figure 2: A summary of notions for understanding success in collaboration

At the very least, those supporting factors and characterizations which are presented in shades of grey in the figure can be argued to be matters of opinion. Going further, it might even be argued that all of the supporting factors / characterizations could to a degree be challenged by simple questions like 'from whose point of view?'

It seems that it is necessary and important, therefore, to be *aware of* and *deal with* interpretation in understanding and contributing to knowledge in this field. The importance of socially constructed interpretations – in defining notions of success, and in judging the processes and outcomes of collaboration in general – leads

naturally to some methodological questions about how research in this field is constructed and conducted. This is explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the methodology for the study. This includes a discussion of the approach to the exploratory research, which addressed the general question of 'what makes collaboration work?' that has been discussed and contextualised in the preceding chapter. It also includes a discussion of the approach to the more extensive and specific part of the research project, when a thematic focus for detailed investigation had been established through the execution of the exploratory work. As later discussion in this chapter will seek to demonstrate, the identification and investigation of a specific research focus, through the iterative exploration of literature and engagement with empirical work, is an important part of the process. The particular benefit of this approach is that it militates against the risk of prematurely defining the nature of the problem and losing sight of the complexity and contextual elements which support a more informed understanding, as the preceding chapter has suggested.

However, working in a very open way with the phenomenon of interest requires that some clear discussion about the underlying world-view and assumptions inherent in the particular researcher's stance should be provided. At the exploratory level, when links to extant theory on the emerging themes of interest have not been investigated, the theorising that takes place necessarily draws on this world-view; by making this more explicit and well-structured, the early, exploratory findings can be evaluated in their proper context. In part this relates to the initial exploration of the literature given in the previous chapter (and the relation of the exploratory work to the context of the *theory of collaborative advantage* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005)), but it also

relates to my own world-view in terms of the way social phenomena might be constructed and known. For this reason the chapter opens with an elaboration of my 'philosophical position'.

It is important to note that the exploratory approach is only argued (in this context) to be particularly useful at the initial, 'scoping' level, to help a researcher develop a broad, open engagement with the phenomenon of interest in order to identify the focussed topic for detailed study. Others might take a different view and it could be argued that such an open approach might be applied more generally. Whilst not denying that an open, data-grounded approach can be handled effectively to support robust theory, it is important to emphasise that in this case it was used primarily to identify a theme for more detailed investigation, and is only defended on that basis.

Once the focal theme was identified – the role of *tradition* in collaboration – specific theoretical reading was undertaken to develop more specific lines of enquiry that were designed to connect with, contextualize and challenge extant theory in this area. Thus the two chapters which follow this methodological chapter briefly present findings from the exploratory part of the work and a further extensive engagement with relevant literature. However, a degree of openness in the approach was still sought, as later discussion will indicate.

For the present the focus returns to the presentation of the methodology, which follows in sections organised as shown below:

- A (personal) philosophical grounding of the methodological orientation in my own world-view.
- How the worldview influenced the selection of an appropriate research strategy.
- A discussion of problems inherent in this type of research.
- The research design, as the bridge between the research strategies and the techniques employed to operationalize them, in dealing with the problems mentioned in the preceding point.
- The techniques employed in the research, in terms of data collection and analysis.
- A summary of the differences and commonalities in the exploratory and focussed elements of the research.

The discussion begins below, with a brief treatment of the philosophical position which was important in developing the initial approach to, and engagement with, the research.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The preceding chapter concluded with the suggestion made by de Rond and Bouchiki (2004) that investigating 'what makes collaboration work' is likely to have to deal with multiple, socially constructed interpretations. As a place to start this present part of the discussion, it provides the opportunity to emphasise that whilst the contribution of this work will not be at the level of ancient and irresolvable debates on ontology and epistemology, the concern for dealing with socially constructed interpretations suggests that *some discussion* about what philosophical perspective is implied in accepting this view is appropriate.

As alluded to earlier in this chapter, this is argued to be particularly important in the early, exploratory phase of the work, before detailed engagement with theories on the final thematic area of interest can take place. In touching on the complicated debates in this area, the intention is therefore to suggest how one might proceed with the appropriate *balance* of confidence and humility in the face of complexity and contention, rather than gain some 'mastery' of it. Having said that, it is also the intention to outline a theoretical position that provides some robust support for both the methodological strategy that was developed for this study, and the techniques and analytical approaches that followed from that strategy. It seems helpful in attempting this to acknowledge the tensions and debates related to research in the social sciences, which inform the limits of robustness that any researcher might claim with some hope of agreement.

In raising these matters, the discussions below will not tend towards identifying the 'correctness' of any particular paradigm. In accordance with the limits of ambition already set out above, the approach rather sets out an agenda for approaching the problem of research with a degree of humility that acknowledges the existence of other frameworks and remains open to a number of alternative interpretations. The selection of the approach for this study was therefore based upon an ontological and epistemological framework that, it is suggested, is coherent and relevant but does not claim the status of a definitive and final answer to intractable debates. To explain the reasons for this cautious approach, the issues related to competing research paradigms are discussed below.

Paradigms in tension

In this section of the discussion, a range of philosophical perspectives and 'dissections' of qualitative methodology – in history and application – are briefly considered. A reasonable place to begin to engage with this discussion is with the issue of commensurability, in particular relation to the debates around postmodern/poststructuralist approaches as compared to other longer-established approaches which might be thought to be more conventional. For example, some authors (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Horn, 1998; Riordan, 1995) suggest that poststructuralist approaches are incompatible with positivist / postpositivist / empiricist approaches, whilst others implicitly allow paradigm combination in a multi-level approach (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Kilduff and Mehra, 1997; Ellis and Kiely, 2000), in which the poststructuralist / hermeneutic approaches are used to contextualise, challenge and refine empirically informed findings.

Issues therefore arise in whether material can be combined across paradigms, but perhaps even more fundamentally they also apply in relation to the taxonomy of paradigms. For example, Lincoln and Guba (2000) identify paradigms of critical theory, constructivism and participatory approaches, whilst other authors 'blend' and discuss these in the context of poststructuralist or postmodern formulations (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). There are also assumed historical elements in the definition of particular paradigms; Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that there have been 'paradigm shifts', relegating positivist and postpositivist approaches to the researcher's wastebasket, but this does not seem to reflect current practice in the fields of management and organizational research. In

addition, Holland (1999) records the divergent treatment of paradigms – including eclectic combination – by different researchers. Some even argue that postmodern approaches represent a 'disabling perspective', which removes purpose from organizational studies and suggest that a 'critical modernist' stance is more practical (Parker, 1995).

The nature and validity/authenticity/authority of individual approaches and schools within the field is, therefore, hotly contested. The end point of this brief discussion is therefore to suggest that there is no consensus paradigm framework from which the philosophical perspective into which a particular research stance in this area could be located. The discussion will therefore proceed from the basis of developing a worldview based upon, and fit for the examination of, the current research area. In effect, a paradigm is set out which: is compatible with the issues implicit in the research situation; connects with the framing readings in chapter 2; and is reflective of my own position.

Theoretical exploration

In defining the very broad research area (what makes collaboration work?) in chapter 2 the complex and – arguably – socially constructed nature of this problem was established, within a complex non-coherent and diverse theoretical discourse, which required some interpretive engagement if it was to be blended and integrated in a useful way (Van Raak et al, 2002). Arguably, this is a problem about handling discourse as the matter for discussion (both in terms of theoretical material and empirical data) and interpretation as the means by which this is achieved.

Accordingly, this discussion deals with these as the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research presented here. Taking these points in reverse order, a discussion of hermeneutics is presented first, as the epistemological ground for the discussion of issues of interpretation. The argument then proceeds with a consideration of discourse, as the ontological structure of the matter for interpretation.

Hermeneutics

From a social constructionist perspective, it seems sensible to approach matters of interpretation and how understanding is accomplished from a consideration of hermeneutics (Grondin, 1994). Hermeneutics is a broad field, which includes elements that are realist in leaning and others which are more deeply embedded in social and historical construction, but it has been argued that it is possible to blend these approaches. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggest the employment of elements of both *objectivist* hermeneutics (after Schleirmacher, discussed in Grondin, 1994) and the *philosophical* hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1977; 1998; Heidegger, 1962; 1999; Kidder, 1997) in supporting interpretive epistemologies. The objectivist hermeneutic approach suggests that understanding can be gained from a logical approach to the analysis of text or talk (Silverman, 2000) in which the intention of the author or speaker might be reconstructed. Alternatively, philosophical hermeneutics suggests that understanding is an intrinsic and universal life process, and interpretations (including those of researchers) are constructed in response to texts or talk based upon pre-understandings; that is, from within the confines of an historical tradition. Pre-understanding and understanding thus become related as

counterpoints of belonging and distanciation (Ricoeur, 1981). The process or condition of distanciation permits some critical understanding of the individual's conditions for the construction of meaning:

> *'...a form of reflexivity that detaches the subjects from their environments, which thereby become visible to them as products of social relations'*
>
> Kogler (1999:p256)

This suggests the utility of a *critical hermeneutics* (Thompson, 1981; Phillips and Brown, 1993; Kogler 1999; Prasad and Mir, 2002) which considers interpretive practice to be informed by social systems, but which does not prevent the subject from developing an awareness of this, thereby preserving the *possibility* of informed agency. In this model both alternative standpoints (objective and philosophical hermeneutics) are relevant, in that: the philosophical, participatory standpoint engages with the immediacy of lived experience, in terms of immanent, personal interpretation; and the objective, distanciating, observational approach engages with the constitution and influence of social systems upon discourse. From the combination of these approaches the subject might be considered to be both the interpreter and the interpreted, dependent on the particular focus adopted. As the later discussion on tradition (chapter 5) will suggest, this duality of the subject as both the interpreter and the interpreted is an important point, suggesting that the ways in which discourse is approached – from participation or observation – has implications for the meanings that can be drawn from it. The discussion of hermeneutics as the

basis of interpretation has, therefore, led to the next area for consideration; the nature of discourse and its significance as the ontological structure of social systems.

Discourse

The field of 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' has been surveyed in a variety of ways. For example, in their analysis of the field, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) suggest that there are three principle levels of discourse: the 'micro' level of social texts, the 'meso' level of social practices and the 'mega / macro' level of social systems. Heracleous and Hendry (2000) similarly present three alternative conceptions of discourse: as the constructive medium of social reality; as the instrument(s) for the achievement of certain outcomes; and as the foundation of 'structures of domination'. Against these alternatives they argue for a systematic view of discourse as comprised of social actions and social systems, linked by interpretive frames.

These elements also provide correspondence with the tripartite construction of discourse research set out by Wetherell (2001): the study of social interaction (social practices / externalization); the study of culture and social relations (social texts and objectivation); and the study of minds, selves and sensemaking (social systems and internalization). A similar multi-level conception of discourse is offered by Hardy, Palmer and Phillips (2000) who suggest discourse is structured in three overlapping 'circuits' of activity, performativity and connectivity. However they suggest that only when the activity circuit (correlated here with social practices) creates 'resonances' with other actors does transmission of meaning into the performativity circuit

(correlated here with social texts) occur. They suggest that only if this occurs will the resultant overlapping connectivity circuit (correlated here with social systems), in which meaning is transmitted back into the arena of activity, be created. This is inconsistent with the philosophical hermeneutic standpoint discussed earlier, in which meaning is always already created in the interpreter:

> *"Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself. [...] It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes"*
>
> Gadamer (1998:p490)

Analysis at all of these levels of discourse is based upon the study of communicative acts and objects, principally related in the medium of language; as Hollway (1984) suggests, discourses do not exist outside of the practices which produce (and re-produce) them. Despite the non-linguistic nature of some of these practices, the textual conceptualization of such elements is supported by Ricoeur's (1981) argument that meaningful actions can be treated as texts and interpreted as such, since they have the following characteristics:

- The *fixation* of action (in textual generation, or a meaningful act);
- The *autonomization* of action (as the objectified actions have consequences beyond the original sphere of meaning);
- *Relevance and importance*, which may go beyond the original sphere of an action;

- Human action is an '*open work*' that may be subject to future interpretations.

Essentially, Ricoeur is arguing that actions *are* meaningful *in that* they are open to (a variety of) interpretations; these interpretations (and subsequent re-interpretations) have effects beyond the intentions of the actor. Thus although a particular action or communication may be perceived by the actor in one particular way, as interpretations of the action spread in time and space, meanings can multiply and change. In the context of interorganizational collaborations, this leads to the conclusion that the social systems *enacted* in them are, in most cases, ill defined and contingent and open to multiple interpretations (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Any directly elicited description, or selection of texts by participants to describe the systems in which they are involved will, therefore, not necessarily be effective in communicating a definitive understanding of the situation, as all actors are free to interpret and re-interpret every action (and report of action) according to their *own* understanding.

From theoretical to practical issues

The problems with elicited descriptions begin to connect these ontological and epistemological points with practical methodological issues. In addition to the points outlined above, there are other issues with elicited descriptions: Goffman (1981) highlights code switching in conversation, and Alvesson (2003) underlines the many ways in which interview processes can represent several different communicative and performative possibilities. These uncertainties inherent in 'direct' communication suggest that non-participatory research approaches (or at least a non-participatory element or stance within the research approach) might be appropriate; this will be

discussed further later in the chapter. Against this may be set the alternative conception that communicable understanding is possible (and straightforward validity claims conceivable) in Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action. The earlier discussion of 'paradigms in tension' has suggested that both of these extreme positions have support in the social sciences. It was, therefore, considered appropriate to treat both 'idealised, perfect communication' and 'postmodern fragmentation' of meanings as limit cases and take a 'moderate' poststructuralist stance which allows for *some* discrimination amongst competing interpretations (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997).

RESEARCH STRATEGY

In short, the potential for discrimination amongst competing interpretations in the present work was accomplished through an interpretive strategy using multiple cases. Through the development of a separate, internally consistent view of each case, from multiple types of data, differences in context specific interpretations are preserved. The combination of elements from these multiple cases to generate and explore potentially generalizable strands from the findings *following* the construction of case-specific views respects the potential differences of interpretation whilst supporting theoretical development. This brief summary of the strategy is explained in more detail below.

Data collection: participation and observation in case-specific views

The earlier discussion in this chapter suggested that there is an argument for non-participatory research (or at least a non-participatory element to the research). Within

a framework of collaborative consultancy (as discussed later, this was a pragmatic access route to the research sites), this suggested the relevance of an action research frame, with ethnographic (e.g. Geertz, 1983; Jackson, 1998) participant-observation forming one of the main strands of data collection. This was appropriate since the groups were focussed upon some specified goal, rather than the collaboration research question itself (as in other styles of action research, which involve participation in the specification and investigation of the research question – see, for example Greenwood and Levin (2000)).

In addition, collaborative and postmodern approaches to ethnographies (Tedlock, 2000) have widened the scope of such methodologies. For example, short-term participant-observations have been accepted for the study of limited-lifetime groups (Fitch, 2001) and discrete organizations undergoing change (Cheng, 1998). There is also some scope for a variety of action research styles along the participant-observer continuum (as discussed in detail later); the particular style adopted for the research in this case was largely towards the observer end of the spectrum. This was partly because of the commercial nature of the interventions – in which the researcher's role was a consultant delivering collaborative projects – and the agreed need for academic investigation which would not disrupt the project progress in any way. In addition the full preservation of the subjects' anonymity – the preference of the participants – dictated certain constraints (there was no collection of photographic material, for example). The methodological risks of stimulating unnatural behaviours and alienation, identified by Huxham and Vangen (2001) in overt research scenarios with

highly visible data collection methods, also favoured low-impact research rather than, for example video recording of collaborative situations.

Analysis and theorising: emergent themes within cases

An approach to emergent theory development (Eden and Huxham, 1996), in which the researcher's pre-understandings are as far as possible suppressed, was the initial perspective adopted in this research. It was not considered appropriate to include participants as knowledgeable 'co-researchers' (Bartunek, 1993) in a 'democratic' participatory model of action research (Quoss, Cooney and Longhurst, 2000; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000), for the philosophical and pragmatic reasons set out earlier in the chapter. As the work progressed it became apparent that it would be impossible for the researcher to approach interventions without prejudice or pre-understanding (Gadamer, 1998) of the situations. Analysis of the data to investigate previously identified themes (as described in Huxham and Vangen, 2000) became, therefore, an implicit part of the approach, and this was developed to a more explicit 'theoretical lens' approach in the exploration of the final research questions, as discussed in later chapters. The need to be clear about pre-understandings was addressed and contextualised through the explication of the philosophical position, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and in the presentation of the general literature on collaboration set out in chapter 2, which sets out the broad areas of theory informing the initial, exploratory research.

A name for the approach: partial ethnography

The strategy adopted here, in addressing social practices, aimed to develop a *relatively* 'objective' hermeneutic position within the contextual limits of each situation and examine externalised understandings (rather than pre-understandings) of collaborative frameworks and processes. The strategy was, therefore, challenged by the tension between distance and closeness (Ricoeur, 1981) – the need for familiarity without assimilation (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) – in interpreting the meanings intended by others. In line with this necessary balance, conducting action research on participant observer models (that is, with private note taking or the use of instrumental recordings, followed by 'offline' analysis (Eden and Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2000) *deliberately* allowed little scope for an assimilative negotiation of interpretations or focus upon the development of consensus. The observational action research conducted in this study is therefore usefully described as 'partial ethnography'. Alvesson and Deetz, (2000) describe 'partial ethnography' as ethnographic research which is focussed upon particular types of situation and specified contexts. In this study we can relate this definition to the situations of collaboration in relation to a number of particular interorganizational arrangements (which are discussed in detail later in this thesis).

Writing and comparison: building robust theories across cases

The preceding elements of the strategy have explained, briefly, the broad approach to collecting and analysing data as it relates to a particular collaboration, leading to output in the more detailed, focussed, second part of the research that might be regarded as a 'partial ethnography' of each case (see chapter 6 for research output

presented in this form). Generalized theorising is then supportable by comparing the theoretically informed, but clearly contextualised, elements from multiple cases to arrive at an understanding that has a wider range of applicability. The practical application of this strategy is elaborated later in this chapter, after some of the problems and challenges associated with it have been explored below.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Issues in theory production: from data collection to theoretical explication

In spanning the gulf between the initiation of engagement in partial ethnography and the development of useful output from this type of research, there are a number of challenges and decisions that have to be negotiated – sometimes in both senses of that word. In this part of the discussion these challenges are addressed, and the particular resolutions (or negotiated courses) in this work are set out. I approach these challenges through a categorization which is similar to Langley's (1999) discussion[2] of strategies for researching processes; I focus on *grounding*, *interpreting* and *explicating* issues.

Exploring the challenges within this framework also helped to connect with issues noted in a range of other interpretive participant-observer approaches that have *some* overlap with partial ethnography, such as discourse perspectives (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Hardy, Palmer and Phillips, 2000; Hardy, Lawrence and Grant,

[2] Langley (1999) discusses 'organizing' and 'replicating' rather than 'interpreting' and 'explicating'; I find the latter terms more helpful but there is a good deal of overlap in our respective usages.

2005), cooperative inquiry and participatory action research (Bartunek 1993; Greenwood and Levin, 2000), and most obviously, 'full' ethnography (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Humphreys, Brown and Hatch, 2003; Weeks, 2000). In this discussion of challenges I touch upon particular problems related to the substantive field of research – interorganizational collaboration – to provide some grounding of the argument, but I suggest that the points raised have relevance to partial ethnographic research, and similar approaches to research, applied to other substantive topics.

Grounding: the roots of theory production

The grounding in the partial ethnographic approach adopted for this work includes both theoretical and data elements. The body of theory emerging in the whole of the field of collaboration research is connected with a variety of mid-range theories as researchers root their findings in, for example, social network theories (Mohrman, Tenkasi and Mohrman, 2003; Reagans and McEvily, 2003) institutional theory (Hitt, et al, 2004; Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips, 2002) or structuration perspectives (Heracleous and Hendry, 2000). Faced with this array of potential positions, I empathize with Thompson and Perry's (2004) view that:

> *"There is no paradigm-free, neutral position from which to choose a paradigm to work within; that is, there is no "objective" ground for choosing a paradigm. All that one can do is work within a paradigm that is consistent with your own ultimate presumptions as a researcher..."*
>
> Thompson and Perry (2004:p403)

– as the earlier discussions of the philosophical position in this chapter have underlined. As outlined briefly earlier, my approach to the diverse theoretical bases for grounding partial ethnography work in collaboration might be classed as 'moderately poststructuralist'; accepting the possibility of alternative foundations for investigation without being disabled by total scepticism. This is the kind of pragmatic position argued by Parker (1995) and Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000); it perhaps avoids the risks of a more radically postmodern approach as outlined by Cunliffe (2003). Cunliffe suggests that a *radically* reflexive researcher must effectively argue that there is nothing 'real' to study. However, she suggests that in practical terms researchers need to balance deconstruction (transient and oppositional views) and construction (mutually involved development of consensual meaning) if something is to be said both *from* and *about* the researched situation.

The possibility of setting flexible confines for data gathering is enabled by accepting this balanced, broad and diffuse relationship to theory set out above – but it perhaps adds to the complexity of the work. The nature of the data itself – seeing collaboration and the social interactions within it as processes – adds to the complexity; I agree with Langley's (1999) points on the challenging characteristics of process data:

- Data are composed of events, that require the application of some conceptualizing approach or a method of pattern detection.
- Data may stretch across multiple levels of analysis and can confound hierarchical classification.

- Data can relate to different levels of temporal perception, from a discrete action of the moment to a gradual trend realised across years; for these reasons, data may emerge from historical reviews, observations or conversations.
- Eclectic combination – pragmatically, dependent on the nature and duration of the processes under investigation, there is an argument for combining both event-based and variance-based research where this supports a more complete understanding.

– and I suggest these considerations apply whether the process is ultimately represented *as* process, or translated into thematic approaches – as explored in the *theory of collaborative advantage* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), in which the initial phase of this research was grounded. Going further, it can be argued that grounding in the data is subject to two particular tensions.

Observation and engagement

Firstly there is the tension between observation and engagement (Hibbert, 2003). As suggested earlier, the social systems explored in collaboration research are ill defined and contingent and therefore not necessarily transparent to participants. Directly elicited descriptions or explicitly projected meanings may not be effective in communicating the full range of participants' understandings, and the problem of tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1966) – people knowing more than they *can* say – also applies here. More straightforwardly, it has been argued that even when research participants are being helpful and honest, their own biases will still have an influence on their descriptions and a certain degree of criticality is called for (Wilson, 2004).

The problems and uncertainties inherent in 'direct' communication support non-participatory research approaches. However Lichterman (1998) suggests that *both* parts of the term "*participant observation*" are important. The latter is suggested to support an understanding of *explicit* meanings which may be projected, but the former provides some purchase on the *implicit* meanings that are taken for granted by participants in the research situations. For example Heracleous (2001) has argued that active participation by the researcher can lead to some additional research inferences through 'subject reactivity'; that is, the way in which other participants implicitly communicate their reaction to the *message* in their views about the *messenger* (the facilitating researcher). In addition, the principle of engagement applies not only to the researcher's interaction in the situations studied, but also in relation to the academic community (Humphreys, Brown and Hatch, 2003) which will also shape the meanings derived from research observations.

There are, however, risks apparent in over-emphasising action if the balance of the researcher is tipped too far towards engagement. Kock (2004) has suggested that this can lead to an emotionally committed, over-subjective position, and Pettigrew (2003) has described the ways in which researchers can be deflected by (or in) political manoeuvring. In a sense, as Weeks (2000) describes, there is a need to be engaged *enough* to participate in a hermeneutic circle alongside the research 'subjects', until we are sufficiently 'at home' in the situation to be able to develop interpretations about the observed practices. In conducting partial ethnographic research (as in other forms of ethnography) a position in which researcher participation in the situation is limited, but not excluded, is therefore the most appropriate stance. In this way the

benefits of implicit levels of understanding are retained, without the risk of falling into the trap of generating *overly* action-oriented, context bound findings as discussed in the work of Ayas (2003) on project management in Fokker. Managing this kind of *partly* engaged position is a delicate balance, as Cunliffe (2003) has suggested; there is a danger of "ontological oscillation" between positions of objectifying independence and (more reflexively) considering our researching selves as one voice amongst many. Questions about internal consistency therefore seem to be an unavoidable corollary to research which is open to multiple levels of meaning in data; for this reason, developing accounts that preserve the integrity of each case before moving to generalizable theorising may help address this challenge, if the data can be allowed to 'resist' somewhat the work done upon it.

Short or long-term engagement

A second and related tension is the choice between long term and short term interventions; Prasad (2002) has emphasised both synchronic and diachronic dimensions to supporting understanding, suggesting that interpretive research might require an historical grounding (Pettigrew, 2003). Vinten (1994) also supports the need for a temporal dimension, but for pragmatic reasons; he suggests that extensive, involved research (rather than spasmodic visits) increases the potential for serendipitous discoveries. He defends the notion of serendipity as being something which is a hallmark of good research, in that it demonstrates that researchers have specifically struggled to maintain the possibility for lateral thinking and openness in their work.

Gille and Riain (2002), however, note that the stability of the research situation's extension in time and space is eroding. They emphasize the disembedding of social relations from 'communities' and 'localities' in the context of globalization, suggesting the need to work with more fluid conceptualizations of research sites such as flows and networks. In such a context, what enduring characteristics can be expected to be found in longitudinal research? Gille and Riain argue that a better approach is to challenge the notion of a bounded study site, and consider combining data from multiple sites and times, to get a better understanding of the social phenomenon of interest. Similarly Kock (2004) argues for multiple iterations of the research cycle in several organizational contexts. As with the challenging balance of observation and engagement, this supports the development of case-specific (not necessarily *site* specific) material which is then sensitively combined.

The preceding discussion leads to the suggestion that the partial ethnographic approach – and any sensitive participant-observer methodology – can lead to data grounded in multiple theoretical and data-contextual dimensions. The task of interpreting this rich and diverse kind of material is the next challenge.

Interpreting: theory takes shape in dialogue

It can could be argued that data interpretation starts with the grounding in theory and strategies for data collection discussed above; a *primary* interpretation is applied in suggesting an event or other data item has relevance to the study (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). However, in this part of the discussion the concern is not with this notional primary interpretation, but on what Alvesson and Skoldberg describe as

secondary interpretation – making some assertions about the meaning of the data – although the two interpretive moments can be hard to distinguish. The initial 'leap of faith' into interpretation (Prasad, 2002) must depend on prejudgements based on our own history – including our history of participation in the research situation (Gadamer, 1998; Heidegger, 1962; 1999). It can be argued that assertions about the meaning of the data are formed at the moment of engagement, and are therefore strongly influenced by our route in arriving at the moment. Overcoming this 'automatic' interpretation can lead to a struggle between detached, objectifying observational stances (in as much as that is possible) and participative integration and description from within. This tension fundamentally effects the types of data that might be noticed and the kind of interpretations that might be developed (Galibert, 2004). In noticing and interpreting data Galibert suggests that a central question is:

> *"How can we be astonished by what is most familiar, and make familiar what is strange?"*
>
> Galibert (2004:p456)

The translation from the researcher's view of the context of the intervention to the generality of everyday life is therefore problematic; as alluded to earlier, Lichterman's (1998) suggestion of the need for a balance between participation and observation may be essential. However, understanding what might be generalizable in or from the data requires some degree of reflexivity about *the researcher's* connections and role within the research situation (Heracleous, 2001; Kogler, 1999).

Going further, Humphreys, Brown and Hatch (2003) have suggested that ethnographic modes of research can be as much about the definition of the researcher's identity as about the study of the 'other'. There seems, therefore, to be a reasonable case for suggesting that as far as possible, our own prejudices as researchers should be subject to this reflexive detachment and a 'hermeneutics of doubt' (Prasad, 2002). As discussed earlier in this chapter, this can entail – as an important example – being explicit about our own starting philosophical position.

Langley's (1999) discussion of organizing strategies (the use of narrative and visual mapping approaches) is helpful in the interpretive balancing act between reflexive and objective extremes. One should not expect to find a simple resolution to the tension; Kock (2004) has emphasised that the broad nature of action-research-type data (the data in this present work are compatible with such a classification) supports many plausible contingent models. This suggests a need for some method of discriminating between the plausible alternatives; the connection back to practice could be argued to be a useful approach to this. That is, an organizing-interpreting approach to working with the data thus requires *some* understanding of the substantive field of action (Vinten, 1994) within which the research is conducted in order to credibly select between alternative possibilities. The tension between engagement and research remains, however, in interpreting the meanings intended by others. In drawing on the researcher's own prejudgements about practice to initiate the process of interpretation, pre-understanding and understanding become connected extremes (Ricoeur, 1981). The two extremes can both contribute to an internally consistent pattern of interpretation through a kind of 'model' building and

storytelling (Wallace, Ross and Davies, 2003), which is the foundation of the process of explication elaborated in this chapter.

Explication: the nature of partial ethnographic theory and its reception

In the context of partial ethnography one faces all of the complexity of the theory building process that Langley (1999) suggests; inductive and deductive elements are often combined and nothing proceeds without some degree of creativity or inspiration. The correlations between *process* oriented and *practice* oriented research bear some relation to both of these positions – at the interface one would expect to produce accounts which are both *embedded in* and *descriptive of* the processes that have been researched.

Descriptive theories may draw on narrative structures when the focus is on a particular case, although Abell (2004) has raised objections to the development of general inferences from this kind of presentation, arguing that if data were freely available and costless then tighter causal models would be able to be generated; following this line of reasoning might suggest that robust prescriptive theories might be possible. Abell's position seems unconvincing, especially since his argument is dependent on definitional manoeuvres that exclude both the cognitive / understanding aspects of narrative, and postmodern objections about the multiplicity of meanings within narratives. Against Abell's position it can be argued that the kind of advice that is likely to be taken up by practitioners is dependent on the assumptions and espoused values that they already have – suggesting that each practitioner will read the work into their own framework of understanding

(Heracleous, 2001). Besides the variations enacted in reading, narratives that engage with readers also have a certain intrinsic level of unpredictability that makes them interesting; as Ricoeur (1981a) has emphasised, stories are based on multiple contingencies, and therefore conclusions drawn from them can only be *acceptable* rather than *predictable*.

This also leads to the consideration of the rhetorical dimension of research accounts. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993, 1997) have set out ways in which the notion of *contribution* is rhetorically constructed, as well as highlighting dimensions of authenticity, plausibility and criticality within convincing, published, organizational ethnographic research. They explain that this equates with convincing the reader that the author has been in the research setting and is giving a genuine account which connects with – but perhaps also challenges – the reader's assumptions and practices. Thus an approach which provides for both connecting with and challenging assumptions through competing interpretations (Boje, Luhmann and Baack, 1999; Kilduff and Mehra, 1997) – might be a useful position to take. Such an approach might provide an alternative way of navigating the possibilities for the interpretation and presentation of research accounts that retains the intrinsic complexity of the situation and process. Grubbs (2001) for example has proposed and exemplified the use of literary, allegorical narrative forms to engage with multiple voices and levels of meaning – but this seems to present researchers with additional, stylistic authorial challenges in the translation of work to a different genre. For example, Humphreys, Brown and Hatch (2003) have suggested that there are aesthetic criteria for the

quality of ethnographic modes of research; such criteria are most suitably assessed on the basis of current critical opinion.

Despite the authorial challenge of narratives and their inherent contingency and polysemic character, they have been argued to have value as a means of replication (Kearney, 2002) – although others might raise objections (Abell, 2004; Langley, 1999). The way to a 'middle of the road' position here may be to think about what is meant by replication. Arguably, it is the way we manage the integration of emergent theory in relation to broad connections to extant theory. Often this is most powerfully achieved through a synthetic (Langley, 1999) approach of identifying core thematic elements, but in combination with narrative applied in a special way; the use of 'micro-stories' (Boje, Luhmann and Baack, 1999). Often illustrative data quotes used in theory building are indicative of a particular process, incident or more extensive experience of a *particular* practitioner. Paradoxically, these quotes *both* give rise to *and* help to overcome the charge of anecdotalism that has been levelled at this kind of interpretive research (Wilson, 2004). The value of such micro-stories lies in the way in which they provide a 'feel' for the reality of the conveyed theory, allow multiple perspectives to be retained and transmitted, and provide the necessary authenticity that Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) have suggested supports convincing research accounts. Going further, including our own stories can help to provide:

> *"reflective accounts which address the subjective, emotional, relational and personal experiences of fieldwork reveal the course of the field research and the interpretive process that influences the project's conclusions"*
>
> Wiley (1987:p78)

However the mixture of synthetic and narrative elements is finally achieved, Vinten's (1994) argument that good qualitative research should involve the development of conceptualizations which are close to practice rather than distant abstractions – and will be open to emergent understandings – seems compelling. Perhaps one can aim to be no more precise than Otto (1923), and must ask the reader to participate in the act of understanding:

> *"This 'X' of ours is not precisely this experience, but akin to this one and the opposite of that other. Cannot you now realize for yourself what it is?"*
>
> Otto (1923:p7)

In fact, does one have to *ask* the reader to do this? – following Gadamer (1998) we can expect the reader to arrive at their own interpretation, from their own traditions and history, and the most that one can hope to do is to provide some possibility for connecting our interpretation with theirs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Having set out the research strategy, and explored the challenges associated with it, the practical research design issues can now be considered. The structure presented here follows elements of the framework suggested by Janesick (2000), setting out:

- The research question (or the initial research 'area' for the preliminary work).
- Site and participant selection matters.
- Access arrangements.
- The research timeline.
- The place of theory.
- The identification of ethical issues.

Janesick also considers the selection of research strategies and the identification of the researcher's own beliefs and ideology. These matters, however, have been explored at some length in the preceding sections of this chapter, and will not be re-engaged with at this point.

The research question

The initial research question (exploratory research area) was specified earlier, and could be summarised as 'what makes collaboration work?' However, this needs to be considered within the focus on interpretation and discourse as set out at the start of this chapter – reflecting the researcher's philosophical starting point and a reasonable approach to the challenging, complex, socially constructed notion of 'success' discussed in chapter 2. The initial research was designed to be open to a wide range of possibilities and thereby to identify themes for more focused investigation.

Site and participant selection

The site selection was guided by the opportunities presented, whilst acting in the role a consultant working for a small firm on the development of a number of collaborations, to research situations within a number of particular initiatives. Since more opportunities than could be effectively researched were available, the groups studied were selected in accordance with judgements about their likely research interest and relevance. The choices were made broadly in accordance with the following points:

- Firstly, of necessity, the practicality of taking up an opportunity to research a particular collaborative grouping; in some circumstances ongoing research into other projects precluded new investigations.
- For the early, exploratory work, relatively short-term cases that were completed early in the process of research were the focus, to allow for some rapidity in the selection of a more specific research direction.
- Notwithstanding the previous point, longer term and higher frequency of contact opportunities (multiple interventions over extended time frames) were favoured, as this was better suited to 'partial ethnographic' variety of action research discussed earlier in this chapter.
- As the research developed into a more specific thematic direction, the focus of data collection was upon cross-sectoral business, technology and science networks which gave particular opportunities to observe the interplay of very different participants – this diversity was useful in the context of the focus of the detailed research upon tradition.

- Similarly, it was possible to incorporate a range of geographical contexts to give some tentative insights related to the generalizability of the findings in this dimension, as well as perhaps presenting some interesting differences in relation to the later focus upon tradition. The collaborative groups studied included regional, national (UK) and European interorganizational endeavours.

These points were the practical and applied limits of the scope for choice in the selection of cases for the study. For the purposes of this research, the participants in each of the study cases were defined as those persons attending collaborative events (meetings, workshops and conferences) related to the group in question.

Access to the site

The arrangements for physical access to client sites was made by mutual agreement, in accordance with the specified aims of each collaborative assignment for which I was employed. In some cases sites of investigation were neutral venues (conference facilities and hotels); in such situations I had freedom of access to participants and ad-hoc discussions were both possible and usual (being part of the 'networking' expected in such situations). It was more usual, however, for meetings and workshops to take place at one of the participant sites (in some cases by rotation). In this way my access to participants was often restricted to collective processes in the shared facilities for each event, although technologically mediated communication (telephone and email) with particular participants was also common. The arrangements for access to the 'conceptual site' (the particular collaborative group) were commercially defined, since I was engaged as a consultant.

Timeline

Individual collaborative engagements were subject to different timelines. The assignments were between six and nine months duration for the exploratory cases, and between twelve and 36 months in the more focussed, detailed cases. Around three to five meetings and / or workshops were usual in shorter consultancy projects although many side-meetings, partial group interactions and so on were also involved – and interactions in longer projects were also more extensive. The overall timeline for empirical data gathering was a period of thirty-six months, commencing in April 2001.

Identification of ethical issues

There were some ethical concerns, as expected in any study with an element of participant-observation (as discussed earlier in this chapter). To address these concerns, all documented observations in this thesis were codified and anonymised. Actual intervention details (such as organizations, individuals and contractual details) remain confidential, although for the final cases presented in chapter 6 these are explained in detailed anonymised terms which provide a clear sense of what each case was 'about'. Participating organizations were informed of the research activities, but were not offered any participatory role in defining the scope of the research or in shaping the output. Only one organization expressed an interest in receiving research output, and was supplied with early conference papers arising from this work. Others expressed a more general interest in academic work in this field and were directed to more established sources.

Having set out the practical framework for the early research, the techniques applied for the collection and analysis of data within this framework are presented in the following section.

TECHNIQUES

In this section, the collection of empirical data and the associated methods of interpretation and analysis that were based upon (or related to) these data are considered. There were three principal technique-elements of the methodology, which related to the approach discussed earlier in this chapter.

Empirical data collection

Data were primarily obtained from interventions, in the form of notes taken during collaborative events or immediately after they had taken place. 'Offline' discussions with participants away from the group location also provided additional data related to the collaborative groups and occasionally included unstructured discussions focussed upon the operation and success of the collaborative initiative in question. Where offline discussions took place face-to-face, they were noted 'naturally' as part of an attentive engagement. Where this was not possible, notes were recorded immediately after the conversation. Telephone discussions were noted at the time of the call, as closely as possible, where this was practicable. In addition, all collaborative outputs (co-developed models, reports and so on) and textual transactions (memos, emails, contributory reports and other written materials) were retained to provide a range of different types of data for each case.

Engagement with, and elaboration of, empirical data

The engagement with the data connected with the 'emergent theory' principles discussed by Eden and Huxham (1996). The empirical data collection for each collaborative grouping was reviewed and simple abstracts, which might be viewed as 'entry points' to the more richly contextualized data in the full records, were identified.

The selection criteria for the abstracts were loosely applied guides; for the initial work, this was simply a consideration of what might have some bearing on the success or difficulties in the collaborative outcomes or processes (that is, the central dialectic of the *theory of collaborative advantage* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) and the broad notions of success explored in chapter 2, within the very broad collection of data accumulated for the case. In relation to the more detailed work, specifically focussed on tradition, the selection criteria were generalized statements about theories of tradition, that were worded to reflect the ways in which elements of theory might be sought in the data (these generalized statements are explained more fully in chapter 5). In both cases, these 'selection criteria' were starting points for engaging with the data; as the abstracts were compiled, the emerging categories themselves became additional selection criteria allowing broader contextual elements to be incorporated. In this way the data were approached with particular *lenses*, rather than *filters*, which provided for some contextual richness, integrity and comprehensibility in the case descriptions and analytical findings which were developed.

The abstracts selected in this way were utterances – either in collaborative settings or during telephone conversations, physical actions (choices of seating, movement and so on) and inactions (noted lack of engagement during collaborative processes, unexplained or explained absences, and so on) and parts of written communications and formal documents. The abstracts were concise points – usually no more than around twenty words – which were transferred to a 'conceptual mapping' software application (Decision Explorer ™). An example abstract from the regional business network case (see chapter 6) is shown in figure 3. For simplicity, all of the examples in this chapter will also be drawn from the regional business network case, to help to make the process of analysis more evident.

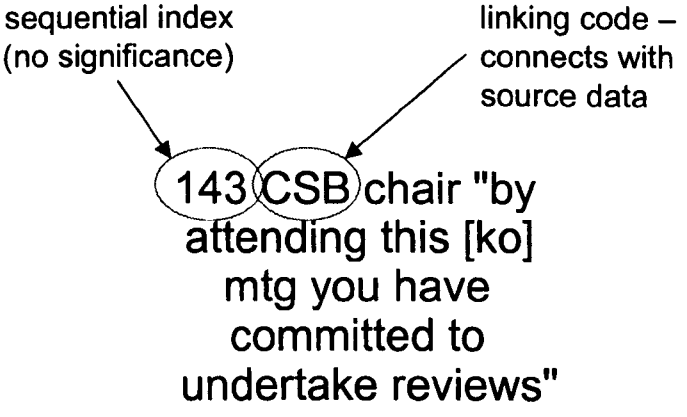

Figure 3: An example data abstract

As figure 3 shows, each abstract has a sequential index number which is assigned by the software, but more importantly a linking code is deliberately assigned during the analysis. This code identifies a particular data source (such as a set of notes and observations from a meeting, or an item of correspondence) to which the abstracted

item relates. In this way the abstract functions both as a particular item of data and also an entry point into the broader context from which it came. Three other conventions that were adopted in the analysis can also be observed in the abstract above:

- Direct, verbatim quotes were shown with quotation marks in the normal way – the speaker was identified either by role or an anonymised mnemonic.
- For convenience in the analysis, some 'shorthand' versions of words were typed in – 'mtg' stands for 'meeting' in the example abstract.
- Where explanatory additions were made to a quote, these were shown in square brackets; for example in the abstract given as figure 3, [ko] indicates that the meeting referred to was the 'kick-off' gathering.

These initial sets of abstracts were identified as 'data items' in the conceptual map and were then examined for areas of commonality. Where concepts were considered to be related they were arranged into clusters (although 'links' were not assigned at this stage). Once the clustering process was completed each was considered and links arranged to a central concept. Such 'central concepts' were either an existing concept or, more usually, an interpretive statement, added at that point as a label or summation of the cluster. An example of such a cluster is shown below:

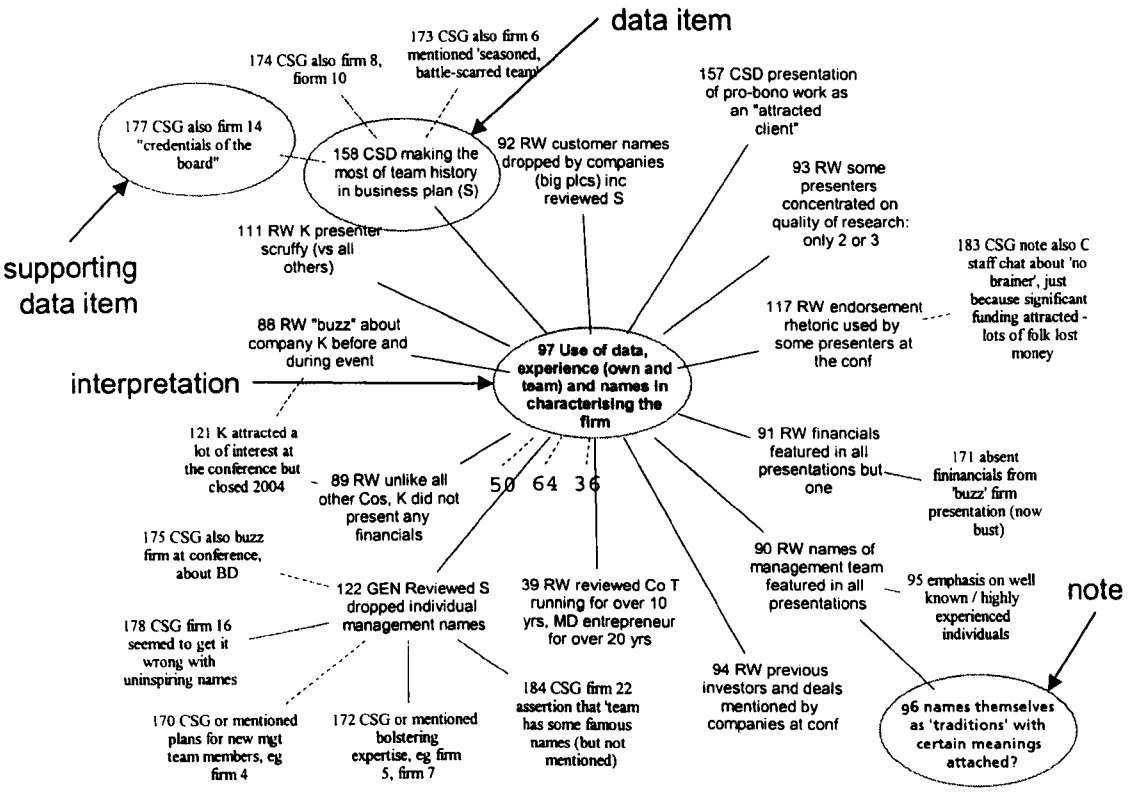

Figure 4: An example data cluster

Four particular features of the example shown in figure 4 are important. Firstly, the notion of 'supporting data items' simply refers to those instances where repeated or similar observations relate to another abstracted data item. Often supporting data items simply establish that similar points were available in the data files, and were indicated by references such as 'see also [another instance]'; but where different *nuances* in the data were apparent they were also captured as supporting items, through references such as 'see also firm 14 *"credentials of the board"*'. Such supporting items were distinguished with a serif typeface, which highlights the

difference between the ordinary data items (sans-serif), central concepts (sans-serif bold) and notes (a particular, distinctive font).[3]

Secondly, the notion of 'note' concepts needs to be explained. These were placed in the diagram at times when a thought about a particular abstracted data item seemed to be important to capture, as a potential aide-memoire for later re-engagement with the data map in relation to a potential line of understanding. At the same time as notes related to particular abstracts were captured in this way, more general notes and reflections about the process of analysis were also captured in a word file. Some example notes, extracted from the file relating to the analysis of the regional business network, are shown below:

21/3/2005

- Added some more data points.
- Idea of "ideational inertia" – when you look for an answer one is available, so why go through the pain of convincing people about something new?

[...]

26/4/2005

- Noted that in this map the identity angles might be more diffuse – sprinklings of academic stuff across a number of clusters? I think also that I am more sensitive to this now because I can see overlaps between CS styles of prescription and the advice / instruction that we provide for academic assignments.
- Changed "anti academic views" cluster to "tension around academic history". I think it could be important the way that this was superficially denigrated, yet emerged as a way of being in process points.

27/4/2005

- Restart on set D at marked page
- Major change to title of cluster about history/current sources of validation to reflect the content in more detail.

The word file of notes and reflections was maintained until the analysis of the case was complete (a separate file was captured for each of the cases).

[3] The Decision Explorer™ software actually allows for different on-screen font colours, but these are

A third point for discussion in connection with the development of a cluster – as exemplified in figure 4 – relates to the central concept. This is an interpretation concept (as discussed earlier in this section), that is intended to provide a useful summary of the all of the related abstracts that form the cluster. At this stage of the analysis the central concepts were developed for each cluster, before potential links between clusters were made; the aim is to develop a minimum number of central concepts that can adequately suggest the content and structure of the data. This will become clearer a little later in this discussion when the process by which the central concepts come to inform, and be informed by, the broader pattern is explained.

The fourth and final point to highlight in relation to figure 4 is the style of link shown between both the different abstracted data items, and between abstracted data items and the central concept. A link style without arrowheads was deliberately selected, since the links were intended to imply relationship rather than – necessarily – causality. This was in line with the hermeneutic principle of deriving meaning from both the whole and part of the 'text' (Ricoeur, 1981; Gadamer, 1998; and see Grondin (1994) for an historical grounding of the term 'hermeneutic circle'), rather than seeing each part in isolation. Through attention to this principle, as later discussion in this chapter will show, the process of deriving explications and explanations of the cases was designed to appropriately reflect both the detail and the structure.

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lost in transfers of diagrams to other applications. Each of the different types is also shown in a different colour in the electronic version of the data map.

The next step in the development of the structure from the detail was to identify links between individual clusters. This connection was sometimes relatively obvious, as it was sometimes the case that multiple central concepts were connected to common data items. That is, a link expressed *overlap*, sometimes in relation to the central 'label concept' and sometimes through one or more common concepts which were relevant to both clusters. Any remaining 'loose' concepts were then linked to cluster concepts where possible; where this was not possible they were eliminated from further consideration. I suggest that these 'loose' concepts had limited local theoretical value since they were not linked to other concepts (events / entities / processes) in the model represented by the conceptual map. This was only a relevant matter in the case of the initial, exploratory case work – there were no 'loose' concepts in the case of the tradition-focussed analyses developed later in the research. As the linking process proceeded, the structure began to develop. An example of some connected clusters is shown in figure 5.

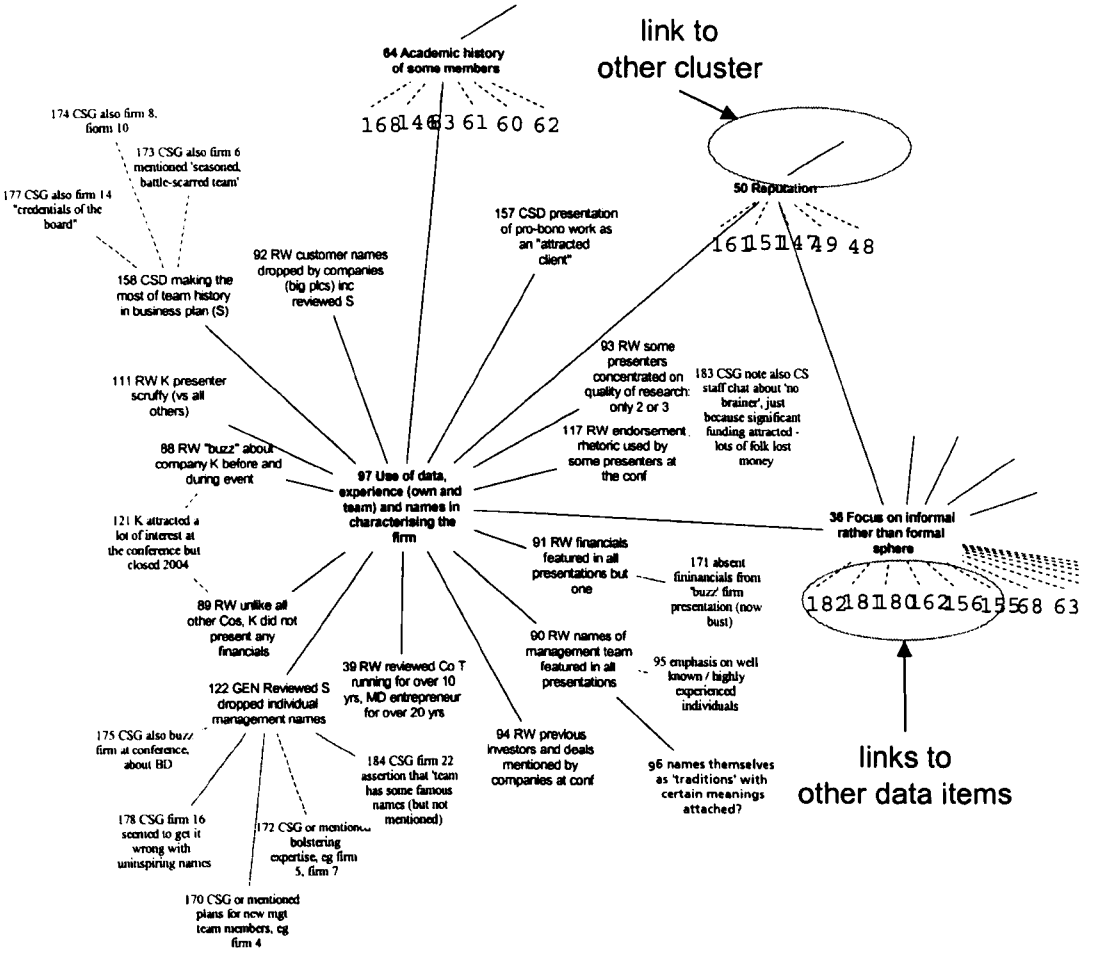

Figure 5: An example of connected clusters

For simplicity, only the central concepts of the additional clusters (those connected to the fully displayed example that we have seen earlier) are shown in the diagram. There were some minor differences in the treatment of the data in the exploratory and the more focussed work. In the exploratory cases, the mapping was complete once all of the potential links between clusters had been made. In the focussed research, there was a further refinement, which I would like to introduce and describe as 'hermeneutic circling'. In this review process, each central cluster label was adapted in turn to be an appropriate description not just of the cluster data items, but also of

the linked labels. This is perhaps most easily explained by reference to an example, as shown in figure 6.

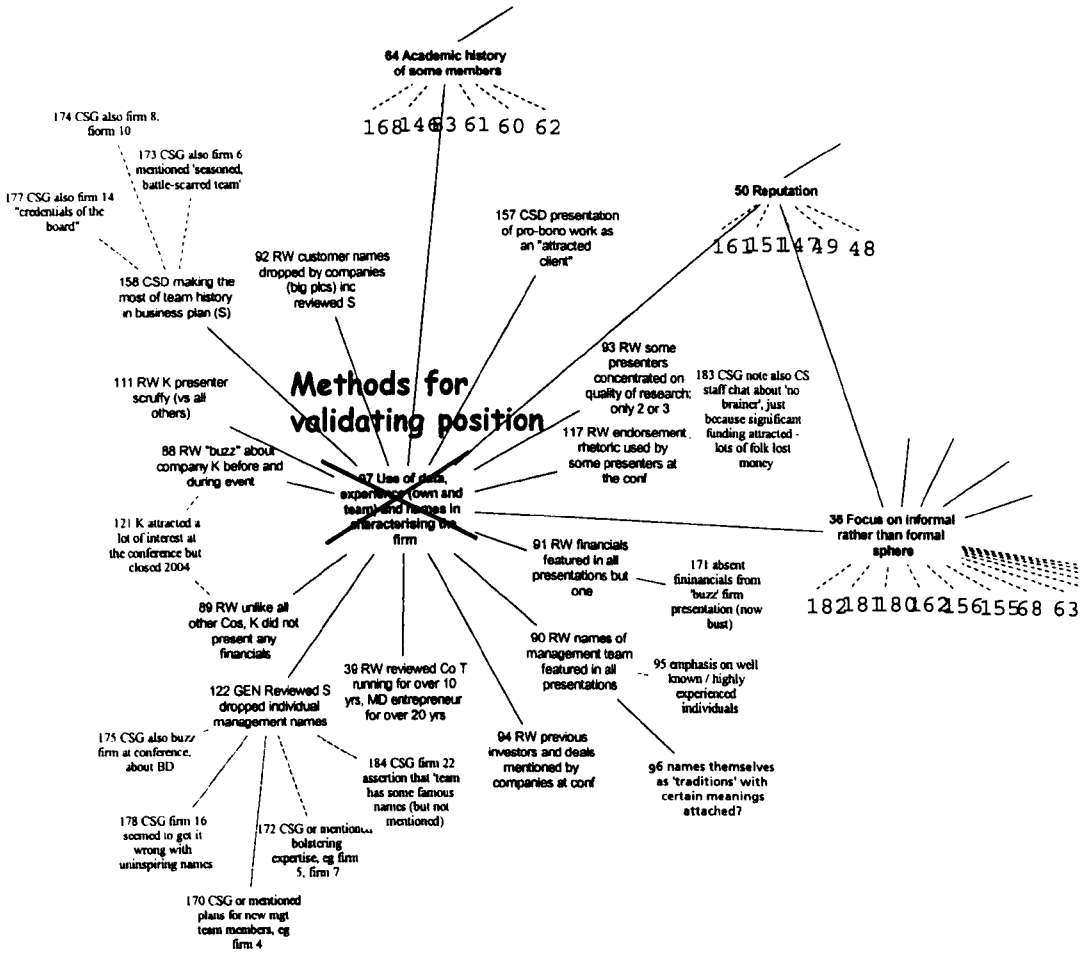

Figure 6: An example of cluster re-labelling in the 'hermeneutic circling' process

The revised name 'methods for validating position' assigned to the central cluster concept was phrased to provide a better description of the connected data items *and* the connected cluster labels. As the process of hermeneutic circling continued, each cluster was examined in the same way. In some cases, upon deeper reflection, it was not possible to retain the links between clusters when they were subjected to this procedure. In such cases, links were occasionally broken and/or clusters were broken

and reformed, until it was possible for every cluster label and connection to be finalised in this way. Since revisions to the label of a cluster could also suggest *new* links, the process of generating robust interpretations in one part of the map could lead to the examination of interpretations in another (and so on), leading to an iterative process of completion.

The process merits the name 'hermeneutic circling' since it does complete the classic notion of the hermeneutic circle. That is, the analysis first proceeded from the part (individual abstracts) to the whole (the completed map). By considering the meaning of each of the cluster labels in relation to the broader surrounding pattern, the circle is completed as the part is then refined in relation to the whole. In this way, the process helps to generate a holistic, internally consistent picture of the data in which both whole and part contribute to the understanding of the situation. In addition, I would suggest, since the central cluster interpretations are derived from data and also challenged in relation to other, connected clusters, this allowed the data to 'resist' a little the necessary violence being done to it.

This process of hermeneutic circling was not considered to be appropriate in the case of the early exploratory work, where the conceptual range was very much wider and overly broad cluster labels might result. This might have thwarted the very purpose – of identifying possible themes for detailed investigation – that the exploratory work was designed to facilitate. An outline of the completed diagram for the regional business network case, showing the structure of the central concepts, is shown as figure 7.

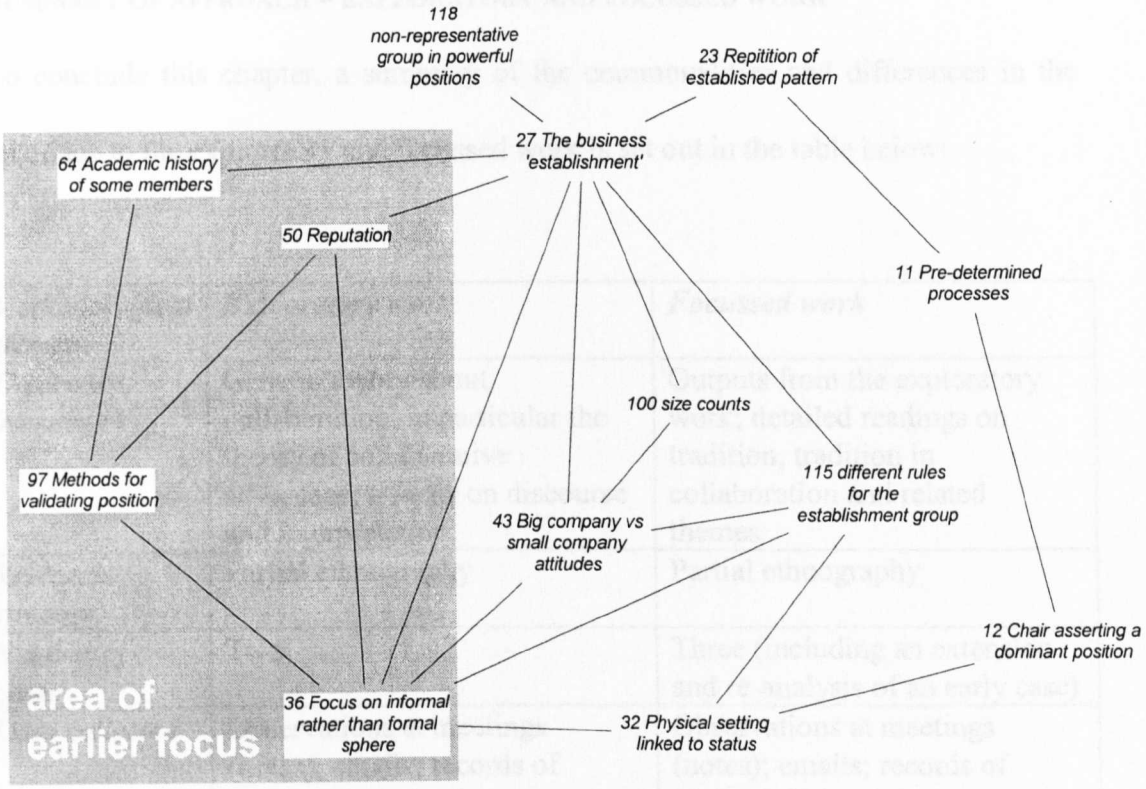

Figure 7: Completed outline structure for the regional business network case

The detailed maps, showing all of the concepts, are too large to show clearly in a relatively small figure, especially in relation to the focussed, later cases. This actually presented a practical problem; it was resolved by printing the three final case maps on poster-size sheets as an aid to working with them in the writing stage of the process. This final writing stage was an important step in the analytical process for the focussed cases, as an integral part of the strategy for grounding the work in multiple and separately treated case contexts. The writing of these focussed case narratives (set out in chapter 6) was loosely informed by the theory explored in chapter 5, but the formal development of (and re-connection with) theory was handled as a subsequent integrative step, as set out in chapter 7.

SUMMARY OF APPROACH – EXPLORATORY AND FOCUSSED WORK

To conclude this chapter, a summary of the commonalities and differences in the approach to the exploratory and focussed work is set out in the table below:

Methodological element	***Exploratory work***	***Focussed work***
Theoretical framework	General theory about collaboration, in particular the theory of collaborative advantage; a focus on discourse and interpretation	Outputs from the exploratory work; detailed readings on tradition, tradition in collaboration and related themes
Research strategy	Partial ethnography	Partial ethnography
Number of cases	Two	Three (including an extension and re-analysis of an early case)
Data collected	Observations at meetings (notes); emails; records of phone calls; case documents; participant documents	Observations at meetings (notes); emails; records of phone calls; case documents; participant documents
Data collection periods	Six to nine months	Twelve to thirty-six months
Analysis approach	Conceptual mapping; emergent theorising	Conceptual mapping; 'hermeneutic circling'; semi-emergent theorising
Forms of output	Summary maps, discussion of emergent themes and potential theory for focussed investigation	Conceptual maps, theory-informed case narratives; elaboration of generalizable theory

Figure 8: Summary of exploratory and focussed research approaches

CHAPTER 4: EXPLORATORY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings from the exploratory phase of the research, which was focussed upon a broad, open engagement in two initial case situations from a partial ethnography perspective. That is, the analysis of these two situations was conducted as described in chapter 3. Through the development of these exploratory findings, a number of areas which seemed to have some potential for further investigation and analysis were identified. Of a range of themes, three seemed to be particularly interesting and common to both situations. These themes were:

- Gender attitudes.
- Professional practices.
- The notion of the 'establishment'.

Each of these themes is explained further later in the discussion. Reflecting on these three themes after the analysis suggested that there might be an element of commonality between them, that there might be an underlying theme – tradition.

In the remainder of this chapter the two early research cases are reviewed in turn, and the three interesting themes (alluded to above) observed in them are described. Following this discussion of each of the cases, the inferred common theme of tradition is explored in outline, as the basis of a more focussed research direction.

THE EARLY RESEARCH CASES

Two particular collaborative groupings were at the heart of the research discussed in this chapter. Both of these initiatives were related to collaborative support for the

growth of small and nascent technology-focussed businesses in a particular UK region, but were quite different in scale and focus. For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity these two research situations will be referred to as the 'spinout' and 'conference' cases in the following discussions.

'Spinout'

The spinout case was concerned with the collaboration between a commercial consultancy, a regional development agency and a small scientific service group within an academic institution. The purpose of this collaboration was to investigate the potential for the service group to obtain full commercial independence, and develop a business plan to support this. The project was conducted over a period of six months in 2001 and the majority of the study data were gathered from five collaborative workshops conducted over this period. These data were complemented by reports, jointly developed materials from the workshops, notes from telephone conversations, email materials and other electronic sources.

Preliminary analysis of the data, conducted in the manner described in the preceding chapter, suggested a number of interesting observations – in particular, a later part of this discussion will develop around the observed influence of the different organizational or social traditions of the development agency and commercialised academic group that were the partners in this case. These differences were suggested by the overall pattern of the clustered data, which suggested an inter-relationship between these traditions, the effects on individuals responding to tensions between these traditions and the outcomes of the particular collaborative projects. However,

there were also a number of other interesting features of the data; to begin to explore this, it is perhaps helpful to begin with a simplified representation of the clustered data, as shown in figure 9 below:

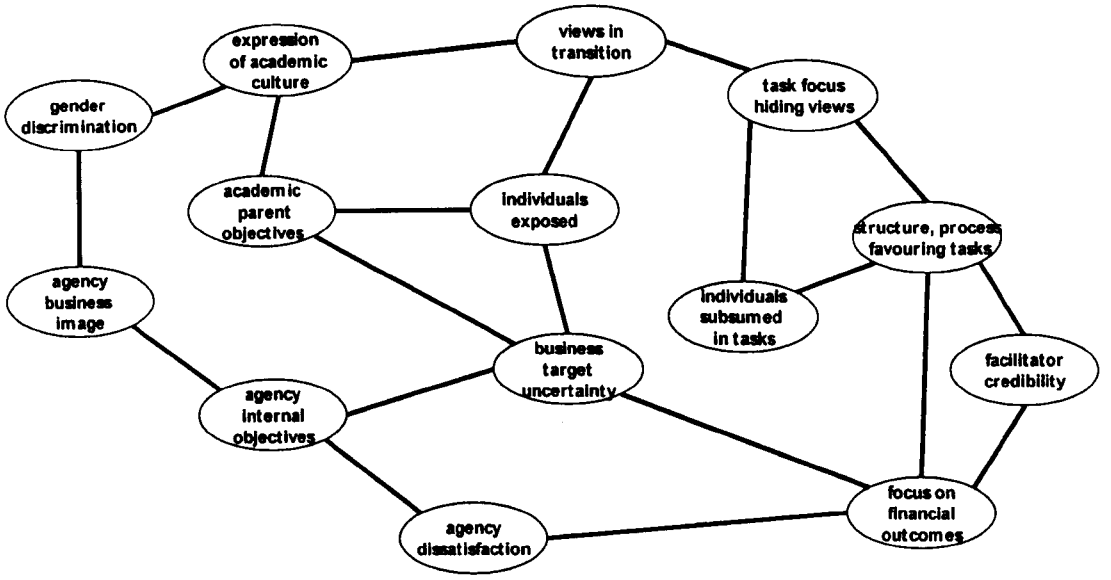

Figure 9: Simplified conceptual map: 'spinout' case

Each of the labels in the diagram above (and in the similar diagram for the second case, presented later as figure 10) represents a central interpretation which describes a cluster of many items of data (the development of clusters and central interpretations / labels has been described at length in chapter 3). In the simplified map above there are a number of points of potential interest but in particular the following are highlighted for the purposes of the present discussion:

- The way in which gender issues seem to be captured between the 'agency business image' and 'academic culture' clusters – as the discussion below will show, the counterpoint of comments and actions between the development agency and commercialised academic group helped to highlight this issue.

- The way in which clusters which might be considered to be cultural expressions related to a single collaborative partner are also linked to clusters describing objectives for that particular partner. In figure 9, this is exemplified by the links between 'academic parent objectives' and 'expression of academic culture'; and by the link between 'agency internal objectives' and 'agency business image'.

What seems interesting about these observations is that whilst some 'characteristics' of the (members of) individual partner organizations *might* be apparent in isolation, some seem to be revealed more clearly in the collaborative situation. We will see later in the discussion what this suggests in relation to common threads in the particular observed characteristics – and about collaboration. But even at a preliminary stage, those characteristics of the partners which seemed to be made apparent in the processes of collaboration seemed to be intriguing, and demand further investigation as to *why* this should be so. This provided one reason for the selection of particular elements for further analysis and discussion. A second reason was that a preliminary review of the collaboration literature showed that there were possible knowledge gaps to be explored in relation to certain themes. Accordingly, the discussion will focus upon an exploration of three features of the data that, for the two reasons indicated above, seemed to merit particular attention. These are: gender attitudes; the professional practices of (members of) partner organizations; and connections to the 'establishment'. Each of these themes is explored in turn below.

Gender attitudes

A cluster of items in the data seemed to indicate that women were disadvantaged in the academic group. This was suggested by demeanour, attitudes to staff development and the humour that was accepted within the group; selected examples of each of these points will be discussed in turn. Firstly, the demeanour of the most senior female representative of the group was noticeably deferential to the senior males in the early workshops; later in the course of the study she began to contribute more freely, and it was apparent that she held key information for the project. Secondly, the chairman (so styled) argued that the largely routine nature of the work of the junior scientific staff (all female and employed on temporary contracts) was not contrary to their development – despite the fact that the generally more senior, male members of staff were largely engaged in research work. In addition, during the course of this study the senior female group member's place at an academic conference was given to a senior male member of the group, without consultation. Finally, the use of humour in the periphery of the workshops was also interesting; for example, the chairman suggested that 'the best invention for ironing shirts is a wife'.

Each of these elements in isolation could of course be assigned a number of other interpretations, but taken together they were strongly suggestive of gender bias, and the situation in the academic group was highlighted by comparison with the regional development agency. This agency was represented by a senior female member of staff, who took an assertive tone in discussions, had a good 'share of voice' and had a strong influence upon the eventual outcome of the processes, up until the final meeting. Some textual sources also provided some support for the existence of biased

gender attitudes in the academic group. The presentation of the biographies of the team on this organization's website gave career achievement details for the chairman and the three senior academic 'advisors' (all male) whilst the technical, service-providing staff (all female) were described merely in terms of their service competencies. In contrast, as related later in the following discussion of professional practices, the development agency website suggested a focus on inclusiveness.

It is important, at this point, to be clear about what the data did *not* suggest. That is, there is no suggestion that there was 'institutionalized' gender bias in the academic group or a policy of disadvantaging women; that is, it is not necessarily the case that opinions were necessarily uniform or deliberate in relation to the matter. Rather it is suggested – with particular reference to the lack of resistance or complaint observed in the academic group – that something of a more 'old-fashioned' societal nature seemed to be apparent in that organization. Although the position and participation of the female member of staff from the development agency mostly provided a contrast to the apparent situation within the academic group, there was a slightly different incident at the close of the project. At the last meeting to formally close the project, the development agency representative was accompanied by her (male) manager, who spoke much more than her – despite no earlier participation in the proceedings. It would be unwise to try to extrapolate too much from that particular observation, but it does open up the *possibility* that gender issues *might* also be present in the development agency. At the very least, it does provide *some* support the contention that the gender issues observed in the collaboration might be societal rather than organizational at the root.

Professional practices

It is suggested that the partners in the *spinout* case enacted certain characteristic professional practices. In the case of the commercialised academic group, these practices seemed to be suggestive of some continuing connection with an academic culture. Selected examples from the relevant data cluster in the findings include the attitude to intellectual property during the project – the group was developing innovative methods that would have been beyond the scope of their competitors, but was both publishing these in academic journals and offering public training courses in their novel techniques. Most tellingly, during the course of the intervention a scientist from a commercial competitor organization had called to discuss some problems in replicating previously published methodology – a member of the group had spent time on the telephone helping to troubleshoot the problems.

These practices would, of course be entirely in keeping with the community oriented and pedagogic principles of academia. Further support for this view was obtained from the academic group's website. This provided extensive bibliographies of papers, free methodology guides and free training materials; the vast majority of the website content was devoted to such matters. Funding for the website had been provided from public, economic development sources in order to develop it as a *promotional vehicle for the group's services*; instead of which, it was providing valuable intellectual material without charge and was poorly developed as a showcase for the group's commercial offerings. In addition, commercial symbolism was confined to acronyms denoting quality in the context of the scientific genre, whereas scientific symbolism was given prominence on several levels: laboratory photographs; molecular

diagrams; and technical acronyms (HPLC, for example). The development agency provided an interesting comparison with the academic group. The data observations included an emphasis on business language use by the agency representative. She also maintained formal dress throughout the processes (the 'academic' group dressed more informally during workshops) and took a detailed interest in the financial aspects of the developing business plan. There seemed to be a carefully constructed 'professional image' for the agency. The website for this agency also had a good deal of referential material related to private enterprise and investment.

The 'establishment'

The development agency website suggested a regard for the 'establishment'. The only titles assigned to individuals on the website were given to the chairman, (a Knight), the deputy chairman (a Professor), the chief executive (Doctor), and a local council leader (Councillor). A CBE was also suffixed to the name of another board member. This was interesting since the academic status and experience of some other members of the board suggested that they would also be entitled to 'Doctor', and there were probably other suffixes to which undecorated members of the board were entitled. The allowance of the use of 'Doctor' for the chief executive might be ascribed to preventing him appearing without a title amongst his 'peers' at the head of the list. Taken together with the suppression of other formal titles (Ms, Mr, Dr) and non-honour suffixes, this was strongly suggestive of a concern with, and respect for, rank. It was also notable the although the site was intended to be a portal for the provision of assistance for growing businesses and inward investment, much more material related to the internal structure of the agency, its management boards, targets

and budgets was present; all of these matters would be of interest to the agency's government sponsors rather than its 'customers'. These elements together suggested that the agency was implicitly looking up to the 'establishment' for its norms, rather than its 'customers'.

The discussion will now move on to consider the second of the two exploratory analyses – the 'conference' case, that is set out below.

'Conference'

The conference case involved twenty-four collaborating commercial organizations. These were sponsors of a not-for-profit company, with an overall mission to select and 'groom' technology firms seeking funding at a major investment conference. The project was conducted over nine months. Data were gathered from three collaborative meetings of the full group, two due diligence visits to technology companies with (differing) sponsor partners and observations at the investment conference. As in the previous case, additional data sources included notes from telephone conversations, joint reports, documents, emails and other electronic sources – particularly related to the two partner organizations involved in due diligence visits with the researcher (these were: a 'big five' consultancy practice; and a regional commercial law firm).

Interestingly, the data in this case also supported the development of inferences related to gender attitudes, professional practices and connections to 'the establishment'. As with the 'spinout' case, presented earlier, the discussion will

address each of these themes in turn. Before doing so, however, an overview of the clustered findings is presented as figure 10, to provide a lead-in to the discussion.

Figure 10: Simplified conceptual map: 'conference' case

In the simplified map above there are a number of points of potential interest in addition to gender attitudes, professional practices and notions of the establishment; the focus on these three themes was for similar reasons to those set out for the preceding case. That is, firstly, that some of these 'characteristics' could be connected to (members of) particular partner organizations, but seemed to become visible in the collaborative situation. Secondly, as already established, these themes represented possible gaps in the collaboration literature. The exploration of these themes begins below with a discussion of gender attitudes.

Gender attitudes

The evidence for biased gender attitudes within this case was again based upon three types of observations in the data. Firstly, the 'share of voice' of women in the collaborative meetings early in the process seemed to be limited, although later in the process a few women became very influential (the discussion will return to this point later). Secondly, the comparison of the roles of those involved in the organization of the conference: the session chairs, invited plenary and dinner speakers were all men, whereas the administrative team dealing with registration and domestic arrangements were all women. Finally, the 24 speakers at the conference (generally, the chief executive of the relevant firm) presenting their cases for venture capital funding were all men. Only one of the presenting companies actually had a female chief executive – but she did not present the case for her company.

Some documentary sources provided limited supporting evidence for the inferred gender bias in this case; the website of one of the key partners in this collaboration (a regional commercial law firm) showed only one female member of the 12 person business services team and no female partners within the company. The websites of the other key partners in this study, the 'big five' consultancy and the not-for-profit company organising the conference, did not show any evidence of gender bias. These sites did, however, provide inferences about professional practices, as discussed below.

Professional practices

Differences in professional practices and attitudes were most apparent in the comparison of the legal firm and 'big five' consultancy representatives in the observational data. A particular comparison concerned discussions with these representatives about a candidate company led by a wife and husband team. The 'big five' representative suggested that "people don't like to invest in husband and wife firms"; the legal firm representative suggested that there was nothing wrong with the business; it was a profitable and solid investment opportunity.

In the simple difference of opinion described above, we can begin to see important differences in client and partner selection stances, and perhaps infer how these might inform the collaborative practices of these two organizations; the discussion will return to this point in relation to the 'establishment' a little later. However there were also other indicators of differences, particularly in the ways each of these two organizations presented their field of practice; these help to connect the interpretations of individual practices to organization level notions.

In the case of the legal firm, friendliness and an appreciation for family businesses was apparently deliberate. The firm's promotional materials featured, for example a 'firm friend in the business' slogan and the (smiling) photographs of partners; together with their names, these photographs showed them to include familial relations. The 'big five' website on the other hand, was styled to be serious; the disclaimer tagline was suggestive of this: "the information contained in this website should not be used without professional advice" – implying that the content was important, rather than the reverse impression given with more conventional

disclaimers. In addition, the list of client types on this site omitted small or medium size firms (for example, family businesses...) but included 'multinationals', major national enterprises, entrepreneurial e-businesses (citing *Amazon* as an exemplary *entrepreneurial* e-business) and private clients. The omission of small businesses on the list of client types seemed to reflect the observations of the company's representative about certain classes of company. The (seemingly unusual) appearance of private clients on the list connects with the discussion of the 'establishment' in the context of this study, which helps to explain why small firms were not potential clients, yet individuals were.

The 'establishment'

The preceding discussions related to gender bias and professional practices both revealed the importance of certain individuals in unexpected situations: female members of the collaboration growing in influence later in the process of screening companies for the conference; and the mention of private clients on a 'big five' consultancy devoted to 'big business'. In fact, these individuals were representatives of the same group – major private investors. Interestingly, the only female members of the collaborative group gaining a share of voice at meetings were 'business angels' – rich private investors – and the 'big five' firm included references to private investor funding in venture capital case studies on its website.

This apparent respect for money was also matched with a regard for 'reputation' or 'experience' – particular companies seeking funding were considered to be 'good bets' if they had previously gained funding from major institutions, or obtained the

services of a 'name' as a director. It seemed that such firms did not have to 'try too hard' at the conference. An example of this is the presentation delivered by the chief executive of a company that had secured a large part of its finance requirements from a major venture capital fund before the conference commenced. The chief executive delivered his presentation dressed informally, rather than in the suit and tie adopted by the other bidding company speakers, and was unique in omitting any detailed financial statements. Both before and after the presentation there was enthusiastic talk about this company in the margins of the conference.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY FINDINGS: RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The discussion will now move from the presentation of the early findings to the basis for the development of the focussed research direction. Looking at the three common themes explored in each of the cases, one option would perhaps have been to concentrate on one of these. However, there were some features of the themes that seemed to merit further reflection. These were:

- The ways in which all of the themes might possibly be connected to each other, particularly in relation to the 'establishment'.
- The blurred spatial and temporal boundaries of some of the observations – for example, the ways in which gender issues might be related to older, more extensive societal patterns, and the patterns of (especially) academic practice that seemed to endure in what might have been expected to be changed circumstances.

- The ways in which themes were sometimes highlighted or made more obvious in inter-partner comparisons – such as gender issues and variations in professional practices.

At a relatively simplistic level of engagement, reviewing the list above begins to suggest that there might be underlying cultural or traditional explanations which merit further investigation. On a common-sense level, the rather 'old-fashioned' gender notions seem to imply the presence of some traditional thinking amongst the partners in the collaborations. Similarly family continuity in the legal firms in the 'conference' case might also be thought to be rather traditional, from a common-sense point of view.

A conceptual sketch of tradition

There are more developed thoughts about tradition that could also be suggested to apply in these cases, however, by reconnecting with earlier methodological arguments about discourse as the ontological structure of social systems. In effect, the kind of attitudes and professional practices discussed earlier in this chapter might be argued to be representative of *social* practices. That is, they represent the ways in which people produce social realities (Davies and Harré, 1990; Heritage, 2001). In this way, traditions may be seen as – for example – the processes in which culture becomes intrinsic to communication through structural conventions (Fitch, 2001). In observing such conventions in practices, the cultural traditions that have been internalised to inform and direct them can be imputed (Gumperz, 1982; Tannen 1993). This might be described as the dominance embodied in shared mental models (Van Dijk, 1993), but that raises questions about the degree of awareness or

reflexivity of the partners in relation to the cases discussed here; the data do not provide a clear perspective on this.

There is also some suggestion that collaboration partners' actions, observed in this research, are also related to the production and shaping of social systems, as well as being the result of them – a kind of recursive pattern that would be consistent with a structurationist perspective of tradition (Giddens, 1984). The findings on gender bias and the concern with the 'establishment' – in quite different situations of interaction with a variety of different partners – are indicative of this embedding within and concomitant creation of social traditions, supporting the notion of a recursive relationship.

Collaboration and tradition

Having observed that, on the basis of the exploratory data, there may be reasonable arguments for exploring the notion of tradition as an important issue for collaboration, it can also be suggested that collaborations might be particularly helpful contexts for exploring tradition. Earlier in the discussion the ways in which partner 'characteristics' were made visible through comparison was noted. This perhaps connects with Ricoeur's (1981) thoughts on the interpretation of traditions:

> *'We belong to an historical tradition through a relationship which oscillates between distance and proximity. To interpret is to render near what is far...'*
>
> *Ricoeur (1981: p110-111)*

It might be expected, perhaps, that the tensions involved in collaborative practice may therefore be partially related both to the recognition (or 'automatic' reaction to, or indeed misrecognition) of 'opposing' traditions; or through the illumination of aspects of one's own taken-for-granted traditional biases, gained through the critical distance provided by (understanding) another's viewpoint. Within the cases discussed here, it might be argued that the need for traditions to surface in a controlled way, providing 'space for expression' (Gould, Ebers and McVicker-Clinchy, 1999), with facilitators or managers acting as 'cultural mediators' (Crane, 1998), was apparent – especially in the 'spinout' case. In comparison, it might be expected that participants within their own organizations have a more immediate relationship to their traditions, and the interpretive frames associated with them, as expressed in Gadamer's (1998) conception of belonging:

> *'...the meaning of "belonging" – i.e., the element of tradition [...] is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices'*
>
> Gadamer (1998:p295)

Towards a focussed research direction

In approaching the emergent theme of tradition, and its potential connection to collaboration in a general sense, the argument has been based upon common-sense notions and the kind of inferences that could be obtained from reflecting upon notions of discourse and interpretation (explored in the development of a philosophical position in chapter 3). Whilst this supported some very tentative, initial inferences and theories about the role of tradition in collaboration, it must be

emphasised that there is a need to explore this from a more focussed perspective. That is, the arguments around the role of tradition in relation to the early, exploratory findings seemed to support the establishment of tradition as a suitable theme for the focussed research direction and indicate its potential utility in understanding the processes and effectiveness (or indeed inertia – Huxham and Vangen, 2005) of collaboration. This appeared to be appropriate and an interesting opportunity, likely to contribute to theory and support findings of relevance to practice. To permit a more focussed analysis, however, there was a need to undertake a further detailed literature exploration. The kinds of questions that needed to be addressed in exploring the literature, at the close of the exploratory stage of the research, were:

- What is tradition? – there was a need to develop a definition of (types of) traditions before their existence and influence in the field of collaboration research could be investigated more precisely. Importantly, the understandings of tradition developed from notions of discourse, presented above, did not necessarily represent the fullest understanding of theory in this area – they simply represented how the notion was grasped at this exploratory point of the research.
- What role(s) for tradition (or obviously related themes) was already posited in the collaboration literature? That is, there was a need to extend the literature investigation to ensure that this research might usefully be able to contribute to academic discourse and practice.
- What features of collaboration in extant literature might be better or more completely explained if the role(s) of tradition was to be investigated? That is, finally, there was a need to identify and explore related areas in the literature to contextualize and connect reading and research on collaboration and tradition.

The elucidation of these questions – preliminaries to the establishment of the focussed research direction – is set out in the following chapter, which continues the discussion through a review of the literature related to collaboration, tradition and related concepts.

CHAPTER 5: LITERATURE II – FOCAL THEMES AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is comprised of six main sections. In the first, theoretical notions of tradition are briefly set out, and some connections with related theoretical elements are introduced. The next four sections provide a treatment of each of the related areas identified in the brief introductory discussion of tradition. These are:

- Culture and organizational culture, including the overlap with collaboration and matters of diversity; culture and tradition have been explicitly linked by some researchers in cultural and organizational cultural studies (for example: Alvesson, 2002).
- Structures and institutional concepts, including a focus on these themes in collaboration; together with culture this is an area that has some obvious overlaps with tradition.
- Identity in general (briefly) and in the context of collaboration. Related ideas about membership and roles in collaborations are also touched upon in this context. As the later discussion will show, this is an important area for enriching theories about tradition.
- Knowledge (and learning) – as the discussion of tradition later in the chapter will suggest, interpreting, understanding and knowing are deeply connected with tradition and merit discussion here; given the wide body of literature in this area, conciseness has required that the focus is largely upon issues of knowledge and learning in relation to collaboration. As the later discussion will show, however, this 'overlap area' is a fruitful one with regard to connections to tradition.

This discussion necessarily touches upon these matters since, because of the nature and content of theories about tradition, they are intimately connected to the central

focus. As each of these four themes is discussed, connections to each of the other themes are addressed; most particularly, connections to tradition are identified in each of the thematic treatments – as alluded to above.

Following the introductory discussion of tradition and the review of the four themes set out above, the final section is presented. This provides an integrated conceptualization of tradition, and develops an approach for 'identifying' elements of tradition(s) that might be in play in the circumstances of collaboration (or perhaps, indeed, in other social settings). It is important to point out, however, that since the discussion of theories of tradition in this chapter demonstrate its connections to a number of other complex concepts, there is no expectation that one can *cleanly and clinically isolate* tradition from other factors which may be expected to play a part in complex social situations. With this in mind the endpoint of this second section is the development of suggested general 'hooks' for connecting with data that can help to establish and characterize tradition as an important factor in play in collaborative situations – whilst being open to enriching concepts which emerge as matters of interest during the analysis of the data.

TRADITION

In this part of the chapter tradition is defined. In doing so, some connections with the related themes which will be discussed later are touched upon. These connections are elaborated at the close of the chapter, where an integrative conceptualisation of the themes in relation to tradition is developed.

Tradition as continuity of practices, reasoning and values

The simplest conceptualization of tradition is that it is something transmitted – handed down or handed on – as well as the description of this process of transmission (Shils, 1981). However, this process is about the interpretation of the passed tradition rather than an unquestioning receipt:

> *"Constellations of symbols, clusters of images, are received and modified. They change in the process of transmission as interpretations are made of the tradition presented; they change also while they are in the possession of their recipients. This chain of transmitted variants is also called a tradition..."*
>
> Shils (1981:p13)

This point also reinforced by Phillips (2004), who sees the process of engagement with tradition as:

> *"...a means of raising questions about the way we pass on the life of cultures – questions which necessarily involve authority as well as invention, practice as well as interpretation."*
>
> Phillips (2004:p25)

This interpretation of and within tradition might be associated with values – Warnke (2004) points out that traditions involve 'thick concepts' in which fact and value are irreducibly bound together. This also connects with Weick's (1993) ideas about the contextual rationality of sensemaking:

"...action motivated to create and maintain institutions and traditions that express some conception of right behaviour and a good life with others..."

Weick (1993:p643)

That is, Weick is not arguing for sensemaking as some 'pure' form of rationality; notions of what is 'right' both include and support tradition. Indeed, tradition has been described as a type of 'truth', which is constructed through the interpretation of the past into the future (West Turner, 1997; Giddens, 1984, 2002). It differs from other types of 'truth' in that its validity is anchored in events rather than theories (Boyer, 1990). This anchoring essentially means that all traditions are invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Thompson, 1990; Giddens, 2002) since the events need not be 'real' events but rationalized myths (Sewell, 2001), and even where foundational events might have been 'real', they may be reinterpreted, redescribed and adapted over time in engagement with reality (Friedrich, 1972; Dobel, 2001), as answers are adapted to new problems. As the previous discussion has already suggested, tradition is centrally about *interpretation*; arguments about whether traditions are *ultimately* 'true' or 'false' are therefore spurious (West Turner, 1997).

As preceding allusions have already indicated, traditions can therefore be seen as methods of dealing with problems, developed by communities over time (Dobel, 2001). Shils (1981) suggests that this is perhaps the most simple reason for the transmission of tradition – when a member of a 'new generation' (a novice participant in any established community or culture) reaches a stage of development that brings them to a question, they find that tradition is there to supply an answer. As

long as the answer can be adapted to the current circumstances (defined and interpreted by the community) it will serve (Schochet, 2004; Shils, 1981). In this way tradition can be seen as an *authoritative* mode of complex theorising which is yet *consensual* in nature, differing from 'scientific' modes of theorising (Boyer, 1990), in that while some communities may *claim* universal truth for their traditions, they are *not* falsifiable. At the limit, Heidegger suggests that we are not even aware of the authoritative operation of tradition, or at least of its original basis (as discussed earlier):

> *Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been quite genuinely drawn."*
>
> Heidegger (1962:p43)

Thus the (sometimes unconsidered) dimension of time in tradition (Giddens, 1990) is an important one; Moran and Mooney (2002), discussing the work of Ricoeur, suggest that traditions and conversations are related phenomena which are temporally different in scope:

> *"The 'short' intersubjective relations in conversations are intertwined with the 'long' intersubjective relations of traditions"*
>
> Ricoeur (1981:p576)

Gross (1992) also suggests that repetition through time is important, in that a repeated action is traditional *because* it has been enacted before; Giddens (1990) suggests that this *routine* of tradition is not 'empty habit' but 'intrinsically meaningful'. That is, tradition is based on a communally agreed interpretation and *reinterpretation* of events arising from the complex interactions of the social structures within which people interpret their lives. Shils (1981) emphasises that tradition is essential in understanding the temporal aspect of social phenomena:

> *Tradition is a dimension of social structure which is lost or hidden by the atemporal conceptions which now prevail in the social sciences [...] The temporal dimension is obscured by the concept of equilibrium, stressing as it does the immediately present function of all the variables in the system*
>
> Shils (1981:p7)

Tradition as the basis of authority in interpretation

Bearing in mind this temporal aspect, the continuity of traditions is argued as being dependent upon the cyclical nature of understanding in a socio-historical context. It is the internalised 'truth' of *historical* community understandings (Phillips, 2004) of events (however historically distant) that supports *authority* (Friedrich, 1972; he suggests that tradition and authority are 'Siamese twins' which are never found apart in a community) – although this authority is not necessarily *total*. As Gadamer (1998) remarks:

"...This is in fact always the case when something speaks to us from tradition: there is something evident about what is said, though that does not imply it is, in every detail, secured, judged and decided. The tradition asserts its own truth in being understood..."

Gadamer (1998:p486)

Shils also emphasises that there is normative element of some traditions but even where this is the case it is not *total*, since traditions are themselves mutable and adaptable in changing circumstances (e.g. Phillips, 2004; Warnke, 2004; and particularly Clifford's (2004) study of the role of tradition in decolonization). In thinking about this scope for change and adaptation, Weber (1978) is helpful here. His discussion of tradition as one of the three grounds for the 'pure types' of legitimate domination, (with charisma and rationality) suggests that:

"...The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on [...] Traditional grounds – resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority)..."

Weber, (1978:p215)

"...there is a double sphere: that of action which is bound to specific traditions; that of action which is free of specific rules."

Weber, (1978:p227)

Connections with other themes

This brief introduction to the complex notion of tradition is developed further later in the chapter, but it is first necessary to explore some of the related themes that seem to be important in the preceding discussion. These are:

- Culture – the connection with the continuity of practices and values implies some relationship with culture.
- Structure – as noted in the preceding discussion, Shils (1981) has explicitly suggested that tradition is concerned with the temporal dimension of social structure, but more general connections with structures and institutions can also be inferred.
- Identity – tradition's role in connecting structures with notions of authority and legitimacy suggests some overlap in defining what it means to be a community, or an individual within a community.
- Knowledge – the notion of tradition as a form of truth (and links with patterns of reasoning and interpretation) suggest a connection between tradition and knowledge.

These links are merely introduced at this stage. Each of these themes is discussed individually, in the following sections, followed by the presentation of an integrative conceptualization in which the links are more fully developed.

CULTURE

In exploring the concept of culture – with particular reference to collaboration – there is a need to approach it from two directions; from the perspective of organizational culture, but also from a broader survey, taking in anthropological and cultural studies.

This is because collaborations can include rather looser, more socially conceptualized forms than those which might automatically be recognized as 'organizations'[4]; there is therefore a need to consider the relevance of culture in the widest sense.

A broad exploration of culture

Before discussing the relevance of culture to interorganizational collaboration, the nature of culture – in the broadest sense – is discussed. This is because tradition is considered from a similarly broad perspective, and it has been suggested that culture and tradition are linked (Alvesson, 2002). To begin this treatment of culture the definition suggested by Lévi-Strauss, presented by Monaghan and Just (2000), seems to be pertinent as it also emphasises this link with tradition:

> *"Culture is neither natural nor artificial. It stems from neither genetics nor rational thought, for it is made up of rules of conduct, which were not invented and whose function is generally not understood by the people who obey them. Some of these rules are residues of traditions acquired in different types of social structure..."*
>
> Monaghan and Just (2000:p41 - citing Lévi-Strauss, 1983)

Lévi-Strauss' definition suggests that culture overlaps with structure as well as tradition; I will return to this connection later in the discussion. However, there are other rather more elaborate explorations of the meaning of culture which do not

[4] This is particularly true of flexible notions of the term 'network' – this is discussed at length in the later section on structure.

connect explicitly with structural notions. For example, de Certeau's (1997) perspective on the meaning and use of the term 'culture' suggests:

> *"Six different uses – characterized by as many different approaches – can be designated:*
>
> 1. *The features of 'cultivated' human beings [...]*
> 2. *A patrimony of 'works' to be preserved or diffused, or in relation to which to be situated (for example, classical culture...) [...]*
> 3. *The image, perception, or comprehension of a world belonging to a given milieu (rural, urban, Indian etc.) or a to a time (medieval, contemporary, etc.) [...]*
> 4. *Modes of behaviour, institutions, ideologies and myths that compose frames of reference and whose totality, whether it is coherent or not, distinguishes one society from another. [...]*
> 5. *Things acquired, insofar as they are different from things innate. [...]*
> 6. *A system of communication, conceived according to models developed in theories of verbal language. [...]"*
>
> de Certeau (1997:p103)

It is important to note that de Certeau does not regard these definitions / usages as alternatives, but rather that some of them apply (or may be used) in combination – for example, items 4 and 6 above. It is important to underline three particular features of de Certeau's definitions. Firstly, the definitions include elements which might be seen as either imposed institutions or interpretively acquired and applied resources.

Secondly, that they are *sets* of *things*, generally regarded as a culture in their *totality*. Thirdly, they refer to things (whether material or otherwise) existing in relation to a given system or society – importantly, these definitions are therefore related to a synchronic analysis of meaning, dealing with something in a given place and/or time; point 3 makes this particularly explicit. These definitions are therefore *not* strongly connected to diachronic analysis, which explains the *process* through which meanings are preserved and developed through time; that is the role of *tradition*. Thinking, therefore, about culture as a synchronically defined 'set of things', the simpler definition offered by Habermas (1987b) might be a useful summary:

> *"I use the term culture for the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world."*
>
> Habermas (1987b:p138)

– this underpins the relevance of culture as a source of knowledge and interpretations, a point to which the discussion returns later (as with structure, this is a connection that it common to both tradition and culture). Importantly, we might see this stock of knowledge as existing not just 'in people's heads' but also in symbolic resources of a textual or other material nature. This area will be explored further in the discussion of organizational culture which follows below.

Organizational culture

Alvesson (2002) characterizes organizational culture as being a way to understand the richness of organizational life, including ethical and political dimensions (points strongly supported by Willmott, 2003). He suggests that it is difficult to link to performance (although it may be associated with particular cases or instances) but it is seen to be something which organizational members actively manage, and which organizational practitioners participate in – the basis of common, taken for granted assumptions and shared meanings that remove the burden of constant interpretation, which makes organized activity possible (see also Faull, Kalliath and Smith, 2004).

Whilst organizational culture can therefore be seen as shared core beliefs or assumptions (Fey and Dennison, 2003), it can be viewed more broadly as a system of shared symbols and meanings (Hatch, 1993; Martin, 2003) – in which 'meaning' refers to the interpretation of a symbol, which may be an object or exist in human interaction. Alvesson (2002) suggests that there are many different understandings of what organizational culture is, but he seeks to distinguish it analytically from social structure (the purpose or product of social action), seeing it as informing social action rather than concretizing rules, norms and values (contra Fey and Dennison, 2003) – although he does not develop an argument or debate with the structural theorists discussed later in this chapter, who might perhaps disagree. Alvesson's overview of many extant conceptualizations of organizational culture suggests that it:

- Is related to history and tradition;
- Has some depth, is difficult to grasp and be accounted for, and must be interpreted;

- Is collective and shared by members of groups;
- Is primarily ideational in character, having to do with meanings, understandings, beliefs, knowledge and other intangibles;
- Is holistic, intersubjective and emotional rather than strictly rational and analytical.

Alvesson (2002:p6)

The symbolic characterization expressed by Alvesson (2002), Martin (2003) and Hatch (1993) includes such concerns, and steps beyond the more prevalent characterization of organizational culture in terms of artefacts, values and underlying assumptions (Fey and Dennison, 2003; Smircich, 1983; Schein, 1993; 1997). Hatch's (1993) symbolic focus takes the Schein conceptualization as a starting point, but goes beyond it through a particular focus on interpretation; this she characterizes as the "second-order experience of the meaning of a symbol". That is, the interplay between symbols and assumptions, when interpretation exposes them. She suggests (from hermeneutic arguments) that the reinforcement or challenge of assumptions happens within the same interpretive move as the reconstruction of the meaning of the symbols.

This interpretive function leads Martin (2003) to suggest that some modesty about claims to 'objectivity' is necessary in studying organizational cultures; considering the way that cultural members interpret and represent their experiences, a subjective conceptualization of culture is appropriate. However, she also points out that some elements of objective analysis might be appropriate in an integrated treatment of the

material and ideational aspects of culture, as well as suggesting that subjectivity in this sense does not imply consensus, as there may be multiple interpretations of a cultural event or object. This is perhaps supported by Corley's (2004) single-organization case study on the perceived cultural constructions of organizational identity; even where a common set of agreed symbols obtains, a variety of disparate interpretations may exist. Culture therefore presents challenges in relation to generalization, as well as the need to be an 'insider' to develop context-specific knowledge and understanding. Hatch (1993), Martin (2003) and Corley's (2004) thoughts on the role of interpretation in relation to organizational culture underlines the role of the interpreting agent within it, and the complexity necessary in conceptualizing it. Alvesson underlines this complexity:

> *"... I have emphasized some key themes in thinking culturally. Perhaps the most basic one concerns the need to go beyond the level of the surface – [...] - what matters is how people interpret and relate to the actions. A second basic theme is the dual nature of culture - on the one hand its usefulness for making complex interaction and coordination possible, and on the other hand its constraining and repressive side. When providing guidelines and a sense of meaning and direction culture also freezes our world, prevents our imagination and reduces autonomy.* ***Culture is anchored in tradition and frequently changes slowly****, but there are many cultural manifestations and people in turbulent and multi-group situations move between them. Belongingness to a multiplicity of groups - organization, profession, age cohort, gender, ethnic community - forms a basis for movements between*

different sets of meanings in organizations. [...] Thinking culturally on a multitude of levels is thus called for; also when one is interested in workplace culture it is useful to bear in mind that this is not a cultural island."

Alvesson (2002:pp170-171 – emphasis added)

The 'anchoring in tradition' suggested in the extract above is an important consideration, and a thought to which I will return later. For the present the discussion turns to the complex situation of collaboration, which might be expected to be more than the superficial sum of its parts – for if an organization is *not merely* " a cultural island" then a collaboration may be *more than* a cultural archipelago.

Culture and collaboration

In working with the literature on culture and collaboration, one finds – perhaps unsurprisingly – that there is a strong overlap with the discussion of diversity. Cultural differences and diversity have been cited as potential sources of difficulties (Schruijer and Vansina, 1997; Huxham, 1996; Gray, 1989) and identified as issues which need to be explicitly discussed in the context of collaborations (Himmelman, 1996). Various studies have been conducted which investigate the effect of the national culture of participant organizations upon collaborative ventures, for example Steensma, Marino, and Weaver, (2000), Barkema and Vermeulen (1998), and Chen, Chen, and Meindl (1998). More recently Salk and Shenkar (2001) in their longitudinal study (three years of work with the management of an international joint venture between an Italian and British company) investigated the impact of national cultures on social identity formation, and suggested that these were dominant

influences in the 'sense making' processes adopted by those involved in the joint venture. The ways in which these processes were reproduced over time is also suggestive of traditions as well as culture.

So much for the general relevance of cultural studies to collaboration; let us now turn briefly to the connected issue of power. Alvesson (2002) suggests that culture should not be discussed in isolation from power; whilst a full exploration of this topic is beyond the scope or ambition of this thesis, it is discussed very briefly below, with a particular focus on collaboration. This brief excursion also connects with notions of control in relation to culture, a little later in the discussion.

Concepts of power in relation to collaboration have also been extensively discussed in the work of Huxham and Beech (2003a), who discuss three purposes of power in collaborations in relation to the interacting parties (and external stakeholders):

- Power over: focussed on gain for the individual (organization).
- Power to: focussed on mutual gain.
- Power for: to allow others to gain.

Power may therefore be constructed and used in a number of ways Gray (2004) connects structural, macro notions of power with possibilities for continuity and barriers to change. Similarly it has been suggested that creating collaborative advantage might be connected to altering the pattern of power relations in favour of the excluded (Sink, 1996).

In relation to the present work, discursive, interpretive perspectives on power (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2000; Everett and Jamal, 2004) connect most directly to notions of culture and tradition. Such treatments suggest that symbolic resources support possibilities for legitimate authority, discursive authority and the control of other resources – which themselves function as sources of power (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002)

Re-focussing the current discussion on culture, it has been suggested that this is itself a form of control. For example Clegg et al (2002) established organizational culture as supporting (or constitutive of) liberal forms of governance:

> *"What is novel about liberal forms of governance is that the personal projects and ambitions of individual actors become enmeshed with, and form alliances with, those of organization authorities and dominant organizations"*
>
> Clegg et al (2002:p319)

- but stressed that this is a difficult matter in the context of collaboration:

> *"the achievement of a practical collective consciousness, in which sensemaking is shared [...] is even more problematic in some new forms of organizational design, such as alliances [...] where there is no unitary centre of control"*
>
> Clegg et al (2002:p319)

The link between culture and control is one way in which it has an effect on interorganizational outcomes, but on a perhaps more general level *cultural compatibility* has also been a focus for research. For example, Crane (1998) identified the need for the explication of individual, differing organizational cultural perspectives in collaborative partnerships, and suggests that there is a key role for 'cultural mediators'. Chikudate's (1999) work also highlights these problems, in his discussion of a Japanese pharmaceutical corporation attempting to develop partnerships with scientific research groups (largely academic) in the West (America-Europe). The relationship between failures to reach agreements with the Western groups and the inability of the company's negotiators to understand the nature of scientific research and relate to scientists are underlined – the study found that 'occupational cultural compatibility' was the key to the development of successful partnerships with the scientific groups, and was more important than advanced 'Western business training' or national language skills.

The preceding discussion has shown that the cultural issues raised in studies of collaboration have included *organizational* cultural concerns as well as broader, *society-level* issues. Griffith's (2002) work unites the perspectives discussed thus far, suggesting that communication problems may arise from differences in national cultures *or* organizational cultures. This work also leads from discussions of culture back to the mixed blessing of *diversity*, suggesting that the more relationships a firm has, the more it is likely to face communication problems since the diversity of cultures necessarily increases. Gray (2004) has elaborated a number of tensions which make the issues related to diversity more explicit:

"Diversity is required to create interdependence necessary for collaboration but some joint signification is needed to take correlative action."

"Failure to include all stakeholders may derail collaboration but if stakeholders with too diverse views are included, consensus may be impossible"

Gray (2004:p17)

These themes relate to what Gould, Ebers and McVicker-Clinchy (1999) describe as the need to deal with the emotional problems of mutual dependence – considering unconscious assumptions about constituent groups in collaborative ventures. They go on to discuss how this must inform structural considerations for the collaborative group, requiring the redrawing of organizational boundaries to provide 'space for expression' of underlying feelings:

"Successful collaborations need to address the tension between need for shared meaning and diversity"

Gould, Ebers and McVicker-Clinchy (1999:p17)

The focus on shared meaning also connects to potential influences upon interorganizational learning and knowledge, which is explored later, but will be briefly alluded to here. The literature suggests that culture is an important factor influencing interorganizational learning possibilities. This has been explored in relation to organizational (Reason (1999), but more particularly regional and national

(Nonaka, Ray and Umemoto, 1998; Simonin, 1999), conceptualizations of culture. Palmer (2001) has suggested that the diversity of interacting partners is an important contributor to learning, helping collaborations to draw upon the knowledge and understanding of different communities, including communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Mohrman, Tenkasi and Mohrman, 2003). Diversity, however, leads to the possibility that certain tensions will be developed (Huxham and Beech, 2003; Lunnan and Kvålshaugen, 1999), for example between accommodating and assimilating a breadth of knowledge, and progress towards narrower, well defined objectives. In the most negative cases linking culture, knowledge and interpretation, cultural differences have been suggested to introduce the possibility of misunderstandings (Milliman, Taylor and Czaplewski, 2002), and introduce barriers to the presumed creative benefits of diversity (Faulkner and de Rond, 2001).

In conclusion it can be suggested that diverse cultural systems (including those related to overlapping institutional conceptions) are important factors in relation to possible developments in the form, process and the outcome of collaborations. Culture clearly has links with tradition, but also – *at least* in the context of collaboration –with structures, identity (Corley, 2004) and knowledge.

STRUCTURES

In this section structures are considered; although there is a focus on collaboration in much of the section, the discussion is necessarily informed by some broader organizational and societal considerations. The complex subject matter is addressed in a number of subsections, in the following way:

- *Institutional theory* is first introduced and discussed very briefly, as a major perspective which views structural issues as being pre-eminently important.
- *Structures, institutions and collaboration* are considered together; in this way the brief treatment of institutional theory already set out is enriched in the context of the focal interest of this thesis.
- *Networks and other forms of collaborative structure* are considered in more detail. Networks are an important focus, connecting to the broader literature on structural issues through Powell's (1990) work.
- *The deliberate consideration of culture in structural choices* makes explicit connections between issues of culture and structure, as they have been suggested in the literature.
- *The implicit interplay between structures and culture in norms and values* completes the section, by considering a further category of overlap between these two themes.

As the discussion will show – from the first subsection which follows below – culture is both an overlapping and challenging concept for many structural notions. The overlap between structures and culture in this section is therefore much more direct than the link between structure and tradition (with one or two exceptions), but connections between these latter two concepts are developed more explicitly at the close of the chapter.

Institutional theory

It seems appropriate to begin the discussion of structures with a brief consideration of a perspective that sees structural effects as being the dominant social mechanism; that

is, institutional theory. Scott's (2001) classic treatment of institutional theory shows the theory to have its origins in large-scale economics or conceptualizations of 'social facts' (Craib, 1997) – that is, macro-scale features. Although it has been suggested elsewhere that all macro social phenomena have their roots at the micro level (e.g. Collins, 1981), institutional theory, as Scott puts it, claims *institutional jurisdiction* even at the personal relationship level, effected through structural regulative, normative or cultural-cognitive means and expressed in rules, expectations or schemata.

Whilst descriptively, the symbolic and relational features identified in institutional theory (such as laws and governance, for example) are apparent, the process of institutionalization is problematic. That is, institutional theory seems to diminish the role of culture in macro-level conceptualizations and copes poorly with agency when considering the micro-level. Perhaps in admission of this process weakness, the definition of agency offered by Emirbayer and Mische (1998: p966) –

> *"the interpretive processes whereby choices are imagined, evaluated and contingently reconstructed by actors in an ongoing dialogue with unfolding situations"*

– is accepted by Scott (2001), and others working from institutional perspectives have also stressed the interpretive role of agency in the improvisation and adaptation of routines (for example: Feldman and Pentland, 2003). A further challenge to the processual aspect of institutional theory seems to be offered by structurational

perspectives (Giddens, 1984), which challenge the 'controlling' perspective on institutions and place the individual in more reflexive and mutually constitutive relationship to them.

A more extensive treatment of institutional theory (an enormous field) is beyond the scope of this present work; in touching briefly upon some problematic aspects, my intention has been to suggest – tentatively – that it has utility as a metaphorical, descriptive tool, but the processual aspect of the theory needs to be handled with a degree of caution.

Structures, institutions and collaboration

Institutional theory might perhaps have a useful descriptive, metaphorical role in relation to discussions about collaboration, as intimated above. It has been suggested both that collaboration plays a role in the gradual restructuring of institutional fields (Cropper, 1996:p92-93) and that institutional theory is an important way of understanding the development of a normative environment for collaboration (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). The theory has been applied to a number of empirical and theoretical studies, for example:

- Van Raak et al's (2002) examination of the cooperation between health care providers in the Netherlands – specifically, those dealing with patients with multiple, complex health problems – in which they applied a combination of institutional theory and resource dependency theory to develop an understanding of the situation and make policy recommendations.

- Sydow and Staber's (2002) qualitative, interview based study examining the institutional nature of project networks, based upon research conducted in two regional centres for film / TV projects in Germany. It develops an argument that particular production projects are short-term collaborations – but are dependent upon the existence of more enduring institutions in the surrounding organizational fields.
- Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy's (2000) literature-based paper develops an argument and a number of propositions related to the inter-relatedness of institutionalization and collaboration.
- Gray (2004) – in this review paper, Gray identifies a number of tensions which arise in collaboration which are related to institutional theory (and particularly a structuration perspective).
- Geppert and Clark (2003) present a theoretical, exploratory range of institutional outcomes which they relate to partner attitudes to 'knowledge and practice transfer'.

The list could be extended further, but instead the discussion will proceed to some of the general points and implications both of the studies listed above and other pertinent papers. One of the aspects of institutional theory mentioned by many authors in the context of collaboration is isomorphism, from the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). This theoretical work suggests three processes through which organizations operating in a common *organizational field* will begin to resemble each other; this work is covered at some length here since it is central to a number of works that draw upon institutional perspectives. The central argument of the paper

concerns three *isomorphic processes* driving institutional change (in the direction of similarity) which are:

- Coercive isomorphism – the pressures which organizations exert upon other organizations through (e.g.) contractual or collusive mechanisms, or the cultural pressures exerted through societal expectations or legal / governmental / regulatory frameworks.
- Mimetic isomorphism – the tendency of organizations, in conditions of uncertainty, to imitate the structural forms of organizations perceived to be successful in such circumstances.
- Normative isomorphism – the pressures exerted by the (increasing) professionalization of fields; this is effected through common standards of education and qualifications and other common, expected traits expected of professionals employed in the field, underpinned by professional networks such as learned societies and trade associations.

The predicted effects of the theory advanced in the paper are given in a number of hypotheses, which are summarised in the table below:

Isomorphism	*Organization level predictors*	*Field level predictors*
Coercive	Organizations will resemble other organizations (in structure, culture, processes) proportionate to their dependence upon them. Similarly and more specifically, if resource provision is centralized this also supports growing similarity to the resource provider.	Field dependence upon a single or limited number of similar organizations is associated with isomorphism. The level of interaction with state agencies will be associated with a proportionate tendency towards isomorphism.
Mimetic	The greater uncertainty that exists the more the organization will imitate those perceived to be a success. Similarly, ambiguity of goals is likely to favour mimesis (legitimacy only defensible by reference to form / processes rather than aims)	A restricted range of viable organizational models results in faster processes of isomorphism. Uncertainty across the field will favour isomorphism.
Normative	Academic credentials for management / staff selection will be associated with growing similarity to other organizations in the field. The more managers / professionals participate in field networks the more the organization will resemble others.	Professionalization of field favours isomorphism. Structuration (degree of defined structure in this sense) of a field will be proportionately associated with isomorphism.

Figure 11: Predictors of isomorphism

(adapted from DiMaggio and Powell, 1983:pp154-156)

Looking at the definitions in the table above, there seems to be (at least) a certain degree of tautology in places and there are other perspectives in relation to the study of networks (as the later discussion will show) and/or communities of practice which might provide more useful descriptions of the processes in play across organizations. However, authors discussing collaboration have worked with certain elements or consequences of these isomorphic pressures. For example, van Raak et al (2002) focus on the normative / coercive pressures experienced by organizations which

make them conform; that is, they see institutions as a combination of rules and enforcement processes that constrain choice, suggesting that a requirement to collaborate may be one of these institutional pressures. They emphasize that this will account for some of the patterns of collaboration observed in their work, but as the pressure to conform is top down and not *mimetic* of a *successful* interorganizational form it does not necessarily result in an optimal collaborative pattern. The question we might ask is whether cultural influences upon policy makers might be a more compelling explanation for this than possible institutional processes.

Garcia-Pont and Nohria (2002) focus on the mimetic mode of isomorphism, arguing that rather than responding to general mimetic pressures, organizations actually conform to more localised organizational models within 'strategic groups' or 'organizational niches'. They also suggest that these niches are related to patterns of interdependence through alliances, which are associated with the prior experience and the related development of trust. Here – as with all of the 'isomorphisms' the relevance of the institutional process term seems to be limited to a post-hoc categorization. As the discussion of tradition in this chapter suggests, we might alternatively explain the developing functional similarities between organisations of similar purpose as a result of interpreting agents seeking to solve problems; finding that some acceptable answers (perhaps competing answers – Townley, 2002) already exist, it seems likely that these will be taken up. This has more appeal than a model which seems to reify organizations by seeing them as influencing 'one another', and demonstrates similarity through careful post-hoc definition.

More sensitively (and with a better feeling for interpretive agency), however, Sydow and Staber (2002) addressed the way in which enduring institutions are effected through a process of structuration in inter-personal and interorganizational networks; agents form these networks through their actions, at the same time that these actions are constrained by these networks. It is this recursive property of structuration, which causes the development of *institutional thickness*[5]. They also consider the resultant spatial and temporal boundaries of these institutionally structured networks:

> *" The difficulty of transmitting tacit knowledge, as well as the strength of local cultures and traditions, explain why some networks are highly place-specific and difficult to transfer to other locales."*
>
> Sydow and Staber (2002:p217)

> *"...agents tend to orient themselves, reflexively, to their experiences with past collaboration, as well as their expectations of future relationships."*
>
> Sydow and Staber (2002:p219)

These points connect with the roles of culture and tradition explored later in this chapter. For the moment the focus remains upon the idea of reflexive development in the context of institutions, explored further in Sydow and Windeler (2003), which considers the development of interfirm networks from a structuration perspective. It presents the necessary management practices as 'reflexive social practices', through

[5] A term coined by Sydow and Staber, to encapsulate the increasing interactions within, and the developing embeddedness of, institutions – especially in relation to project networks.

which both the network is constituted as a social system (or interorganizational field) and the individuals are constituted as managers.

> *"Reflexive network development focuses, first of all, on the structuration of the enduring set of interrelations among network participants and, secondly, on the recursive interplay of these relations with the organizations and organizational fields"*
>
> Sydow and Windeler (2003:p183).

As highlighted in earlier discussions, these structuration perspectives are significant modifications to the original 'brute social fact' roots of institutional theory, and perhaps begin to make the institutional metaphor more flexible and useful and the role of interpretive agency more explicit.

In addition to the interactional and practice-related aspects of networks, the preceding discussion has highlighted the potential spatial aspect of networks. Lazerson and Lorenzoni (1999) have emphasised this in their discussion of industrial districts in Italy, although (as Sydow and Staber (2002) would agree) these spatial limits are not necessarily absolute; 'closed communities' would suffer from the lack of diversity which results from *purely* strong-tie networks, and would not therefore have endured and developed. They suggest that external or outward looking firms provide the 'weak ties' to the other communities which are necessary for keeping in touch with developments and remaining innovative[6]; this has overlaps with Staropoli's (1998)

[6] 'Strong' and 'weak' ties are discussed in detail a little later in this chapter.

discussion of networks in the pharmaceutical industry and Boari and Lipparini's (1999) consideration of industrial districts.

Networks and other forms of collaborative structure

This seems to be an appropriate point to say a little more about what might be meant by the term network. Powell (1990) suggests that network forms are best described as a form of 'collective action', which are better at accommodating know-how, dealing with uncertainty and supporting cooperative norms as a basis for trust. This emphasis on relationships and an acknowledgement of flexibility and open-endedness moves the discussion further away from a constraining conceptualization of institutions.

Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) add to this argument by developing a number of propositions related to the inter-relatedness of institutionalization and collaboration, based upon a structuration perspective, and a definition of collaboration which overlaps with Powell (1990) in excluding market and hierarchically organized structures. The central premise is that collaborations draw upon various resources (of a discursive nature – such as rules, accepted practices, definitions...) from their 'institutional fields' and in doing so reproduce these resources within their existing source institutional fields, translate them into new fields or create new resources which re-shape institutions. This translation and creation of resources seems to give a central role to interpretive agency, which is surely vested in individuals and not in 'the collaboration' – although cultural connections and conflicts about meanings might be expected to be in play in such situations (Alvesson, 2002).

Geppert and Clark (2003) similarly describe, in an international context, processes of preservation and disruption of institutions that can occur in collaborative settings. Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) go further to argue that the extent to which institutions define the context for collaborations is dependent upon the shaping of the problem definition, selecting and excluding members and the kinds of practices that are considered legitimate in addressing the issue. It could be plausible to see the processes in which rules / practices / resources are being reproduced, created or translated as *traditions* (or at least as potential evidence for their existence) in connection with interactions and transformative possibilities from the interplay of different cultural elements. These points are expanded upon later in the chapter.

The consideration of network forms of collaboration and organization necessarily connects with the discussion of *social* networks since Granovetter (1985) describes economic action as embedded within a network of social relations, in an ongoing recursive process shaping *both* individuals and institutions – avoiding, an 'oversocialized' perspective that sees individuals as completely governed by institutions. This suggests that the influence of the *historical* and *structural* embeddedness of such social relations can be considered, without completely marginalising the potential impact of specific individuals and the *current* patterns of social relations; the opportunities for action are not closed.

Despite this apparent potential for openness and action, Burby (2003) highlights the risks of network closure, exemplified by the "iron triangle" of local government, business interests and neighbourhood groups which were often the only stakeholders

consistently involved in the planning processes he researched. Closure of collaborative forms of organization reaches its logical extreme in the case of mergers (Kitchener, 2002). Kitchener's work is relevant to collaboration in two ways. Firstly, the professional institutions are related to communities of practice which go beyond the boundaries of organizations. In effect changes to organizations which incorporate professions are arguably effected in the context of the interorganizational field rather than just in relation to the members of a single body corporate. Secondly, Kitchener suggests that the 'sedimenting' of managerialist logics upon existing professional institutional logics is said to result in unstable orders that do not endure – perhaps raising issues of cultural incompatibility.

The deliberate consideration of culture: structural choices

Issues of cultural compatibility may therefore influence structural choices or outcomes. Structures of collaboration may be thought of as relatively goal-defined *partnership forms*, or broader, enabling or capacity building *network forms*. Examples of the partnership form range from project focussed collaborations with a small number of contributing organizations (Hennestad, 1998), to large international research consortia (Mothe and Quélin, 2000). Examples of network forms include communities of practice and best practice networks, as described by Rosenkopf, Metiu and George (2001), Hartley and Allison (2002) and Breu and Hemingway (2002).

The choices that are made about the kind of structure that may be appropriate to the particular collaboration's objectives also implicitly introduce variations in the types

of connections between actors that are developed and utilised; that is, Granovetter's (1982) conception of strong and weak *ties*. Goal-defined partnership forms are most reliant upon a relatively small number of *strong ties* (Reagans and McEvily, 2003) within a narrow group of actors to facilitate action, whatever the size of the *total* group may be (Elliot and Homan, 1999). Broader, capacity building or innovative goals are argued to be more likely to also involve *weak ties*, bridging communities and integrating diverse resources (Lazerson and Lorenzoni, 1999; Assimakopoulos and Macdonald, 2003). It seems that these possibilities for interorganizational structure are related to issues of diversity and culture (Lunnan and Kvålshaugen, 1999) that were discussed earlier in the chapter; essentially these are matters that cannot be considered separately.

The implicit interplay between structures and culture: norms and values

The discussion of institutions and structures has proceeded inexorably towards alternative descriptive approaches – and perhaps more useful explanatory ones – by beginning to engage with concepts related to interpretive agency and culture. It seems fitting to discuss norms and values at this point, since these have been approached in conceptualizations developed both by institutional and by cultural theorists. This might, perhaps, be one of the key areas of overlap of the two approaches.

For example, in the study of interorganizational collaboration, Chaserant (2003) has suggested how *cooperative norms* can help to suppress 'gain frames' that otherwise might dominate the thinking of participants in cooperative situations and, similarly, Cullen, Johnson and Sakano (2000) have described *norms of reciprocity* as being

important to the development of social capital in alliances. Erridge and Greer (2002) also discuss norms in relation to social capital, but link them to potential sanctions and the role of trust. These theorists have a certain institutional flavour to their work.

However, Garcia-Canal, Valdes-Llaneza and Arino (2003) suggest that supporting trust and norms in larger alliances – across increasingly complex sets of relationships – becomes progressively more difficult. Griffith (2002) in a sense supports this notion of complexity whilst also indicating that it may approach some consensual integration, by suggesting that (inter) organizational cultures are formed from the compounding of the values, norms and beliefs of involved parties. McGuire (2002) also seems to support the possibility of norms becoming an integrative possibility in larger collaborations (in particular, network forms) through facilitating the development of shared values and definitions of roles and operational rules. Similarly Olberding (2002) suggests that norms or traditions of cooperation within a community can be associated with the development or prevalence of partnership forms. In a related vein, Gray (1989) suggests that (national) culturally derived norms can influence the possibilities for successful collaboration. This second group of theorists show that norms and values may be approached with alternative, cultural perspectives rather than institutional approaches.

In judging between the two perspectives, it can be argued that the institutional view of norms as an integrating 'force' is perhaps open to the challenge of being tautologous; indeed, Powell (1990) suggests that network forms *provide* cooperative norms and (a basis for) trust, rather than being supported by them. Similarly a

'controlled' perspective offered by Lampel and Shamsie (2000), who suggest that the 'dominant logic' within General Electric's joint ventures was based on *received* values and a sense of mission, is perhaps also open to challenge in the same way. They suggest that the concept of dominant logic:

> *"...can be used to refer more broadly to a general management logic that can govern decision-making processes throughout the firm by producing a mind-set or world view that can be shared across all of its business units."*
>
> Lampel and Shamsie (2000:pp593-594)

They go on to suggest that this imposition of a 'dominant logic' has a formative role in joint ventures. This perhaps suggests an extreme perspective on the scope for control within a 'single' organizational culture, let alone in the context of collaborations – although Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily (2003) argue that 'clan control' (management by shared values / beliefs / norms, especially in highly uncertain environments) is connected to supporting the role autonomy necessary for effective collaboration.

This tension between determined or determining, institutional or cultural, theoretical positions in relation to norms is further complicated by the fact that empirical studies have characterized the existence of cooperative norms and 'social cohesion' as the existence of network ties (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). However, the linkage of these ties to possibilities of ostracism or reward might swing the debate in favour of networks being determined by, rather than determining, cooperative norms.

Alternatively the possibility of such norms enduring is perhaps metaphorically conceptualized as the development of institutions within an interorganizational field (Sydow and Staber, 2002). In a related point, from a cultural perspective, Clegg et al (2002) discuss the role of values within an alliance culture in their discussion of an interorganizational collaboration to deliver a large public construction project. It seems that the overlap between these institutional and cultural concepts is an ongoing matter for debate.

IDENTITY

If the review of culture and structure has provided some room for debate, it is no less so in the case of notions of identity. In this section identity is discussed, both in the context of organization studies in general and in the more specific contexts of collaboration. It also connects with some related concepts – membership and roles – that have been discussed in the collaboration literature. In reviewing the theme of identity some links to tradition can be suggested, especially in relation to collaborative situations, as the later discussion in this chapter will show.

Identity in the context of organization studies

Many studies which focus on or connect to organizational identity are based on social identity theory – the consideration of in-group/out-group distinctions – and are therefore based on individual perceptions of identity (for example: Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002). Since these perceptions can be related to context and culture (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), it is perhaps unsurprising that self-identity in organizations is seen to be a rather tenuous phenomenon (Alvesson and Wilmott,

2002). Rather than being an enduring characteristic, identity seems to be more of a social process, open both to deliberate control and patterns of interactive interpretation (Hatch and Schultz, 2002).

The interpretations at the heart of the formation of identity perceptions in groups may be thought to be arrived at from 'cold, rational' and/or 'hot, emotional' processes, depending on whether the perceiver is outside or inside the group to which identity notions are ascribed (Fiol and O'Connor, 2002), and the level and legitimacy of the perceiver's observation of, or participation in, identity-constituting practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). *Organizational identity* is perhaps, therefore, even more tenuous than individual identity, which both involves and may be a site of, conflict and disagreement. The very reality of the notion of organizational identity is also an open debate – whether it is a phenomenon in its own right, or a metaphor, or perhaps a description for collections of metaphors in use within particular organizational settings (Vaara, Tienari and Santti, 2003).

Given the apparent volatility and questionability of notions of identity, the question that arises is: how are individuals, organizations or groups of any nature perceived to have *any* consistency of identity over time? This is a question which the study of tradition can inform, as later discussion will seek to show. For the present another layer of complexity and *fluidity* is discussed, through the consideration of identity in the context of collaboration.

Identity in the context of collaboration

As the preceding discussion might lead one to expect, identity is discussed in the collaboration literature in two ways; that is, in the context of individual identities and in the relation to collective identities. There are of course connections between the concepts, as the preceding discussion has suggested; a little more can be said about these connections in the context of collaborative situations.

Notions of collective identities might be discussed in relation to collaborations themselves, but there may also be some referent connection with an established social group or category (Schruijer, 2001). This is exemplified in Salk and Shenkar's (2001) work on individual social identity formation and endurance within an Italian-British international joint venture. Their findings suggested that national social identities were dominant influences in the 'sense making' processes adopted by those involved in the joint venture. The authors also suggest that the enactment of these identities overcame the contextual / environmental factors that might have been expected to promote, over time, the development of more localised team-based identities associated with the IJV. The enduring nature of enactments of these national social identity formation processes, despite changing internal and external contexts in the case they describe, could be suggestive of the influence of traditions – as discussed later in the chapter.

In a similar vein, Lehrer and Asakawa (2003) also based their research in an international context, examining the operation of European R&D centres by Japanese and US multinationals, but connect with individual identity formation processes.

They were particularly concerned with the balance between the embeddedness of the R&D specialists – working in the centres – within either their organizational and occupational communities (or communities of practice) which extended beyond these centres. They focussed upon:

- *Intersecting group affiliations* which form the basis for the construction of individual identity / identities, and
- A *plurality of overlapping subsystems* which constitutes the macrosocial environment within which these identities are deployed in order to deal with the plurality.

Lehrer and Asakawa found that Japanese companies took particular steps to maintain a 'hands off' approach to European R&D operations, in order to ensure that the connections of scientists with their own networks (group affiliations at the local, national and European level) were maintained, as this facilitated both recruitment of suitable staff and the effectiveness of these staff in terms of innovation – the traditions of interaction amongst research communities being important factors in this regard.

Community concepts of identity were similarly important in the work of Fiol and O'Connor (2002), who provide more of a feeling for the collective level of identity. They developed propositions related to change processes in communities; their argument, about the roles of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in collaboratively effecting change, is directly relevant to collaboration. They define collective identity thus:

"Collective identity refers to characteristics that members of a collective feel are central to defining who they are [...] collective identities develop based on the reciprocal relationship between individuals' social identity beliefs (the psychological component) and the social structure (the social interaction component)"

Fiol and O'Connor (2002:p535)

The linking of beliefs and structures will be revisited later in the chapter, however immediate points for discussion are the two fundamental problems which can result in resistance to change in insider/outsider situations, identified in their paper:

- The difference between 'hot', emotionally involved community conceptions of their identity and the "imperfect mirror" (p535) of reputation – which is the outsider's cold, rational conception of the community's identity, based on those aspects which are observable and the most salient in their own frames.
- The relative inertia of communities when instigating change on their own behalf, due to a tendency of communities to preserve their identity.

To have a better chance of achieving radical change, the authors suggest a 'small wins' initiated framework. This involves both the outsiders (facilitators or change agents) and the internal community members, and utilises aspects of both rational planning and 'emotional energy'. The framework described in Fiol and O'Connor's (2002:p540) diagram is:

1) Initiation of a small, externally driven project likely to lead to small – but positive – gains which start to shift insider conceptions.

2) Development of an enlarged project, which involves insiders and gives the outsiders a more appreciative understanding of the community (enhanced reputation).

3) The explicit communication possible from step 2 is backed up by support from the facilitating outsiders, allowing some of the members of the community to develop some new conceptions about their identity through practice (understanding following experience).

4) Promoting the internalization and institutionalization of the new beliefs about the community identity – talk about the changes is encouraged and there are public symbols of support for them – which allows these new, favourable conceptions to add impetus to the change programme.

The processual nature of identity formation is also discussed by Beech and Huxham (2003) in relation to their cycle concept:

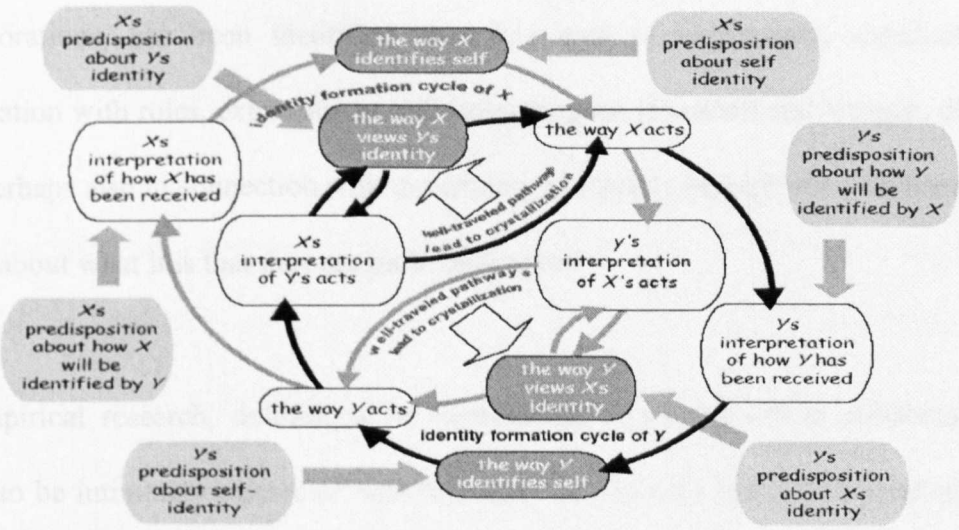

Figure 12: Identity formation

(Beech and Huxham, 2003: p40)

In this model it can be seen that identity perceptions (of self and others) inform the kinds of social practices in which interacting individuals engage; through interpretive feedback loops these patterns may be reinforced or modified. This connects with the influence of tradition in relation to the ways in which the *predispositions* about interpretations evident in the model above can be explained, particularly in relation to the ways in which they endure despite the possibilities of change available in collaborative practice. This is discussed further later in the chapter. For the moment the discussion moves on to consider some related concepts to identity – particularly in the context of collaboration – *membership* and *roles*.[7]

Membership and roles

Decisions about the membership of collaborations may be influenced by the desire for inclusivity with respect to *all* of the stakeholders and providing motivation for their involvement (Gray, 1989). The *nature* of this membership, within collaborations, has been identified as a key area of uncertainty, especially in association with roles, expectations and group purpose (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), and perhaps also in connection with uncertainty in identity perceptions – do members agree about what it is that they are participating in?

In empirical research, definitions of membership and roles within collaborations seem to be intimately connected with the kinds of practices that are undertaken and the kinds of 'texts' developed in such situations, rather than firm notions of identity

[7] These connect with particular and influential identity concepts that exist within and beyond the limits of collaborative situations. Membership as a concept is also directly connected to the in-group/out-group notions of social identity theories, although I am not following that particular line here.

(although, as earlier argument has suggested, practices are connected to notions of legitimate identity – Lave and Wenger, 1991). For example, the link to practices is expressed by Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily (2003) who define roles as a set of recurrent tasks and behaviours, whose emergence (through 'role taking' and 'role making') is effected in communication. Whilst roles have aspects that are emergent or negotiated in character (Poncelet, 2001)[8], they may also be influenced by the power of external agencies (Assimokopoulos and Macdonald, 2003).

It seems important to say a little more about what roles in collaborations actually *are*. They have been characterised, for example in terms of:

- Autonomy – related to the power relationships, experience and organizational culture associated with the role holder (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily, 2003).
- Differentiation in terms of process or content (particularly with regard to facilitation) (Schumann, 1996).
- Sources of diversity (Poncelet, 2001).
- Necessary competencies (Williams, 2002).

Williams identifies a particularly important role – the *boundary spanner* – in which specific competencies are required, in order to facilitate the collaboration of a typically diverse set of autonomous individuals. The specific competencies are:

- The ability to build and sustain relationships.
- Managing through influence.
- Dealing with complexity.

[8] Also Williams (2002) sees collaborations as negotiated 'postmodern' forms of organization, within

- Balancing roles and accountabilities (particularly with respect to their *own* role).
- Providing motivation.

– although it might be argued that these reflect management challenges in general, rather than any specific role demands in relation to collaboration.

The discussion now returns to the consideration of a more generic level of collaborative role – that of the 'ordinary' member. As was the case with the consideration of more specific roles, membership development has been described in internal, emergent terms (Lawrence, 2004) and as a consequence of externally defined pre-requisites (Assimokopoulos and Macdonald, 2003) – perhaps echoing the internal and external elements of identity work and identity regulation suggested by Alvesson and Wilmott (2002). Lawrence's (2004) discussion of membership change strategies seems to focus on the regulative aspect, with an institutional focus. Figure 13 shows his suggested cyclical process for the development of membership rules:

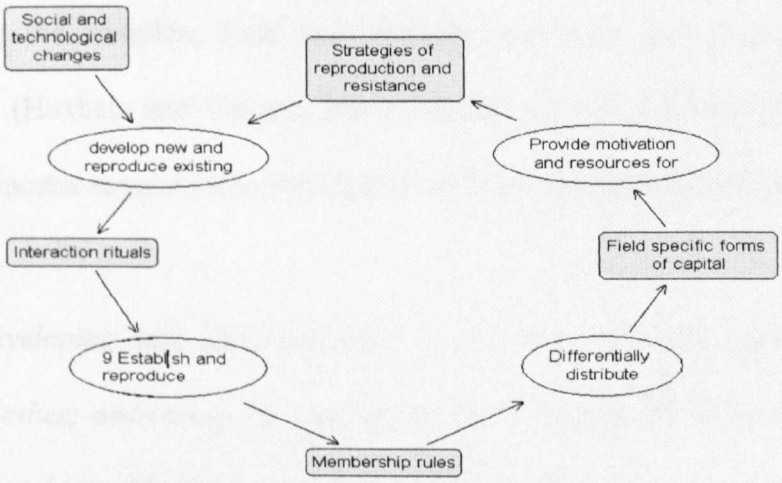

Figure 13: Membership rules and change strategies

(Lawrence, 2004: p122)

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which balancing roles and accountabilities is one of the key competencies.

Lawrence's model, developed to address issues relating to individuals and agency in discussions of the membership in 'professional fields' resonates with the connections to the discussion of institutions and structures presented earlier – suggesting a link between structures and identity.

Another aspect of Lawrence's work that connects with earlier parts of the discussion is that he suggests that "...the interaction rituals that govern membership vary significantly in terms of the degree to which they are formalized and taken for granted" (p119) . This connects with the notion of explicit, institutionalised rules and tacit authority in the discussion of tradition – and expresses the essential incompleteness, and scope for interpretation that is a characteristic of tradition, that was touched on earlier.

Lawrence's work also has overlaps with Poncelet (2001) in expressing the interactive, emergent and communicative nature of constructions of membership and in describing the complex, fluid, and dynamic nature of such constructions in collaboration (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily, 2003). In particular, Poncelet suggests that participation within a collaboration involves –

> *"...developing new understandings of the issues at stake, themselves and each other; embracing new group processes, especially in the form of new relationships with others; and adopting new practices..."*
>
> (Poncelet, 2004:p274)

– but also that transformation is not necessarily inevitable or consistent. This fluid and complex construction of membership in connection with particular relationships, perceptions and practices links neatly back to the notions of identity at the start of this section of the discussion. This therefore seems to be a suitable point to conclude this section, with the suggestion that issues of identity, role and membership might be expected to be strongly inter-related – if not coterminous – in the context of collaboration.

KNOWLEDGE

As with preceding themes, this section largely focuses on literature related to collaboration, but also touches upon broader material, where necessary, from organizational and other contexts. The degree of extension into broader literatures is perhaps a little less broad in this case, as many of the main issues have been extensively treated within the collaboration literature. The section is composed of three parts:

- *Knowledge and learning in collaboration*, which discussed the broad area of relevant interorganizational literature.
- *Knowledge characteristics – explicit and tacit;* this is an important theme in the interorganizational literature but also connects knowledge with the discussion of other themes in this chapter, including tradition.
- *Understanding and experience – of learning, of the field, of collaboration*; similarly, this is of relevance in the interorganizational literature on knowledge and learning, but also provides important links to the topic of tradition.

Knowledge and learning in collaboration

Many authors in the interorganizational domain deal with knowledge in the context of interorganizational learning – often knowledge is presented as a kind of 'outcome' or 'product' of collaboration. For example, Ingram's (2002:p642) definition of interorganizational learning highlights the kinds of learning possibilities which might be evidenced in practice: "Interorganizational learning occurs when one organization causes a change in the capacities of another, whether through experience sharing, or by somehow stimulating innovation". Interestingly Ingram's (2002) definition suggests that knowledge might be developed in collaboration through both planned learning and unplanned, emergent processes. This reflects strands in the literature which report both cases; those in which knowledge arose from planned learning and those in which unplanned or uncontrollable learning outcomes occurred (Norman, 2001; Nooteboom, 1999; Assimakopoulos and Macdonald, 2003).

A common classification of these outcomes, looking across the literature, is into the categories of '*knowledge transfer*' and '*knowledge creation*'. Knowledge transfer outcomes have been classified as unidirectional, bidirectional, or more complex multidirectional flows (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence, 2003). These different classes of flow may be connected to competitive or collaborative learning intentions (Spekman, Isabella and McAvoy, 2000). In particular, knowledge transfer outcomes of a unidirectional nature have been linked to competitive learning behaviours in which one partner seeks to take knowledge from another whilst limiting reciprocation (Ingram, 2002). Such outcomes arise at the *organizational* level, for example through deliberate acquisition of knowledge by one organization from another or 'spillover'

(Mothe and Quélin, 2000). Broader bidirectional and multidirectional knowledge transfer outcomes may occur not only at the *organizational* level but also at the *interorganizational* level; for example, network participants learning new ways to interact and structure collaborations (Benson-Rea and Wilson, 2003) and the improved performance of collaborative entities (Zollo, Reuer and Singh, 2002).

The different knowledge transfer outcomes discussed above reflect approaches based upon organizations learning *from* each other (Bergquist, Betwee and Meuel, 1995). There is another mode to consider – organizations learning *with* each other. In the context of the collaborative entity this is effectively *knowledge creation*, either by innovative re-configuration or by exploring broader cultural connections to import knowledge that is new to all of the collaborators. Knowledge creation is of course an important outcome for collaborations (Mothe and Quélin, 2000) and organizational communities (Lazerson and Lorenzoni, 1999), but it is not argued that creation is an *alternative* outcome to transfer. Rather it is suggested that aspects of each may be entailed in the other; multidirectional knowledge flows in particular have been connected with knowledge creation (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence (2003). For example, it has been suggested that learning outcomes for individuals can be significant in complex partnerships – particularly in terms of developing competencies for dealing with ambiguity and complexity (Elliot and Homan, 1999) or in crossing paradigms to develop capabilities for collaboration (Reason, 1999). Thus even at an individual level, given suitable structures and motives, aspects of transfer *and* creation of knowledge in interorganizational settings are both suggested.

Participants *may* have definite attitudes to learning related to participation in a collaboration – to allow knowledge to be taken from or shared with partners, or to develop that allow some kind of innovative transformation of it. A 'spectrum' of sharing is suggested in the literature, ranging across the following kinds of intention:

- To 'selfishly' acquire knowledge exclusively for the participant's own organization, thus *exploiting* a partner.
- To share knowledge with specific organizational partners, in a relatively controlled fashion, thus *exchanging* with a partner.
- To share knowledge in a broad, open *manner amongst a range of partners, thus exploring* innovative solutions to problems-at-hand collaboratively.

These distinctions have been indicated in the work of a wide range of authors, for example Oliver (2001), Schuler (2001, Lunnan and Kvålshaugen (1999), Faulkner and de Rond (2000); Yan and Child (2002). There is also a fourth kind of stance that is worthy of discussion:

- To *exclude* or sideline the consideration of learning: either implicitly, because the collaborative agenda is focussed elsewhere; or explicitly, because it is regarded as unimportant.

As Beamish and Berdrow (2003) have suggested, a lack of consideration of learning as an aim does not preclude the emergence of learning outcomes.

Having described the ways in which knowledge is potentially obtained or developed in collaboration, there is a need to consider the possible determinants of these processes. Five groups of characteristics of collaborative situations emerge from the

literature as having a bearing on knowledge outcomes, although the boundaries between the categories are blurred:

- Partner complexity – diversity, culture (e.g. Milliman, Taylor and Czaplewski, 2002; Faulkner and de Rond, 2001).
- Structural characteristics – network and / or partnership forms (e.g. Hennestad, 1998; Hartley and Allison, 2002).
- Management style / stance – participative or controlling (e.g. Tsang, 2002; Bouwen, 2003).
- Knowledge characteristics – explicit and tacit (e.g. Polanyi, 1966; Ingram, 2002).
- Understanding and experience – learning, the field of enquiry, collaboration (e.g. Alter and Hage, 1993; Inkpen, 2000; Lehrer and Asakawa, 2003).

These characteristics provide links to much of the discussion in this chapter and help to underpin the importance of knowledge and knowing in relation to the collection of concepts that inform our understanding of tradition; this will be made much clearer in the concluding part of this chapter. Some of the specific elements listed above have been addressed earlier, in the sections dealing with culture and structures, and links to tradition have been elaborated in those sections. However, the final two elements itemised above – knowledge characteristics and understanding – also have an important bearing on theories of tradition and therefore merit further discussion here.

Knowledge characteristics – explicit and tacit

Polanyi (1966) has argued that there is an irreducible tacit component to all knowledge (see also Nooteboom, 1999); but for interorganizational contexts a key distinction is whether the tacit elements are likely to be common to the participants,

such as a shared national or technical languages (Chikudate, 1999) or involve more problematic inter-disciplinary discourses (Jevnaker, 1998). Where learning is a deliberate intention in collaborations, therefore, I suggest that the *nature* of the knowledge involved is a relevant matter.

If the interorganizational situation is intended to maximize the facilitation of tacit knowing, then it has been suggested that mechanisms such as loose social relationships (Ingram, 2002) or informal interactions (Powell, 1998) will need to be enabled – requiring a negotiated stance to interaction (Geppert and Clark, 2003). The nature of the knowledge in play will relate not just to the substantive aims of the collaboration, but also to the knowledge of people and processes necessary to conduct the collaboration (Hibbert and Huxham, 2005) – which may involve encountering different traditions, cultures and notions of identity, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

Understanding and experience – of learning, of the field, of collaboration

It has been suggested that collaborative knowledge sharing – especially where creativity and tacit knowing are important – is best supported by 'people centred processes', such as staff transfers and relationship developments (Almeida, Song and Grant, 2002) whereas competitive approaches, focussed upon explicit transfers (acquisitions) of knowledge are related to the abilities of the acquiring organization (Inkpen, 2000).

The work of a number of authors allows me to suggest that the whole spectrum of possibilities for the sharing or acquisition of knowledge is dependent upon capacities for *understanding.* (Cohen and Levinthal's (1990) notion of 'absorptive capacity' is one such capacity.) These are based upon the prior experience of the organizations (or individuals within them); Lave and Wenger suggest that *"understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed they are mutually constitutive"* (1991: p51-52). In the interorganizational setting in particular, the literature suggests the three types of experience are important bases underlying capacity for understanding:

- Experience of learning (Alter and Hage, 1993);
- Experience of the relevant knowledge domain(s) (Inkpen, 2000);
- Experience of collaboration (Lehrer and Asakawa, 2003; Khanna, Gulati and Nohria, 1998).

The relationship of experience and understanding also connects with the discussion of tradition and its focus on the temporal dimension, developed in this chapter. As Shils (1981) has suggested, tradition is not just associated with 'traditional knowledge' but with the development and reception of rational or scientific knowledge within a particular community. Before concluding this section, therefore, it is important to acknowledge that "knowledge" itself is a rather broad and problematic term (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003); it may be related to understanding, insight, skills, expertise and so on, and can be considered to have both personal and collective aspects (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2002). Also, since knowing is socially constructed in practice (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Berends, Boersma & Weggeman,

2003) the notions of 'transferring', 'acquiring' or 'sharing' knowledge in the preceding discussion should therefore be regarded as discursive shorthand.

To conclude this section, I suggest that knowledge (or more particularly, perhaps, knowing) is an area which seems to be intimately connected to the central focus of this study – tradition – since both connect strongly with matters of interpretation and understanding.

INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATION

Having reviewed the connected themes of culture, structure, identity, and knowledge and identified points of connection with the theme of tradition, it is now possible to make these connections more explicit – and thereby develop a richer understanding of tradition itself. The exploration of these connections begins with the link to discussions of structure below.

Tradition, structures and domination

Weber's (1978) definition, presented earlier, suggests that tradition has areas of action to which it does not relate, and areas in which its authority is felt. Where the authority of tradition is felt, it is the basis of the salience (Boyer, 1990) of structures which in their explication help to define identities, power relations and other social contextual elements (West Turner, 1997) – in particular, it gives enduring meaning to institutions (Molotch, Freudenburg and Paulsen, 2000); tradition has for this reason been described as the reproductive mechanism of societies (West Turner, 1997). This 'mechanism' can be seen as an alternative to the various processes of reproduction of

institutions presented within institutional theory, but it perhaps has some overlaps with the cultural/cognitive mechanism offered there (Scott, 2001).

Going further, tradition has also been discussed as a repetitive form which *employs* institutions as 'carrier media' (Gross, 1992); it therefore has some overlaps with Bourdieu's (1977) conception of the *habitus* – which effectively sees individuals as carriers for a set of enduring class-defining predispositions – and with Giddens' (1984) structuration perspective. However it is suggested that while the hierarchy is arguably open to inversion, allowing tradition to be proposed, from an institutionalist or structurationist perspective as a particular type of institution or structure, it is more *usefully* considered as the higher-level concept, which employs the metaphor of institutions in its reproduction.

The focus upon an agent's (reflexive relationship to their) identity, the association with a particular, authoritative mode of reasoning, and the centrality of interpretation – and therefore the essential *incompleteness* of the authority of tradition – makes it significantly different from a classical conception of institutions (Scott, 2001). For this reason it is argued that tradition provides a useful explanation of both the reproduction and adaptation of institutions (Shils, 1981), rather than the contrary position. The focus on interpretation also separates tradition from the concept of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) touched on earlier, which is a rather deterministic model of a self-perpetuating system, with little space for meaningful individual agency. Gross (1992) makes some interesting points in relation to interpretation and institutions:

"...no tradition is ever taken precisely as it was given, or passed on precisely as it was received. Rather, it is always adapted to a situation"

Gross, (1992:p14)

"... traditions can also be distorted through too much institutional interference [...] if they are preserved only artificially then [...] technical knowledge about tradition becomes a substitute for tradition itself"

Gross, (1992:p18)

The kind of reasoning that is associated with or evidential of tradition is *not*, therefore, a *fully* rational, calculative process based upon technical knowledge, as has been discussed in various ways throughout this treatment. This means that there is a risk inherent in tradition that is *not* questioned and re-interpreted. At the limit as *fundamentalism*, it can become tradition defended on purely traditional grounds, by which it becomes:

"...an unreflective or unconsidered Weltanschauung (world view). Tradition, in this sense, consists in not being aware that how one believes or behaves is 'traditional', because alternative ways of thinking or living are simply not taken into consideration."

Ruthven (2004:p16)

Although, therefore, it is argued that tradition *can* be a rather dominant influence upon interpretations, it is itself subject to interpretation; these two modes are discussed further here. Firstly, tradition provides the internalised aspect of authority – prejudgements (McCarthy, 1994; Gadamer, 1998) and habits of understanding that

are difficult to explicate without losing their value. Secondly, there are explicable elements that are open to description (and therefore to *redescription* and challenge). Friedrich (1972) expresses this point rather nicely:

> *"It is in words that tradition and authority are rooted; reasoning which is at their core presupposes the sanctity of language [...] Tradition, when seen in this perspective, is a very fragile thing, even though powerful. A tradition is quickly destroyed and hard to rebuild [...] Tradition, once lost, cannot be recaptured. A new tradition has to be developed to take its place. Often it is the old tradition in new garb, but the garb makes all the difference. For the garbs of tradition are the words in which it is expressed"*
>
> Friedrich (1972:p114)

Tradition and identity

The preceding section briefly touched upon issues of agency and the agent's reflexive notions of identity in relationship to tradition; there is more that can be said about this relationship. There seem to be certain aspects of tradition which are about our knowledge of ourselves, rather than about the world (if the two can be considered separately). As Shils (1981) suggests, the individual sees herself as a consistent identity over time, rooted in particular past experiences and traditional definitions (e.g. religion, nation, profession...). Individuals are not necessarily aware of the changes in self as they occur, and their 'sense of present' is effectively related to some variable part of the past. There is an argument, therefore, that this sense of identity is rooted in memory, but that this need not be limited to personal memory;

events of / from traditions may be communicated by, for example, parents, associates and others and in this way the sense of the past extends beyond the life of the individual and is rooted in conceptions of community (Clifford, 2004; Phillips, 2004). Such identity conceptions may operate at multiple shared levels and be open to challenge and adaptation (Schochet 2004).

Traditional knowledge and knowledge of tradition

The preceding section has suggested that identity conceptions supported by tradition may be open to challenge, and the earlier discussion of tradition and structure outlined the fragility of traditions in relation to their expression. Both of these points, however, lead to a question; the degree to which aspects of a tradition *can* be explicated, perhaps being described in terms of structures or discernible social features. However, I suggest that the most important point is that as far as this *is* possible, the authority of tradition(s) as a basis for *unquestioned* modes of theorising is undermined. In particular, the explication and opening up of tradition to interpretation is discussed by Ricoeur (1981):

> *"Hermeneutics similarly begins when, not content to belong to transmitted tradition, we interrupt the relation of belonging in order to signify it"*
>
> Ricoeur (1981:pp116-117)

However, attempts to *fully* explicate and critically examine tradition's *tacit* element can result in the destruction of its meaning:

"...unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters. Scrutinize closely the particulars of a comprehensive entity and their meaning is effaced, our conception of the entity is destroyed."

Polanyi (1966:p18)

It can also be argued that the explication of the truly tacit may not be feasible, including the tacit component of tradition (McKeon, 2004; Schochet, 2004). Perhaps, therefore, the role of tradition is perhaps as a way of *knowing*, having an *irreducible* tacit element associated with its persistence and *explicable* elements which admit adaptation. To quote Gadamer (1998):

"Verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience. If every language is a view of the world, it is so not primarily because it is a particular type of language (in the way that linguists view language) but because of what is said or handed down in this language"

Gadamer (1998:p441)

The exploration of the tacit component of tradition and the earlier relationship to structural concerns begins to suggest the first steps in a developing conceptualization. As already argued, tradition is embodied in the individual agent as tacit, inexplicable elements and as explicit elements. These are derived from events which may be wholly external to the agent, or internal interpretive events (a 'realization') in relation to the agent's engagement in the social context. The resultant authority, the internalised 'truth' of the past, becomes an intrinsic aspect of the agent's identity and

is manifested in explicable structures, which constrain and enable agents in interaction, allowing – through interaction with other traditions (Gadamer's (1998) *fusion of horizons*) – the possibility of change.

The interaction of traditions in the cultures of collaboration

The possibility of the adaptation of traditions through interactions with others has been reinforced by Shils (1981). These interactions might take place in many ways, since tradition has been described as having relevance at a wide range of levels of study, from departments within organizations to entire societies (Molotch, Freudenburg and Paulsen, 2000; Shils, 1981; Schochet, 2004); it therefore has an interesting role to play in the analysis of the problems of interorganizational collaboration. In particular interacting organizations (or individuals) may have conflicting traditions (Poggio, 2002; Couzens-Hoy, 1994); evidence of differences at an explicit level may signify intractable differences at a tacit level. Alternatively, apparent similarity of structures at an explicit level may mask fundamental differences in traditions. This is evident, for example, in Chikudate's (1999) research on a Japanese corporation developing partnerships with Western scientific institutions; the selection of individuals with advanced English language skills and Western business training did not help negotiations, but allowing senior scientists to interface directly was successful. Chikudate ascribes this not to problems with scientific language but to patterns of respect and communication amongst scientists; similarly the tradition of networking / network spanning amongst scientists is also discussed by Staropoli (1998).

In a broader context, Lampel and Shamsie's (2000) discussion of 'dominant logic' affecting the design of joint ventures has parallels with the role of authority in defining the structures of joint ventures with General Electric – they discuss 'dominant logic' as "restricting interpretive freedom" (p602); there are parallels here with the effects of dominant national social identities described by Salk and Shenkar (2001). Similarly, Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) refer to the role of unquestioned traditions (with other factors) in supporting institutional power and Sydow and Staber (2002) link institutions, traditions and tacit knowledge in explaining the uniqueness of certain networks.

Overall, it can be suggested that tradition is a mechanism – operating in the context of individual and community levels of interpretation – that produces and reproduces elements of identity, knowledge, social structures and guides the maintenance of material artefacts (Shils, 1981). It can therefore be seen as the diachronic seed-line that supports the continual synchronic flowering of culture.

This anchoring of culture in tradition (Alvesson, 2002) and its own openness to interpretation suggests, however, that we should see the two as being mutually informed domains, which seem to intersect around certain social realities which they connect across either time and space, as figure 14 suggests.

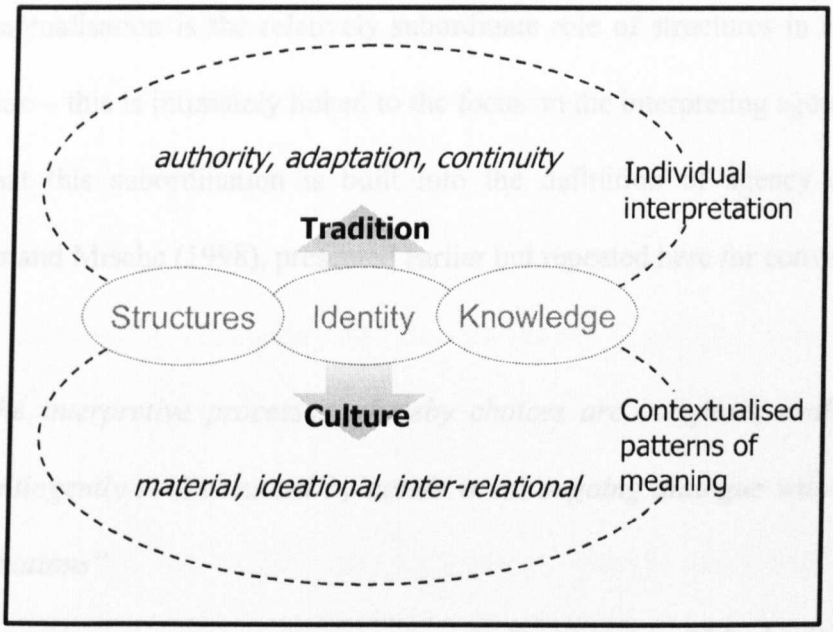

Figure 14: The inter-relationship of tradition and culture

In figure 14, all of the boundaries should be considered as 'permeable' or fuzzy. Of the two most important elements, the first is the suggestion that the authority of understanding provided by tradition, together with the capacity for adaptation (through reflection or inter-relational / inter-cultural contact) provides for continuity through time, and is most strongly vested in the individual. However – and secondly – it is suggested that at no time is the diachronic function of tradition divorced from synchronic function of culture(s), through interaction with objects, persons or (textual/symbolic) concepts. This is necessarily the case because, if knowledge, identity and social structures are mutually constituted, recognised by individuals and groups *and* persist (to whatever degree) through time, *both* the traditional and the cultural dimensions *must* obtain. The individual then draws upon these inter-related knowledge, identity and structural resources as they interpret the tradition from the past to the future (Shils, 1981; Clifford, 2004). An interesting and debatable point in

this conceptualisation is the relatively subordinate role of structures in comparison with culture – this is intimately linked to the focus on the interpreting agent. It can be argued that this subordination is built into the definition of agency offered by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), presented earlier but repeated here for convenience:

> *"the interpretive processes whereby choices are imagined, evaluated and contingently reconstructed by actors in an ongoing dialogue with unfolding situations"*
>
> Emirbayer and Mische (1998:p966)

Conceptual hooks

This literature exploration has helped to provide a contextualised understanding of the role and nature of tradition – and how it pertains to collaboration. It also suggests some 'conceptual hooks' for beginning to engage with the empirical data collected for the present study. Reviewing the main elements of the discussion of tradition set out earlier, it can be suggested that scanning sources of data for evidence of the following might be a useful way to begin to engage with it:

- Continuity of practices, reasoning or values from the past, especially despite changing circumstances (the continuity of tradition in figure 14).
- Conflicts or difficulties associated with (perceptions of) identity – and differences amongst identities (the traditional / cultural constitution of identity suggested in figure 14).

- Implicit structural power relations, for example evidenced in unchallenged instances of 'domination' (connected to tradition's internalised, authoritative support for structures, suggested in figure 14).
- Traces of the authority of tradition in the *apparent* ways in which participants construed events (connected to the traditional / cultural construction of knowledge, as suggested in figure 14).

It should be emphasised that these kinds of questions that are posed of the data are very much seen as a way of facilitating engagement with the data ("knocking at the text"; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p98-99); that is, they operate collectively as a focussing lens rather than an excluding set of filters. For that reason they are deliberately phrased in general terms, to allow a broad field of view through the theoretical lens. The picture that is seen through such a lens is painted in the following chapter.