EMAIL AND THE SUBVERSION OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Email and the Subversion of Organisational Culture

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Email is, in the early part of the 21st century, an integral part of organisational life. Its centrality has resulted in it being more than a mere organisational process. Rather, email represents a vehicle by which organisational culture develops. Using concepts of "email communities" and "insider-outsider social habitus" statuses, this phenomenon is explored through evocative ethnography and is found to be both benign and malign. Issues of alternative hierarchies, bullying, inclusion and exclusion emerge. These issues are characterised by a lack of awareness of the effects of their actions on the part of protagonists. Because the protagonists' actions are not usually deliberate, those suffering the effects doubt the validity of their experiences and feelings. From the organisational perspective, official notions of organisational culture and organisational values are compromised or even rendered irrelevant. This in turn compromises the honesty and integrity of organisations in respect of the ways in which they present themselves to their employees and the outside world. Organisations, however, are largely unaware of these effects as the insider-outsider social habitus concept does not engage with the structural culture-as-an-entity understanding favoured by organisations. Remedies, examined within the compass of organisational learning and knowledge management are explored, with a need for remedies within both concepts being found to be necessary, together with a need for emotional intelligence.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Whilst much research has been done into organisational culture and organisational learning, little has been done on the specific role of email within these areas. What research has been done into email has largely been from a technical/IT oriented (Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000: 279) or functional/management oriented (Spence 2002: 49-50, Stokely 2007: 2) perspective. In light of this, the combining of cultural and learning perspectives in the study of organisational email appears to offer the intellectual purpose of making new discoveries and developing new insights. Located within the organisational culture and organisational learning academic debates, the contribution of this research may be summarised as examining the conflict that exists between the culture concepts of organisations and email communities and identifying the effects that email-facilitated culture can have, and by intersecting with existing literature, developing "learning mechanisms within a learning culture" involving emotional intelligence as a possible means of ameliorating the discovered subversion of organisational culture by email.

In order to study email within a cultural and learning perspective, a problem had to be formulated, a conceptual framework developed and a methodology determined.

The problem

For the purposes of this research, the problem is encapsulated in the following research question.

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is a picture of what is going on in the area studied (Maxwell 1996: 25 and 37). Within this picture the ideas of the area to be studied can be systematically arranged (Weaver-Hart 1988: 11) and the goals of the research can be linked to the problem to be investigated, the research design, the literature reviewed and its relevance, the choice of methodology and the analysis of data gathered (Smyth 2004: 168). Within the conceptual framework the common language of the research can be gathered (Smyth 2004: 171-172). The conceptual framework may be expressed in matrix form (Smyth 2004: 169-170) or as a diagram (Leshem and Trafford 2007: 98). In this Chapter a diagram is developed which spatially illustrates the concepts which underpin the research in relation to the research problem.

Here is the diagram that represents the basic conceptual framework.
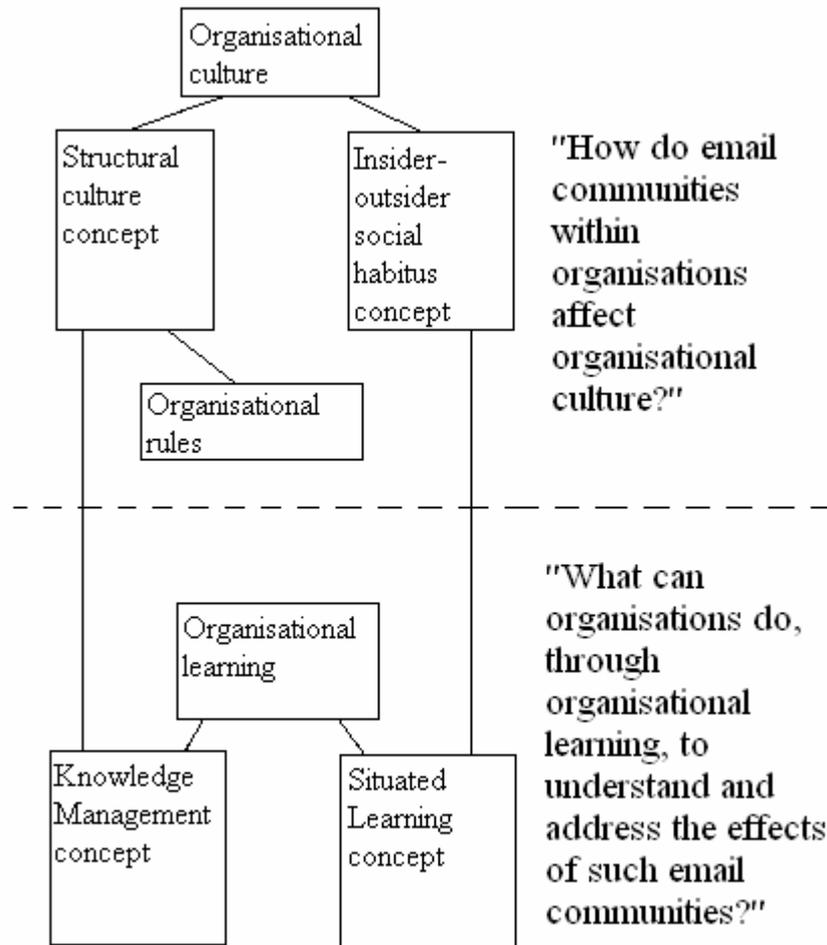
The conceptual framework depicted above shows the two main themes of the research – organisational culture and organisational learning. These themes correspond with the two main themes of the research question expressed under *The problem* above.

Within the "organisational culture" theme are two emergent concepts – the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), from which flow organisational rules, and the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

Within the "organisational learning" theme are two emergent concepts – the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) and the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991). While the knowledge management and situated learning concepts lie within a discrete theme, they can be shown to be conceptually linked to the structural culture (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) concepts respectively.

Meanings within the conceptual framework

For the purposes of the research question and this research generally, the term "email" may be defined as "a computer-based message that can be electronically manipulated, stored, combined with other information and exchanged with other computers" (Turban et al 1999 in Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000: 271). Excluded from this definition are other electronic messaging systems such as instant messaging because, whilst technically similar, their more group-based dynamics and synchronous mode of operation suggest that their social dynamic will differ. This suggests a possibility for further comparative research. "Email communities" for the purposes of the research question and this research means the groups of people within organisations that, through the medium of email, arise organically, distinct from those created by organisations' official structures and hierarchies. For the purposes of the research question, the term "organisational culture" means, for each organisation, a reified concept of performance-linked mental software (Hofstede 1997, 2001) – the "structural culture" concept – and for each email community, the organically arising behaviours and values that determine acceptance as an insider, or rejection as an outsider as described by Elias – the "insider-outsider social habitus" concept (Elias

1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Emergent from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) are "organisational rules" – the elements concerned with email that are solidified as explicit authorisations and proscriptions by organisational procedure and national legislation.

Organisational learning too is conceptualised in two ways for the purposes of the research question and this research generally. Within "the organisation" it means quantified and commodified learning such as that described by Davenport and Prusak (1998) – the "knowledge management" concept, and in the email community it means the legitimate peripheral participation described by Lave and Wenger (1991) – the "situated learning" concept.

Other concepts arising in the course of the research are indexed in Appendix 1.

Methodology and context of the research

The context for this particular research could have taken many forms, including the hard science of the technical apparatus of email, the liberal art of linguistics of those who make use of the technical apparatus, and everything in between. However, the context of this research has of practical necessity been limited to those areas that are encompassed by the terms "sociology" or "social science", even though the participants' concerns on occasion extended way beyond in several directions.

The methodology for the research is evocative ethnography. This methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Evocative ethnography is concerned with participants' experiences, reflections and emotions. As such, it is deep and

qualitative, offering opportunities for originality and the making of a contribution to knowledge through examining participants' thoughts, reflections and feelings rather than simply recording their experiences. It is primarily for these reasons that this methodology was selected. Secondarily and rather more prosaically, in its seeking of depth rather than breadth, evocative ethnography typically involves a small number of participants. Given the temporal and spatial constraints of the doctoral thesis, this methodology offers the best prospect for a meaningful yet manageable project.

Evocative ethnography also allows participants to find their own way, to include that which is important to them. The only delineation of what is important and what is not – beyond the researcher's unavoidable cultural filter – is the researcher's responsibility to maintain the focus of the research on the topic at hand. This consideration appears as the "Researcher's standpoint" in the final development of the conceptual framework in the *Conclusion* to this Chapter, and is explored in depth in *The researcher's standpoint with regard to the research* below. With this in mind the participants, working within the evocative ethnographic methodology, determined the academic context of the research.

When addressing the first part of the research question, that concerning email and organisational culture, the participants' view as hierarchically located members of organisations was interpreted structurally – involving hierarchy and rules – hence the interpretive background of the research here adopts the structural culture concept of Hofstede (1997, 2001). Their understanding of their experience as members of email groups, however, fell into the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), so here the interpretive

concept of the research is that of Elias (Elias and Scotson 1994). Similarly, when addressing the second part of the research question, that concerning organisational learning, participants' understandings were alternately formal and expansive, so the interpretive background of the research in this respect alternates between the knowledge management concept offered by Davenport and Prusak (1998) and the situated learning concept offered by Lave and Wenger (1991).

About the researcher

My name is David R Freke. I studied as an external student at Leicester University for an MA in Law and Employment Relations (1994-1997) whilst working full-time training Royal Saudi Air Force and Saudi Arabian Airlines personnel in aircraft engineering in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Since 2000 I have worked in legal services, from 2003 to 2011 managing a team of legal proofreaders for Allen & Overy LLP in the City of London, and lately as trainer of legal services people for Allen & Overy in London, Belfast and Chennai. Both my education and career experience inspired my interest in organisational culture and organisational learning, and both led ultimately to the choice of subject matter for this research.

The researcher's standpoint with regard to the research

As mentioned above, the methodology for this research is evocative ethnography. The researcher takes part as participant, as ultimately does the reader. This inclusivity is important for what Christians (1997: 16) refers to as validity in a social context. Validity is also sought through the reflexivity of participants (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 220; Hine 2000: 52) and the use of email as research medium (Orgad 2005: 52-53), however the researcher as author and guide of the research cannot expect validation

without setting out his own context, so that readers as participants may assess the influence of *a priori* assumptions – my researcher habitus (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) – and interpret accordingly. With this in mind I here set out how the research came about, and my personal interest in it. Readers may also like to read the section of Chapter 5 entitled *My story* in this regard.

Readers will not be surprised, in light of my current occupation, to discover that I have a keen and lively interest in the written word and the way in which it is used in both formal and informal contexts. I grew up in the 1970s, when the written word was suffering at the hands of the ubiquitous telephone. Informal letter-writing was increasingly becoming a thing of the past; picking up the telephone was seen as being preferable to putting pen to paper. Most formal communication was conducted through forms and the only real reason for writing a letter was to apply for a job, or give notice of leaving one. People who worked in offices still wrote memoranda, but this was largely reserved for notes covering hard-copy attached documents. Memoranda would otherwise be used only to provide a written record in note form.

In the 1990s the mobile telephone came into common use, which appeared at first to further signal the demise of the written word. By this time the telephone had long developed its own formality; upon picking up the receiver to answer a call, people would typically identify themselves then say "hello", and the caller would then say "hello" and identify themselves. Only once caller and called had established to whom they were speaking and why would they adopt appropriate levels of informality. A regular caller of mine in the early 1990s would, however, begin his call with the

words "Who speaks?" irrespective of whether I as caller had identified myself or not. I wondered what the social significance of this telephonically heretical behaviour was. The rise of the mobile phone, however, instead of putting the last nail in the coffin of the written word, included an add-on facility that allowed subscribers to transmit short written messages – text messages – which facilitated a resurgence of writing as a means of informal communication. People loved text messages. They could reply to them when they wanted and keep them for further consideration. At the same time people in their workplaces and at home were learning how to use the now ubiquitous personal computer. Whether the computer was used for processing data, designing, controlling machinery or simply recording information, chances are it would be using an operating system that enabled messages – email – to be sent and received. Email had the advantage over the text message of being cost-free and not limited as to length. Email further strengthened the resurgence of the written word. Communicating in writing, that which had appeared to be old fashioned in the 1970s, was, by the 1990s (among all but a shrinking minority of the population), the favoured thing to do.

My interest in and curiosity about language inspired me to examine the language people used for text-messaging and email. Email particularly, because it began to develop a set of rules much as did the telephone earlier in the 20th century. Attempts were made to codify these rules but such codification (for example, Shea 1996) offered a kind of etiquette but did not explore the social consequences of the breaking of etiquette (by accident or deliberately) or the consequences for organisational culture of email becoming central to organisational communications. By the beginning of the 21st century I was noticing the power of email to reinforce official

hierarchies within organisations: think, for example, of the way in which senior managers can communicate instantly and directly with every individual within an organisation, rather than entrusting the propagation of information to successive descending levels of managers, supervisors etc through the hierarchy. The problem of "Chinese whispers" diluting and changing the message as it cascades through the hierarchy has been solved. Email, however, because it is available to all those organisational members who need to communicate regularly, allows for the possibility of official hierarchies being weakened or unofficial hierarchies developing. This became very clear to me as I saw individuals using emails (often prefixed "confidential" or "private") to advance their own ends. This could be a disgruntled employee wishing to publicise a grievance; it may be a person who thinks things should be done differently and tries to impose their view through "helpful" advice or "constructive" criticism of those who they perceive to be offenders; or it may be a group of employees innocently circulating jokes or cartoons. Each of these, it seemed to me, offered the possibility for cultural effect within the situations in which they took place.

The effect of email on organisational culture is, however, more than just academically interesting. Organisations need to know about its existence and its outcomes because, as detailed in the Chapters that follow, this effect encompasses important issues such as discrimination and bullying for individuals within organisations, and consequent issues of corporate honesty and authenticity for organisations in their professed values and the image they present to their partners, clients and customers.

My proposition is that email is central and essential to organisational culture. It forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious.

Thus was the inspiration for this research. During its accomplishment many of the people to whom I've spoken have understood exactly what it is all about, and offered their own anecdotes. HR people and managers within my own organisation have expressed interest in learning more about something that may be compromising stated values. Because of this interest and understanding from outside, I have never lost faith in the relevance and potential contribution of the project, no matter how difficult the road to its accomplishment may at times have been.

This outside interest in the contribution of the project – the bringing to light of conflicting conceptualisations of organisational culture between organisations and the email communities that operate within them, and the need to address the resultant subversion through learning mechanisms within a learning culture and emotional intelligence – is, I believe, highly relevant to organisations and their people. This research has real-world applicability. Its intellectual purpose, the drawing together of the organisational culture and organisational learning academic debates in the study of

organisational email, offers new ways of conceptualising email in organisations and hence making new discoveries and achieving new insights.

Outline

The research begins by examining the literature around the research question. As the research question falls into two parts, organisational culture and organisational learning, the literature is reviewed in this order in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Each of these Chapters' *Introduction* shows a conceptual map that indicates the direction the Chapter takes. In the *Conclusion* to Chapter 3 appears a combined conceptual map, illustrating the interpretive backgrounds described briefly above and in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3. The conceptual maps that appear throughout are relatable to the conceptual framework developed in this Chapter.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology in detail, including the academic base and ethical considerations of evocative ethnography and how it is used in this research.

Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the field work of the research and its analysis. This process consisted of the participants writing their "email autobiographies" which are presented in Chapter 5, together with initial researcher analysis. In the *Conclusion* to Chapter 5 the findings so far are summarised with reference to the conceptual map developed in Chapters 2 and 3, which itself is derived from the conceptual framework of this Chapter. From this analysis emerged the first round of "discussion points" – the crystallisation of the concerns expressed in the email autobiographies, and by a similar process the second round of discussion points emerged. These two rounds of discussion points enabled the participants to reflect upon their own concerns and

express their views on the concerns of others, and the researcher to reflect upon the findings that emerged. These two rounds of discussion points and accompanying analysis appear in Chapter 6. In the *Conclusion* to Chapter 6 the findings so far are summarised with further reference to the conceptual map.

Chapter 7 revisits the research question and sets out the findings in summary and "unpacked" forms. The contributions to knowledge of the research and implications for theory and practice arising from the findings are explored reflexively, and opportunities for further research arising from this research are set out.

Conclusion

This introduction has set out the need for the research – examining the conflict that exists between the organisational culture concepts of organisations and email communities and identifying the harm that email-facilitated organisational culture can do – and how it is to be conducted through evocative ethnography. The researcher's standpoint has been explained so that readers can see the background to this research, resulting in the proposition made in this research: that email is central and essential to organisational culture; it forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001); within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift; unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-

changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious. From this standpoint and proposition, readers can form their own views as to its influence.

The conceptual framework has been developed and with the added context of the methodology of this research appears in its final form below.
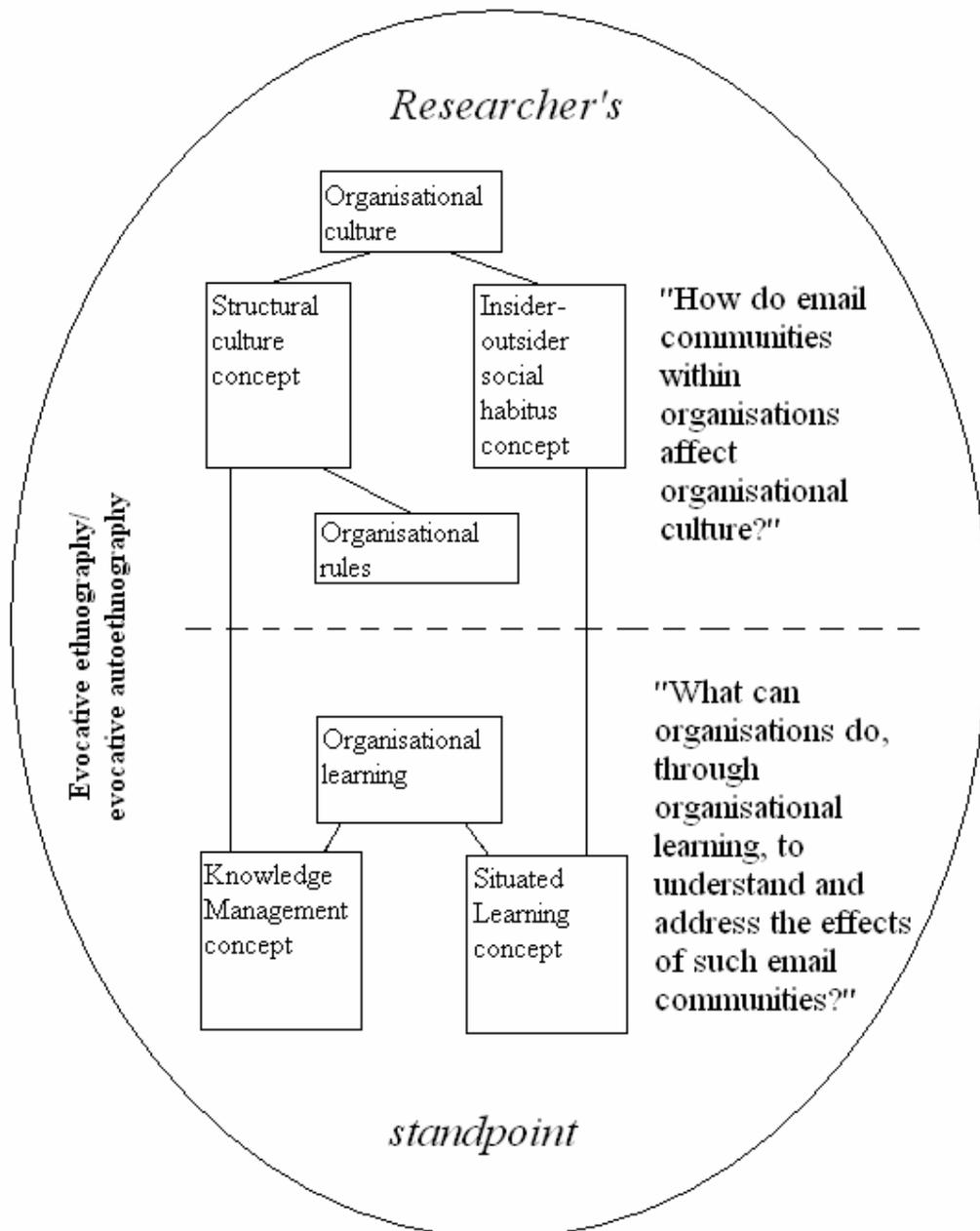
This conceptual framework guides the shape of this research, and forms the basis for the conceptual maps that guide the reader through the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) and the field work and analysis (Chapters 5 and 6).

The primary meanings of the research: "email", "email communities", "organisational culture" and its conceptual divisions "structural" concept and "insider-outsider" social habitus concept, and "organisational learning" and its conceptual divisions "knowledge management" concept and "situated learning" concept, have been introduced. These concepts and meanings, and others arising in the following Chapters, are indexed in Appendix 1.

In any research project the place to start is with the existing literature – a process begun here in the following Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT:

A LITERATURE REVIEW IN RESPECT OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Introduction

Whilst in any ethnographic research it is the concerns of respondents that set the direction the research will take, it does so against a background of previous research embodied in the literature of the topic. From this literature the research can take affirmation or identify contrasts. Significantly it is against the background of previous research that original contributions can be made and areas for further research teased out.

This research sets out to examine "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

The research question set out above falls into two parts, the first of which concerns organisational culture, the second of which concerns organisational learning. The literature around the first part is examined in this Chapter; the literature around the second part is examined in Chapter 3.

The shape of this Chapter is dominated by two concepts. The first, as will be shown, is an organisational culture construct favoured by management practitioners due to its simplicity and utility. This is referred to as the "structural culture" concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) – conceptualised as a "culture construct" of the actors within it. The defining feature of a culture construct – and also its limitation – is its convenience

rather than its ontological validity. The second, as will also be shown, is an "insider-outsider social habitus" concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) more appropriate to research and analysis. Why, however, are two concepts required? The answer lies in the conflict between (a) the culture constructs of the participants in this research and the popularity of those culture constructs in managerialist-defined workplaces – the structural culture concept – and (b) social scientists' ways of understanding and interpretation – the insider-outsider social habitus concept – which guides the proposition set out in *The researcher's standpoint with regard to the research* in Chapter 1 and elsewhere throughout this research. Each concept is considered in separate sections within this Chapter, in each case being introduced as a pure concept before being developed in the contexts of organisational email and the research question.

Emergent from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) are "organisational rules" – the elements concerned with email that are solidified as explicit authorisations and proscriptions by organisational procedure and national legislation. Consideration of organisational rules follows logically from the consideration of the structural culture concept in this Chapter.

Mapped conceptually, this Chapter appears as follows.

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                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │   Introduction   │
                        └──────────────────┘
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The Structural Culture Concept
- The development of the structural culture concept
- Culture as an organisational concept
- Critics of the structural culture concept
- Support for the structural culture concept
- The structural culture concept with respect to email

The Insider-Outsider Social Habitus Concept
- The shortcomings of the structural culture concept
- An analytic, rather than merely utilitarian, alternative "social habitus" concept of "insiders" and "outsiders"
- Support for the insider-outsider social habitus concept
- The insider-outsider social habitus concept with respect to email

Organisational Rules
- Practical guides
- Email activity
- Considerations of privacy

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                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │   Conclusion     │
                        └──────────────────┘
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The conceptual map above derives from the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1. It is within the contexts of these sections that relevant literature was sought, using key-word search criteria as follows:

- *Organisational rules* – disclaimer; email/e-mail; emoticon; flame/flaming; forwardable; group; intranet; netiquette; organisation/organization; privacy; rules; spam

- *The structural culture concept* – behaviour/behavior; joke; culture; email/e-mail; group; hero; Hofstede; nation; network; organisation/organization; rite; ritual; value

- *The insider-outsider social habitus concept* – advantage; behaviour/behavior; blame; conformity; culture; disadvantage; Elias; elite/elitism; email community/communities; exclusion; gossip; group; habitus; inclusion; insider; newcomer; outsider; power; praise; status; story/stories

These key-word search criteria were used singly and in Boolean combinations in electronic resources including ATHENS and those provided by the University of Leicester library.

The stance taken in this research favours the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) because of its philosophical sustainability in social science research and, being concerned with community and communication, its applicability to the subject matter of this research. These reasons are drawn out in the following sections of this Chapter, and fully summarised in the *Conclusion*. It is necessary, however, to include the alternative structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) due to its importance to participants in this research in informing their understanding of organisational culture. Both concepts are, therefore, critical to the conceptual framework of this research.

Here follows a critical review of the existing literature that, within each of these contexts, forms the background in respect of organisational culture to the field work and analysis that follows in Chapters 5 and 6. The volume of the existing literature is such that exhaustive consideration here is impracticable. What follows considers that which is most influential in the research area, as guided by the exigencies of this research. Where the preferences of this author may become manifest is not at the

selection/omission stage, but in the critical review aspect – it is hoped that such preferences are transparent and fully explained. In common with other ethnographic work, however, the research exigencies are set ultimately by the participants.

The structural culture concept

The development of the structural culture concept

Culture as a concept of the characteristics of groups of people emerged from anthropology (Friedman 1994: 67). Bocock (1992: 232-234) traces the development of the culture concept as a sequential series of cultivations and developments: agricultural cultivation; cultivation of the mind (art, civilisation); social development; and cultivation of practices which produce meaning. Bocock's (1992) conceptualisation is linguistically elegant in that it links "cultivation" directly with "culture" and "cultured" in the sense of social and racial hierarchy. The social development stage occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries when such notions were routinely accepted (Bocock 1992: 232). The final cultivation, that concerned with practices that produce meaning, sits more comfortably in the early 21st century, being concerned as it is with signs, symbols and artefacts (Bocock 1992: 233).

In a parallel exposition Friedman (1994) traces by means of a comprehensive literature review the development from its earliest beginnings to the understanding of the concept at the end of the 20th century. The early anthropological conceptualisation consisted of merely the defining characteristics of people, however a process of abstraction followed that facilitated the separation of culture from its demographic/racial base to become something superorganic, reified – a code or script (Boas 1927 in Friedman 1994: 67). Then emerged the "social fact" of collective

behaviour understandable without reference to individual psychology (Durkheim 1982 in Friedman 1994: 67), and the construct of linguistics and arbitrary signs (Saussure 1983 in Friedman 1994: 67). The late 20th century saw the transition from an understanding of culture as a symbolic and cognitive (i.e. an ideational and semantic) construct (Kluckhohn 1951 and Kroeber and Parsons 1958 in Friedman 1994: 68) to one of meaning, symbolism, and cognitive categories – culture as "the publicly accessible text of a people, a symbolic programme inscribed in the time and space of social life and [that people's] true essence" (Geertz 1984 in Friedman 1994: 68-69). Like that of Garfinkel (1967), Geertz's work has been influential in the development of ethnomethodology – this is further explored in Chapter 4.

Friedman (1994) notes a trend towards reification and a pattern whereby an emphasis on here-and-now distinctiveness has been replaced by one of an emphasis on origin and identity. This, he notes, reflects the 20th century dissolution of imperial confidence and the emergence of fin-de-siècle dislocation and change; effectively the culture concept changes according to its cultural context (Friedman 1994: 71-72). Friedman (1994) is rightly critical of this reification, citing conflict between an "old" anthropology and a "new" sociology as being instrumental. It is important to note, however, that anthropology has made a robust defence of its position (LeVine 1984). Barth (1989 in Friedman 1994: 74) resolves this reification by identifying an interpretive culture concept whereby meaning is attributed rather than present, and differs depending upon the geographic and social situation and context of the individual who experiences the meaning. Importantly for this resolution, social outcomes are combinations of individual intention and interaction, and are therefore never quite as intended (Barth 1989 in Friedman 1994: 74-76).

Culture as an organisational concept

Such was culture as an anthropological/sociological concept by the end of the 20th century. However culture is a many headed hydra: this particular concept would not be recognised by, say, an art historian, for whom the notion of culture as a measure of cultivation (expressed as "high" or "low") is more useful (Friedman 1994: 67). On the face of it, it seems reasonable to suppose that the anthropological/sociological concept would be of primary use in the context implicit in the research question – that of organisational culture – however an alternative exists, the popularity of which suggests that this may not be the case. Organisations and the responsible managers within them are less concerned about epistemology than utility, and sometimes a novel approach sounds so right that it effectively resets (for some) the organisational culture concept's starting-point. This is not the view that accords with the stance of this research (see *Introduction* above), however, the influence of such seminal works cannot be denied, and they cannot be academically elided if the concepts they raise are reflected in the organisational culture constructs of responsible managers, and in the conceptualisations of research participants when considering the organisations in which they work.

One such work that resets the mark in social science terms (Triandis 1993: 133) is Hofstede's (2001) *Culture's Consequences*, which is frequently recommended for study by managers. Significantly for this research, Hofstede's conceptualisation appears in the observations and reflections of participants, and it is for this reason that it receives detailed consideration here. Hofstede (1997, 2001) developed his structural culture concept based on a largely quantitative study of staff at IBM plants around the world. His proposition relies upon individual psychology, introducing

concepts of "values", "rituals", "heroes" and "symbols", encompassed by "practices" – see below.

Symbols

Heroes

Rituals

Values

Practices
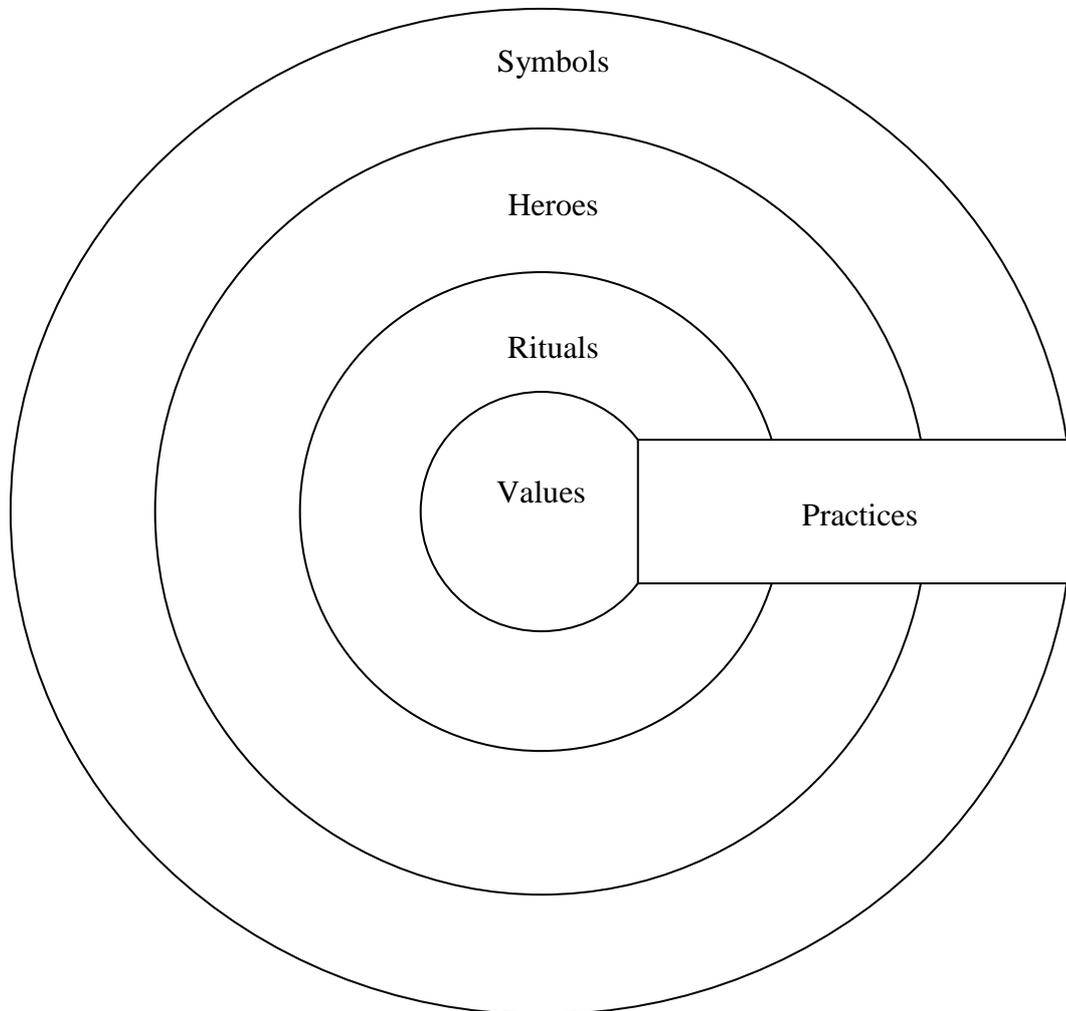
"Symbols", the most superficial and transient level in the diagram above, refers to words, gestures etc that carry culture-specific meaning. "Heroes", the second most superficial level in the diagram above, refers to people, real or fictional, who represent a particular culture. "Rituals", the third most superficial level in the diagram above, refers to practices such as greetings and forms of words. Rituals are not technically necessary, and can include collective status-affirming phenomena such as meetings. These three superficial levels can be termed "practices" in that they are visible

manifestations of culture within Hofstede's (1997, 2001) conceptualisation. At the deepest level rests the invisible "values" core. This includes shared perceptions of good and evil, normal and abnormal, logical and paradoxical, and rational and irrational. Values are acquired subconsciously and at an early age. As such they are rarely consciously considered by their holders and are therefore difficult to identify and change. One problem with identification concerns the disentangling of that which is desirable and that which is desired. That which is desirable is a norm, whereas that which is desired is a personal preference – this enables individuals to reconcile a culture construct where fair distribution of wealth is desirable, yet remain personally acquisitive (Hofstede 1997: 7-10).

Hofstede's (2001) seminal book is subtitled *Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, and the relevance he accords to nationality is pronounced. He compartmentalises "cultural identity" along national lines using a conceptualisation that he calls "dimensions of culture". These dimensions include, *inter alia*, national identity; regional, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity; gender identity; social class identity; and professional/work identity. These may well be conflictual, typically between religious and professional/work identities (Hofstede 1997: 10-11).

Within national identity lie dimensions of "national culture" (Hofstede 1997: 13). These are, according to Hofstede (1997: 13-15), isolatable and statistically measurable facets of nationalities, based on the notion that in his IBM study the only significant differentiating factor between the IBM employees was their national identity, and so by studying these apparently otherwise largely similar people, dimensions of national

identity may be identified. These correspond strongly with those found by the earlier anthropologists Inkeles and Levinson (1954: 17 in Hofstede 2001: 13).

In Hofstede's (1997, 2001) conceptualisation organisational or corporate culture (in this research this culture construct being described as the "structural culture" concept) describes the mental software prevalent within organisations, typically referenced to the organisation's performance. It differs from national (and other forms of) culture construct in that membership is generally voluntary and may (and ultimately will) be terminated. Therefore the dimensions used to describe and measure Hofstede's national culture are only partly useful in describing structural culture (Hofstede 1997: 18). What Hofstede (1997, 2001) has achieved here, however, is to provide practitioners within organisations with a culture construct that involves "mental software", i.e. something susceptible to reprogramming, for which read training. It also references this culture construct to performance. Whatever the ontological shortcomings of this culture construct, practitioners hereby have a means of identifying and describing their problems, and a model whereby solutions may be delivered. In the context of the research question, Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept must be considered due to its popularity within organisations and its presence in the conceptualisations of the participants in this research, if not in those of its author.

Critics of the structural culture concept

Hofstede (1997, 2001) has been robustly criticised on abstract methodological grounds and on bread-and-butter bases such as the ways in which popularity (and hence by implication, academic acceptance) is achieved. Hofstede (1997, 2001)

features prominently in this research due to the prevalence of his concept in the understanding of participants, however, in the interests of providing the reader with a rounded and complete picture of the structural culture concept, a representative sample of critical literature is presented in this section.

Baskerville (2003: 2) criticises Hofstede (1997, 2001) on the basis of a faulty poor theoretical base, equating "culture" with "nation", the viability of quantifying "cultural dimensions" and the effect of the internal or external status of the observer of structural culture, although Hofstede (2001: 15) himself addresses cultural relativism – see below. Baskerville (2003: 3) assesses the continuing popularity of Hofstede (1997, 2001) by performing a citation count: she found that *Culture's Consequences* fell into the category of a super classic, based on achieving a high number of citations constantly over a long period of time. Analysis of the citation count reveals that this work is most frequently cited in popular management texts (Baskerville 2003: 2-6).

Additionally, studies which use nationality as a variable are concerned with how social institutions vary in accordance with national characteristics, however Hofstede (1997, 2001) uses nationality as a variable in the cultural area of organisations/businesses (Baskerville 2003: 7). The use of nationalities requires a great deal of definition and description: without them there is no clarity regarding what is meant, and the defence that nations are usually the only variable does not answer the criticism (Baskerville 2003: 6-8).

Baskerville (2003) also criticises Hofstede's (1997, 2001) methodology with regard to what Hofstede (2001: 25), quoting Berry (1969) terms the "Malinovskian Dilemma" of research from within and without. Baskerville (2003: 8-9) claims that other researchers have adequately resolved this, which Hofstede (1997, 2001) fails to acknowledge and so contradicts a basic principle of social science research methodology. Additionally Baskerville (2003: 9-10) comments that Hofstede's (1997, 2001) dimensions are closely relatable to criteria used in other fields, typically politics and economics, and as such are socio-economic rather than anything that could be described as "cultural". This linkage of Hofstede's (1997, 2001) dimensions to socio-economic criteria supports the contention expressed above that this culture construct supports responsible managers' imperatives such as performance and measurability, rather than any that are conceptually coherent.

McSweeney (2002: 91) presents an alternative critique of Hofstede (1997, 2001) that examines the theoretical aspects more fully. He begins by reprising Hofstede's original paradigm of culture (Hofstede 1997: 11-15), finding it to be "implicit" – that which is unconscious and subjective; "mental programming" as opposed to that which is observable or recordable. Hofstede's paradigm is also criticised on the grounds of being deterministic, and claiming that "culture" defines people as being identifiably different from others on the basis of nationality (McSweeney 2002: 92). Finally McSweeney (2002: 92-93) offers this interpretation of Hofstede's (1997, 2001) paradigm: it is "shared" – that is, it assumes common features applicable to all individuals, or alternatively an average of heterogeneous elements. In summary he claims that Hofstede (1997, 2001) makes the following assumptions: individuals do not all share "subcultures", but all share a "national culture", and the inhabitants of a

nation together comprise an average, an average to which no single individual conforms.

McSweeney also criticises Hofstede (1997, 2001) on his use of questionnaires. Although the sample size (117,000) appears large, this number is the aggregate of two separate surveys, and in some countries the number of respondents was very small (e.g. Pakistan – 107 in total) (McSweeney 2002: 93-95). McSweeney (2002: 111-112) concludes that the *prima facie* sophistication of Hofstede's (1997, 2001) work and the convenience of its use of "nation" as a variable have impressed some, but that it is as superficially impressive and convenient as, say, using expensive and accurate measuring instruments to measure people's heads with a view to quantifying intelligence. Managers and those who seek to guide them have been seduced by the sophistication, convenience and quantifiability offered by Hofstede's (1997, 2001) work, and have been too uncritical in their acceptance of it (McSweeney 2002: 112-113). In common with that of Baskerville (2003), McSweeney's (2002) analysis supports the contention that Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept works only in the organisational practitioner context.

It should be mentioned that Hofstede replied robustly to both Baskerville (Hofstede 2003) and McSweeney (Hofstede 2002: 1355-1361).

It can be argued that Hofstede's (1997, 2001) conceptualisation, whilst being useful for responsible managers who both define and interpret the meaning of "culture" within their organisations, and organisational practitioners who constitute the participants in this research, does not accord with sociological or social science

concepts. In a study of Apple Computers (Garsten 1994) that to some extent replicated Hofstede's (1997, 2001) work with IBM, "organisational culture" was found to be an altogether more dynamic phenomenon, significantly dependent on commercial relationships between parent and subsidiaries and employee engagement with the employer. These findings call into question the extent to which Hofstede's (1997, 2001) findings may be replicated beyond their research setting. Elias (2000: 547-8 note 24), writing before Hofstede but nevertheless disputing what Hofstede was later to find, questions how the geographical situations of the English and Japanese can be so similar, yet as civilisations they are so distinct. In this regard Elias demonstrates the futility of isolating distinguishing factors from characteristic-building history and experience (Elias 2000: 434). Elias is popular and useful in a sociological setting as a builder of concept and sociological method (and as such has been co-opted as a contributor to the conceptual framework and analysis of this research) but, as he offers no utilitarian culture construct or link between "culture" and performance, does not compete with Hofstede in managerialist settings. Hofstede remains, therefore, despite the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of his work, extraordinarily popular in management and HR circles and underpins in some contexts the understanding of participants in this research. His influence therefore cannot be elided.

Support for the structural culture concept

Just as Hofstede (1997, 2001) has his critics, there are others who have made use of the structural culture concept to good effect. So that the reader may form a balanced opinion with respect to this influential concept, examples of such support are presented in this section.

Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept in many ways harks back to the easy reification of earlier anthropologists, although Hofstede, possibly mindful of this, explicitly warns against their characteristic cultural relativism and ethnocentrism (Hofstede 2001: 15 and 17-19). Reified and conceptually flawed or not, his influence, particularly in vocational management studies, has been enormous. The comparatively detailed treatment accorded to his work here, and the criticism of it, reflects this and the influence that Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept holds over the participants in this research.

Influential though he may be, Hofstede (1997, 2001) is not the only author to have captured the imaginations of a lucrative and powerful market. Deal and Kennedy (1982: 19) directly appeal to those responsible for achieving success in business, telling them that organisational culture can help solve their problems. Like Hofstede (1997, 2001), in *Corporate Cultures: the Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* they present a neatly packaged concept of organisational culture, consisting of business environment, values, heroes, rites and rituals, and the cultural network (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 13-15). Although not as scholarly in their approach as Hofstede (1997, 2001), they present a similarly reified concept from which practical solutions to everyday problems may be drawn and which can be packaged into employee development courses and delivered to employees, hence its popularity in business circles. Unlike Hofstede (1997, 2001), they do not rely on new research but draw mainly upon illustrative vignettes to build their concept. As a methodological approach this has its flaws, but it is an ideal way to reach the target audience; everyone who has worked in an organisation at any level can identify with the US Navy's "Attaboy" plaques (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 61) – for which read

achievement award, Employee of the Month and so on. Perhaps the best measure of success of these motivational tomes is the attention they have attracted from satirists – praise indeed, albeit backhanded. One such vivid example is the lampooning, as no more than a "Buggins' turn" polite fiction, of Employee of the Month awards in episode 96 the iconic US cartoon series *The Simpsons*. Here Homer Simpson (an (anti)hero in Deal and Kennedy's conceptualisation) is due to receive such award (a rite/ritual), being the only employee to have so far been overlooked. Realising it must by default be his turn, on the day in question Homer makes a special effort to smarten himself up for what he believes must be his big day, only to be overlooked yet again – in favour of an insentient but far more reliable and hard-working carbon rod. Whilst populist authors like Deal and Kennedy (1982) lack the legitimation of peer review, the attention they attract – as illustrated by this example – demonstrates the ingraining of their culture construct into the collective psyche of corporate life, the individual psyches of those involved in corporate life and beyond. Such interest is not new, however: even before its neat packaging for a sympathetic market by Deal and Kennedy (1982) and others, the concept was well-accepted and gently ridiculed: Homer Simpson is, after all, no more than a Charles Pooter (Grossmith 1995) for our time.

Deal and Kennedy's (1982) culture construct bears comparison with Hofstede's (1997, 2001) in that it is reified, popular, and reflective of organisational culture as conceived by individuals within organisations, and because of this is worthy of mention here irrespective of any conceptual or methodological flaws that each possesses and, to a large extent, shares. It is against such background concepts that studies of organisational culture (including this one) are pitched. One such is the

"academic tribe" culture construct identified by James (2004: 5) in her study of university teachers. This example illustrates the power of a popular if flawed concept; James's respondents were all academics – psychologists – who could reasonably be expected to come to the organisational culture concept with a degree of thought and questioning, and indeed she encourages them to reconsider their identities for the purpose of her study (James 2004: 7-8). The focus of this research is the participant as individual, however the cultural frame, the community of practice, organisational culture as an entity, is evident in her respondents' constructed identities (James 2004: 11-12). Sachs (2001: 158-159), in a study of the professional identities of teachers in Australia, found similar concepts of community of practice. In Sachs's (2001: 159-160) study, however, the teachers' organisational culture construct was under tension due to managerial change and the new imperatives that accompanied it. In Hofstede's (1997, 2001) terms this would be a conflict of individual and organisational values. The experience of James (2004) and Sachs (2001) supports the notion of widespread acceptance of the structural culture concept among organisational practitioners, and hence the need for it to be addressed in this research.

The structural culture concept with respect to email

Hofstede (1997, 2001) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) set out the concept of organisational culture as an entity – the structural culture concept. James (2004) and Sachs (2001) illustrate the concept in operation. This section presents literature that brings the debate closer to the subject matter of this research.

Khoo and Senn (2004), in their study of email in operation, identified cultural dissonance between the effects of sexualised email among men and women. At a

Canadian university they found marked differences in gender reactions to email that could be classified as likely to cause offence (sexist jokes, sexually oriented spam, targeted harassment); broadly, that which women found "extremely offensive", men found "somewhat enjoyable" (Khoo and Senn 2004: 210-212). Within Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept the "culture" of the university overlies a deeper, values-based personal culture construct that stems from the individual's gender. That Khoo and Senn (2004) problematise this is unsurprising given the moral imperatives of the world in which we live – for people living in Western society, sexism is a big issue – however it would be unjust to conclude that they are simply stating the obvious in the context of a well-trodden path. Their work vividly illustrates the way in which the usage of and reactions to email by individuals within an organisation can highlight deep, values-based differences that can potentially cause division in that organisation's culture construct. In recognition of the power of such deep-rooted differences in culture constructs, they recommend that organisations impose guidance as to what is and is not acceptable (Khoo and Senn 2004: 213) – further addressed in *Organisational rules* below. This surely recognises the power of personal values and the comparative weakness of the structural culture concept.

Conversely however, Kibby (2005: 774), in her consideration of email forwardables, identifies seemingly positive effects of email for organisations in fostering cohesiveness and community. Thomas and James (1999: 80) reach a similar conclusion in relation to email groups delineated by profession – in this case, GPs – even though they admit that membership represents a small proportion of the total, and many of those that are members do not actively participate. Kibby (2005: 789) is perhaps too sanguine in her favourable assessment of forwardables as, for every group

that coheres there must surely be those left on the outside. The same can be said in relation to Thomas and James's (1999) GPs: if, when considered in the context of this research, each group exactly overlies its relevant organisation, department, function or any other relevant grouping, then Kibby (2005) and Thomas and James (1999) will be vindicated; if not, then there will be those left out, a possibility that Kibby (2005) and Thomas and James (1999) have not considered and which is damaging to their positive assessments. This is further examined in *The insider–outsider social habitus concept* below, however it is important to note that within this structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) the communities formed around email forwardables or professional email groupings have the power to contribute to, detract from or indeed sideline and progressively render irrelevant the structural culture construct of "the organisation".

Skovholt and Svennevig (2006) identify community-building characteristics in their study of email copies. As noted in *Organisational rules* below, there is no material difference in social terms between email copies and email forwardables, however Skovholt and Svennevig (2006: 47) find that the email copy, in addition to having a community-building function, enables one individual (the email author) to exert control over others (the recipients) by requiring a response that conforms to behavioural norms. They also note that the email copy acts in much the same way as a conversation where the participants speak so that they may be overheard (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 47). Skovholt and Svennevig's (2006: 53-60) overall conclusion, however, is that despite these power considerations, email acts as a democratising medium that facilitates participation in networks and alliances, whilst contributing to their intrinsic character. This is supported by Peek et al (2007: 169),

who found that email can, in the correct circumstances, foster participation in individuals whose natural introversion may discourage participation in other group forums. Clearly this is not problematic where networks and alliances overlie those of "the organisation" in such a way as to correspond with its perceived formal structure. Weare et al (2007: 238-241) found that this was indeed the case in their study of email use in a network of local associations, where cohesiveness and an existing democratic character were found to have been enhanced by the use of email. The fact that cohesion and democracy already existed is important here, as Cecez-Kecmanovic et al (1999) found that email is not inherently democratising, but usage mirrors existing management styles and can, as reported by Romm and Pliskin (1999), encourage the perpetuation of petty tyranny. Weare et al's (2007) findings are echoed by Cater (2003) in his study of charities' use of email and those of Radcliffe (2007) in a study whereby email was found to have value as a medium through which cohesiveness may be fostered among at-risk students. Problems will arise, however, where the networks and alliances that develop around email communications (including copies, forwardables or groups) act against or sideline perceived formal structures or interfere with constructed hierarchies and relationships. This may be due to the infection of inappropriate values and behaviours as discussed above, or much more simply as the result of the purchase of incompatible off-the-shelf email products, or the lack of managerial leadership due to email being viewed as an IT department responsibility (Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000: 279). In common with the potential for inappropriate behaviour identified by Khoo and Senn (2004), these phenomena can exert negative pressures on a culture construct to the point where structural culture as conceptualised by Hofstede (1997, 2001) and imagined by responsible managers is no longer applicable. Further problems arise from networks and alliances; these must

necessarily operate with some degree of exclusivity and, as mentioned previously, those that are not "in" will be "out". The effects of this are considered in detail in *The insider–outsider social habitus concept* below.

Summary

So in terms of the research question, a concept of organisational culture as a constructed, reified artefact – the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) – exists, and is popular due to its convenience and the ease with which it may be applied to the imperatives of management – motivation, customs and practices, training and positive attitudes. Its conceptual flaws are not problematic at this level. It is this concept that organisations apply to the ways in which email works. However, as the literature shows, other, stronger, values-based forces are at work which emerge from individuals; it is in this way that individuals' email behaviour makes its organisational impact.

When these influences are deemed by organisations or legislators to be sufficiently necessary or desirable, or the consequences of disregarding them would be significantly detrimental to organisations or individuals within them, they are actively defined and formalised in the form of organisational rules.

Organisational rules

Organisational rules flow conceptually from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), as represented in the conceptual framework of Chapter 1 and the conceptual map of the *Introduction* to this Chapter.

The subject of organisational rules is arranged here in three categories; practical guides, email activity and considerations of privacy. Examples of the literature surrounding each are presented in this section.

Practical guides

Email had not long been in common usage when popular authors, typically those whose work encompasses the "how to", "how not to" and "how to avoid" genres, turned their attention to the peculiar etiquette that quickly grew up around it. These authors approached email from a technical rather than a social standpoint, typical among them being Levene's (1997) work for the popular *Dummies* series, a range of technically oriented computer user guides for beginners.

Seminal among the works that went beyond the technical standpoint is Shea's (1996) work. Aimed at a general readership, this work set out, as the title suggests, what the author discerned to be the de rigeur and faux pas of communication by email. That it was necessary to set out these things suggests that there were problems with email behaviour, and indeed Shea (1996: 32-33) sets these out, for example email users are apt to forget that behind the email sits a thinking and feeling being, and should be treated as such, with consideration and respect. But problematic human behaviour is nothing new, and sanguine and helpful people have always taken not-a-little trouble to correct and improve their fellow men and women. Elias (2000: 72-109) illustrates that table-manners (among other things concerning social behaviour) are not a thing of evolution and accident, but human intervention and improvement. Elias (2000) shows that Shea (1996), although concerned with a thoroughly modern medium, is following in a very well-established tradition. Organisations, however, quickly

became sensitive to the possibilities of this new medium not only to communicate but to discriminate, offend and otherwise facilitate inappropriate behaviour. By the beginning of the 21st century any organisation that used email for internal communication and communication between it and its suppliers and customers had its own guidelines. Some of these are largely technical, aimed at, among other things, preventing networks crashing through overloading, for example that of the Delaware Technical and Community College (http://www.dtec.edu/cs/rfc1855html). What behavioural guidance there is here lies buried in the technically oriented user instructions. Others, for example the University of Bath (http://www.bath.ac.uk/bucs/email/ emailbasic.shmtl) follow very much in the steps of Shea (1996) by offering guidance on what does and what does not constitute good manners in email usage. The advice given is basic and consists mainly of commonsense bullet-point items concerning email security, brevity, appropriate addressing and guidance on polite behaviour concerning particularly use of capitals and emoticons. The approach of Yale University is very much along the same lines (http://www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/postscript.html/), addressing issues that include security, effective style and sensitivity to the feelings of recipients. Significantly, these are situated at the hub of these organisations' electronic media systems, their "intranets", and very few of them appear to make it into print, perhaps indicating that they are intended as problem-solving resources rather than policy documents. ("Intranet" is the generic term for the internal internet systems built by IT professionals and contributed to by HR and other organisational functions. Intranets typically contain information ranging from organisational hierarchy trees to staff restaurant menus.)

Email activity

Whilst these practical guides are commonplace, rules for internet use have been considered from a more conceptual base. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, an early, important example comes from the academic world and concerns the use of email in a higher education institution (Spence 2002). The benefits of email communication are here spelled out; uncontroversially these include the removal of potentially prejudicial elements in communication such as race, dialect, and age, and the empowering of the socially reticent (Spence 2002:40-41). Even the apparently impersonal nature of the written word may in electronic form be leavened by the use of emoticons, and of course email need not supplant the use of face-to-face conversation or the telephone call when a more sophisticated exchange of communication is called for (Spence 2002: 41). Interestingly, however, there is anecdotal evidence that the use of emoticons themselves (rather than the emotions that the author intends to express) generates its own range of responses amongst those who have strong feelings about them.

The study conducted by Spence (2002: 47) found that both students and staff within the higher education institution held positive views about email but were equivocal regarding its use: some felt that it limited opportunity for personal contact rather than supplemented it, whilst others felt that some forms of quite widespread use were inappropriate for what is essentially an academic tool. Such forms included the forwarding of chain letters, posting advertisements and telling risqué jokes (Spence 2002: 48). Where respondents were united was in their concern about angry and immediate replies, or "flaming"; this often results not only from the flamer's response arising as a result of an intemperate first impression, but on the carelessness of the

person who inspired the flame in not ensuring that they could not be misunderstood or misinterpreted (Spence 2002: 48-49).

Spence (2002: 49-50) concluded that technical measures needed to be in place to ensure that systems did not become overloaded or emails were not copied to those people to whom they would appear to be "spam"; users also needed training in managing their email accounts effectively; emails themselves should be kept simple and sparse, with email users being offered templates and "house-style" guides.

Where Spence (2002: 50) had difficulty was in determining the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable private use, but offered guidance regarding keeping the purely personal separate from the work-related, and not allowing the two to mix. Several years on, organisations (particularly those whose communications could be assumed to carry particular commercial or legal meanings, for example those coming from banks and law firms) are finally catching on to this and requiring personal emails to be identified as such, with a signifier (for example the word "private" appearing in the subject field) to enable automatic addition of disclaimers that dissociate the substance of the email from the organisation whose IT system processed it (Christacopoulos 1999).

Spence (2002: 51) does, however, note that a wider consideration of cultural influences (both national and organisational) and ethics is necessary to build upon the findings of her research. Romm et al (1996: 44) offer such consideration, noting the importance of the organisation's culture in determining whether email will be used in support of the organisation's goals. Literature reviewed elsewhere in this Chapter

offers this wider consideration, as does this research in its consideration of "organisational culture" and "organisational learning" with respect to email communities as stated in the research question.

Writing from a legal point of view, Stokely (2007: 1) starkly spells out that responsibility for appropriate use of information technology not only rests with those active participants but also with the passive facilitators: "… employers are liable for the unlawful behaviour of employees if that behaviour was found to be in connection with the individual's employment". These warnings come in the wake of a scandal involving the dissemination by email of pornography at the Australian Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and highlights the negative consequences that can affect not only the individuals concerned but also their employers when such occurrences come to light, as can happen when, for example, an employee complains about harassment (Stokely 2007: 1).

Echoing Spence (2002), Stokely (2007:2) calls for staff training, clear policies and technical safeguards, but points out that any deficiency in these can render the employer liable for any shortcomings but must also not infringe employees' privacy rights. Clearly for any training, policy and technical solutions to be effective and within the law, there must be constant and rigorous review to ensure that such measures keep up-to-date in what is a very fast-moving area (Stokely 2007: 3).

Spence (2002: 51) by her own admission did not adequately delineate the acceptable and the unacceptable in the organisational email domain, and Stokely (2007), whilst warning of reputational and legal consequences emerging from it, did not address this

question at all. Spence (2007: 51) suggests that what is "reasonable" may depend on cultural factors, however this is not helpful for the organisation which, perhaps operating across many geographical locations and perhaps employing people of many cultures within cosmopolitan settings, has to protect itself and its employees against the legal and emotional consequences of misdiagnosing unreasonableness, or failing to act upon it when it occurs.

Khoo and Senn (2004: 205) point out that whereas inappropriate jokes or ribald comments are generally passed around small groups and fade away in a short time, an email which some employees find offensive may be forwarded on in cumulatively larger steps to very large numbers of people in disparate locations. Email has own "advantages, disadvantages, social dynamics, problems and opportunities" (Hiltz and Turoff 1985 in Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000: 279), or, rather more concisely (if cynically), provides "a new way of doing old things" (Tyler 2002 in Khoo and Senn 2004: 204); however it operates far more quickly and over a far more wide-ranging and more public forum than do other means of communication. Having highlighted the problem, Khoo and Senn (2004) examine the demarcation between what is acceptable and what is not, taking sexual harassment as their bellwether. It is worth noting here that in the context of organisational rules they recommend, in common with Spence (2002) and Stokely (2007), that organisations offer clear guidelines regarding what is and what is not acceptable (Khoo and Senn 2004: 213). Importantly they add to their recommendations the useful standard of the "reasonable woman" as conceptualised by Frazier et al (1995 in Khoo and Senn 2004: 213). The "reasonableness" concept – an abstraction describing the supposed attitudes and actions of an informed, observant, enlightened and objective onlooker – has been used

as a descriptive device before (above, this Chapter) but it did not feature explicitly in the texts thus far reviewed, but its inclusion by Khoo and Senn (2004) is significant in that it imports a feature beloved of lawyers (Lucas 1963: 97-106) into what, as Stokely (2007: 2) illustrated, is an increasingly juridified organisational issue. This research is concerned with organisational rather than judicial remedies, however there is comfort to be found in the existence of a conceptual link between organisational and judicial approaches, and its identification by authors whose standpoint is sociological/organisational, should such link prove to be necessary.

Whilst the exact line of demarcation between the acceptable and the unacceptable may be difficult to determine (Spence 2007: 51), the conceptualisation of unacceptability in relation to sexual harassment, lewd jokes and ribald comments as absolutes is not problematic. What are problematic in terms of unacceptability are the emails that purport to be helpful, yet are not. These frequently take the form of electronic chain letters warning of, for example, new computer viruses and other threats to systems, organisations and individuals. These are invariably styled as helpful information with exhortations to pass the information on to as many people as possible (Kibby 2005: 775-779). These are not necessarily damaging to organisations in the way that the unequivocally unacceptable emails described previously are, but they are technically damaging due to the volumes of email traffic they generate, which can have negative systemic and commercial consequences for the organisations concerned.

Kibby (2005: 787) notes that "cultural" and group factors are influential here, but whilst she examines these facets in detail she does not offer solutions for

organisations, rather regarding these emails as a fact of life. It is easy to see why: the disparate nature of these emails – "forwardables" – and their equivocal facticity renders them difficult to pin down in terms of organisational rules and attempting to do so may result in organisations infringing employees' privacy rights (Stokely 2007: 2).

This is not to say, however, that email forwardables are wholly negative. There is a closely related email form, the copy sent to interested (although not always involved) third-party recipients, that is widely used. Skovholt and Svennevig (2006: 44-45 and 61-62) found that there are many unequivocally legitimate organisational uses to which these may be put, including the building of alliances and both democratisation and social control. It is significant to note that Skovholt and Svennevig (2006) found nothing problematic about email copies and therefore offer no organisational remedies. The contrast with Kibby's (2005) conclusions with respect to the closely related forwardable is marked, yet the outcome is the same.

Another closely related email form, the instigation of discussions and resultant replies around the members of informal email discussion groups, was considered by Thomas and James (1999) in their study of one such example constituted by general practitioners in the UK. Their findings concerning the benefits felt by members of professional email groups with respect to their experience of membership were wholly positive and, significantly, none of their respondents, all of whom were general practitioners, identified organisational problems emerging from their use of this email form – rather the opposite in fact: they identified several tangible factors that mitigated existing organisational shortcomings (Thomas and James 1999: 79-80) and

none reported any hostility to this email discussion group from their managers. In short, there seems to have been no problem, or if there was it was not of sufficient significance for Thomas and James (1999) to problematise.

So in the three common forms by which individuals communicate electronically with many others, the forwardable, the copy and the email discussion group, there is no consensus as to their benefits or otherwise and no recommendations for organisational responses. Of course were it easy to separate the beneficial forms from the detrimental it would be possible to recommend remedies, but this separation is impossible due to the benefit/detriment balance differing according to the context of the actors rather than the nature of the email form. Jokes, as problematised by Spence (2002), were found to be beneficial by Thomas and James (1999); Spence (2002) reported on forwardables, Skovholt and Svennevig (2006) on copies and Thomas and James (1999) on email discussion groups, but there is no meaningful division between these forms beyond the technical, i.e. which button is pushed. As a joke may be forwarded or copied as easily around a discussion group as around a project group or a department in an organisation, these forms, whilst technically different, are essentially identical from the organisational rules perspective. That the literature on email jokes reaches widely varying conclusions as to their organisational benefit or detriment cannot be resolved by compartmentalising them on technical bases, and explains why no organisational strategies are recommended. This illustrates that the issues around email jokes are not technical but social; more to do with the people than the medium. In terms of the research question, this has important implications in that for the purposes of analysis (as opposed to the purposes of organisational problem identification and problem solving), the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997,

2001) is here shown to be insufficient. Additionally, overarching the debate remains Stokely's warning regarding employee privacy, and the legal consequences of failing to take this into consideration.

Considerations of privacy

Expectations by individuals in organisations of privacy in their email use have been problematised in considerations of law and in organisational policy. Privacy has become the most talked-about matter concerning the ethical use of IT (Miller and Weckert 2000). In Smyth v Pillsbury (1996) it was found that despite assurances of confidentiality, the employer could not be held to have invaded the privacy of the individual when emails were subsequently intercepted. However, employees take little comfort from adverse court judgments, and organisations that, through their formal processes, take full advantage of their rights in terms of privacy are likely to achieve no more than the alienation of valuable knowledge workers (Friedman and Reed 2007: 7-8). The building of a body of case-law and the likelihood of both individuals and their organisations misconstruing what privacy entails in email has led governments to attempt clarification. The Australian Federal Privacy Commissioner (2000: 2), in terms of privacy, likens emails to postcards rather than sealed letters, and encourages "responsible managers" – those people who represent "the organisation" internally and externally – to ensure that organisational members are aware of the rights that "the organisation" – a construct that comprises locations, official hierarchy, assets and members depending upon context – reserves to itself. The Commissioner advises responsible managers to set out clearly what is allowed and what is forbidden, and under which circumstances email privacy may be legitimately set aside, and what information about emails the organisational email system retains (Australian Federal

Privacy Commissioner 2000: 3-5). In consideration of the ethics around email privacy, Woodbury (1998) highlights the tension between the individual's wish for privacy and an organisational wish to control, noting (in common with the Commissioner) that "the organisation" (acting through its responsible managers) has rights as owner of the email system to specify what is permissible and what is not. Elegantly, however, Woodbury (1998) advises that "Policies should not kill happiness and creativity".

Summary

In the terms of the research question this section has defined and problematised email in the organisational context – in terms of the rules within which organisations operate, imposed from outside by law and from inside by custom and practice and expectations. From the literature reviewed in this section it seems that organisational rules concerning the use of email are, in their consideration of issues beyond the purely technical, limited to (1) dealing with encouraging adherence to forms of etiquette, (2) obedience to technical rules, (3) proscription of the unequivocally unacceptable – that which would be inappropriate or offensive, however communicated, and (4) respecting privacy, inasmuch as privacy is understood to be of a particularly limited kind that may be violated by organisations acting through responsible managers in their role as providers of email apparatus under certain circumstances. Organisational rules are perhaps more notable for what they fail to encompass – those forwardables, copies and discussion-group communications which due to their wide conceptual overlap are only variably problematised and, for the same reason, are difficult to define in such a way that organisational rules can bite. Most interestingly, rules imposed to protect organisations' reputations and their

employees against offence or bullying are limited by the law that protects those employees' privacy, but not to the degree that employees may expect. Yet something akin to "rules" does apply; it is not unreasonable to suppose that, when composing emails, whilst employees might not immediately open the relevant intranet page or reach for their organisations' rule books, they will apply their own finely nuanced guidelines that are not at odds with what their employers and colleagues would expect them do, even though articulating those expectations is so problematic. Such guidelines go a long way to create the tenor of the organisational email environment – that part of the wider, frequently reified but conceptually elusive phenomenon known as organisational culture.

The structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) examined so far is, however, insufficient when the focus switches from organisations to people, their values and their behaviour. A deeper and more dynamic concept is required, one that is ontologically valid and not merely a convenient culture construct. Such a concept is offered below.

The insider-outsider social habitus concept

The shortcomings of the structural culture concept

The structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) draws a picture of organisational culture as something having its own existence – something reified. This perception may be demonstrably conceptually erroneous, however it is the perception widely held and indeed encouraged by organisations (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 18). The "organisation" itself is something as constructed and reified as the structural culture concept. Responsible managers will set out the values they desire for "the

organisation" in order to paint a picture of how they wish it to appear to employees, customers and the outside world, typically represented by (for small- and medium-sized firms) the "communities" in which they operate and (for larger firms) the media (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 26-27). Conceptually constructed "organisations" will then, through strategies devised by responsible managers that include carefully designed training and development programmes, attempt to ensure that their espoused values are reflected by their members (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 29-30). They clearly have a vested interest in adhering to their stated values – living up to their public image – as the results of not doing so can be damaging and expensive (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 157-159).

Within the constructed organisation, however, exists groupings of individuals (formally delineated departments, functions, areas of expertise) that may possess their own cultural formations, and such formations may not always fall in line with the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). These cultural formations may be conceptualised by their actors and observers as constructs in the way in which the structural culture concept is: an example is the "culture" of the medical profession that exists within the National Health Service; there are frequent reports in the popular press of doctors being at loggerheads with NHS management (Brindley 2007). That NHS management has come, unfairly, to be characterised as men-in-suits whose main interest is in financial management demonstrates a failure to ensure that reflected values accord with espoused ones (Currie 2008). Usually such discord is not so clearly and publicly discernible; neither is it the dissenting "culture" that usually claims moral superiority. Neither need the dissenting culture be conceptualised structurally. A major feature of this research, embodied in the research question, is

concerned with the examination of how "organisational culture" may be undermined by "communities" that are facilitated by email communication. Having examined culture as a construct in *The structural culture concept* above, this section begins by examining in detail how "email communities" are conceptualised, and how they are characterised in terms of dynamic human interaction, rather than the constructed stasis characteristic of the structural culture concept.

An analytic, rather than merely utilitarian, alternative "social habitus" concept of "insiders" and "outsiders"

A good place to start in departing from the seductively simple and convenient, but ultimately ontologically flawed structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) is with the examination of community dynamics and ontological status. Seminal in this regard is Elias and Scotson's research in "Winston Parva", a pseudonym used to describe a suburb of Leicester (Elias and Scotson 1994).

Whereas a concept of organisational culture as something constructed and reified rendered the use of the concept problematical in the structural (Hofstede 1997, 2001) context, it acquires new problematisation in the Eliasian context. Elias' intellectual formation took place in the Germany of the 1930s. At this time, Germany had existed as a nation for barely more than 50 years. Germany had been forged out of a collection of kingdoms and principalities from the top down by the Prussian chancellor Bismarck's *realpolitik* in the years leading to 1871, only to suffer defeat in the Great War in 1918 and endure political upheaval, economic ruin and resultant social dislocation in the succeeding years. Against this historical background of German statehood as something both contrived and threatened (Elias 2000: 7), it is

not surprising that Elias conceptualised the state as nothing more than an "attack and defence unit" (Elias 2001: 18-21). For Elias, compared with Germany, England between the wars was a nation at ease with itself and its self-identity: the English identified themselves by their *zivilisation* – an outward-facing, confident and dynamic means of self-expression – whereas Germans identified themselves by their *kultur* – an inward-facing, defensive means of self-identification (Elias 2001: 6-7). Whatever disasters befall the German state, German *kultur*, characterised by "intellectual, artistic and religious facts" (Elias 2001: 6), will go on. In contrast, the English, confident in permanence, *Pax Britannia* and the universal nature of the English language, had every confidence in their *zivilisation*. For Elias, *kultur* meant something static; exclusive of dynamic elements such as behaviour (Elias 2001: 6). This static understanding of "*kultur*" is therefore quite different from "culture" which, as seen in *The development of the structural culture concept* above, changes according to its cultural context (Friedman 1994: 71-72).

It is therefore incorrect to apply the word "culture" in the Eliasian context to the consideration of this research. "Civilisation" comes closer in the Eliasian context, encompassing as it does behaviour (Elias 2001:6), self-approbation, disapprobation of others (Mennell 1992: 29) and clearly linking conceptually with gossip, praise and blame. However, Eliasian *zivilisation* is too conceptually encompassing and, because of the historically derived understanding, different from the English understanding of civilisation to be appropriate for use in this research. A more useful Eliasian concept is that of *social habitus* which, for the purposes of this research, may be described as the shared personal characteristics of social groups (Mennell 1992: 30). In a research context, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 5) describe *habitus* as a pattern of actions of

the researcher among the researched. Elias explains these personal characteristics of social groups in action as "the established and the outsiders" (Elias and Scotson 1994) or "involvement and detachment" (Elias 1987). In this research, contrasting themes of being established and being outside, and involvement and detachment emerge. In wishing to maintain continuity of terminology, these themes have been consolidated in this research in the themes "insiders" and "outsiders" – the "insider-outsider social habitus concept" (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

Elias' (2001: 18) concept is one that bases itself not around a top-down reified view of arbitrary groupings such as nation, but begins at the level of the individual. In an evocative phrase used in the development of his concept, Elias (2001: 18-21) describes individuals as "posts from which the lines of relationships are strung", and in doing so he locates the social group as being something of which the individual is part and upon which the individual depends. Even when people pursue their own individual economic ends, they do so within the constraints of society, whether such constraints are occupational or arising from education or experience (Elias 2001: 12-14). The central conceptual theme is a figuration where the individual is located as "I" within an emotionally bonded "we" composed of other people, in sharp contrast with the reified separateness of the naïve egocentric view which places the "I" at the centre of a number of levels of "they", each level defined by degree of remoteness (Elias 1978: 134-138, 1987: xxii-xxiii). This figuration is represented in the diagram below (Elias 1978: 15).
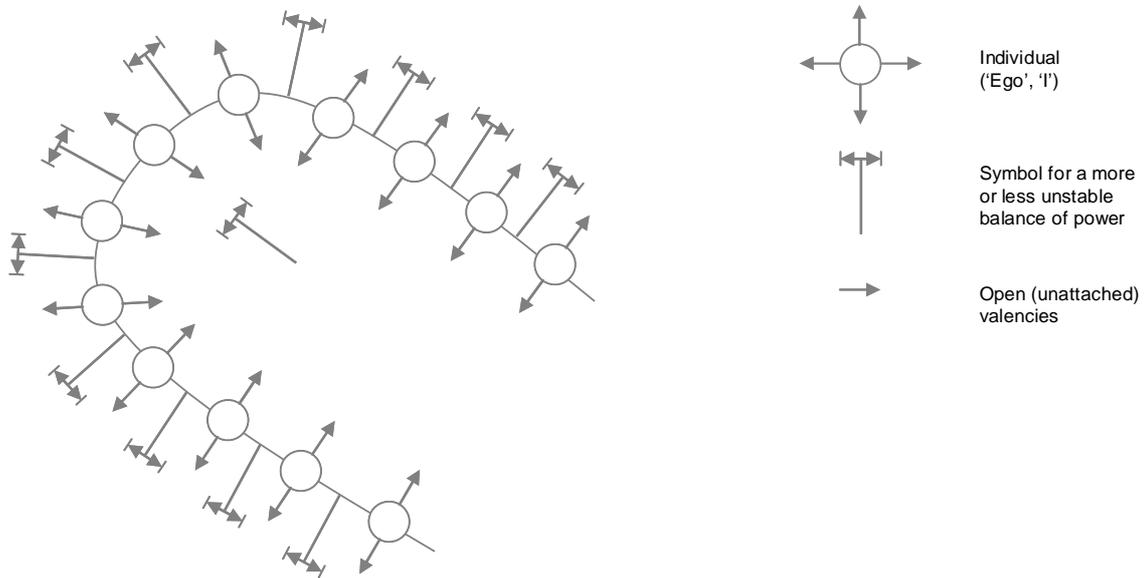
A figuration of interdependent individuals ('family', 'state', 'group', 'society', etc.)

This diagram bears comparison with its Hofstedian counterpart (see page 27).

Also significant is the dynamic nature of the concept via continually flexing levels of differentiation and integration, pushed and pulled by circumstance (Elias 1978: 145-152, 167-174). Differentiated people can become outsiders, integrated people can become insiders, but this not a lazy dualism; the tides of circumstance stretch, break and squeeze emotional bonds, but each bond makes its own unique connection, for its own unique reason.

The original research in Winston Parva was conducted as a local study into juvenile delinquency by Scotson in the 1960s. Elias then reworked Scotson's study, providing conceptualisation that enabled the original work to be projected into the study of, and suggest ameliorations for, the problems of wider society (Elias and Scotson 1994: x).

The established-outsider (in this research, insider-outsider) relations that formed the consideration of Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva work are fluid, multilayered and conceptually elusive. New outsiders continually appear, and old outsiders become insiders simultaneously at many levels (micro/macro) and in many contexts (e.g. economic, social, political, national, regional). In Winston Parva there was no insider-outsider relationship until new people arrived, tried to make contact with the old and were rejected. Once established, insiders risked rejection by their own group if they showed signs of deviance. By being compliant, on the other hand, insider members were subject to internal control that satisfied their self-image and conscience. Group self-image ("we") is as important as individual self-image ("I"). Group self-image survives long after that self-image has ceased to be justifiable, and former insider members of groups will perpetuate their group norms long after it has ceased to be appropriate or reasonable to do so. Indeed, as the insiders feel themselves to be under threat they tend to tighten the restraints that distinguish themselves from those whom they perceive to be outsiders. In Winston Parva the old insiders perceived themselves to be under attack in terms of their power resources, group charisma and group norms. Their reaction was to close ranks against outsiders, an act which humiliated the outsiders – an effective figuration in the eyes of the outsiders themselves (Elias and Scotson 1994: xv-lii, 1987: xxii-xxiii). Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva offers a vivid picture of insider-outsider community formation, figuration and dynamics. As representatives of insiders and outsiders, Winston Parva's insiders characterised themselves as "a minority of the best"; the outsiders they characterised as a "minority of the worst" (Elias and Scotson 1994: 1-6). These formations, figurations and dynamics constitute a useful paradigm for the focus of this research. The "communities" – the overlapping self-constructed "we"

formations – of Winston Parva bear comparison with those of the emailers in the workplace, and Elias and Scotson's (1994) understanding of Winston Parva provides an entry into understanding the "email communities" – the overlapping, self-constructed "we" formations facilitated by email – of the workplace.

Elias himself uses the term "community" with careful definition in order to avoid separation of the concept from its essential "we" nature in the minds of his readers (Elias and Scotson 1994: 146-147). In this research the terms "community" and "email communities" are similarly carefully defined as above, i.e. overlapping self-constructed "we" formations and overlapping self-constructed "we" formations facilitated by email respectively.

Gossip performs an important function in the insider-outsider characterisation described above (Elias and Scotson 1994: 41-42) in that an ideology of behaviour developed which the insiders reinforced through gossip about themselves and about the outsiders. Effectively, gossip among the insiders involuntarily reinforced positive views of themselves and negative views of the outsiders (Elias and Scotson 1994: 13-21). Gossip is an important feature in the dynamics of communities and is rightly highlighted here by Elias and Scotson (1994: 89-105); this becomes evident in the findings of this research. The relevance of gossip as a feature of communities sustained wholly by communication, such as those that form around email, is clear in relation to the research question.

There is, however, a price to pay for insider status, and that status, whilst hard-won, can be easily lost. Elias and Scotson (1994: 38-39) tell of a lady who invited the bin-

men in for a cup of tea, for which she suffered low-level ostracisation and assignment of a lower social rank by her neighbours. Not only does one have to conform – one has to be seen to conform (Elias and Scotson 1994: 24-41). These organic, unofficial and unintended "communities", their crossings-over and boundaries, layers upon layers that constantly shift, compare readily with the email communities of this research. Elias and Scotson's (1994) projection to the general paradigm – next paragraph, where the importance of gossip is again highlighted – is telling in this respect.

Power and status in Winston Parva emerged from cohesiveness and conformity. Social position emergent from these factors cannot be easily observed as a casual outsider; such subtleties only emerge by attending to the gossip of local people. Phrases and words, e.g. "all right", "okay", "better" and "not quite nice" painted a picture of gradation not fully conceptualised even by those to whom they apply. These subtle social configurations demonstrate the importance of superiority and inferiority generally (Elias and Scotson 1994: 41).

Elias and Scotson (1994: 43-50) illustrate the coherence and persistence of power and status by examining the dynamics of families as they play out over the generations. As the modern workplace generally does not experience this kind of continuity, email communities would not configure by these means. It is worth mentioning here that such familial continuity such as might have once existed in workplaces has effectively been proscribed by far-reaching anti-discrimination legislation (Commission for Racial Equality 1982). However the finding from the examination of these familial and generational features in Winston Parva that the price paid by those "inside"

people was conformity with and submission to neighbourhood norms (Elias and Scotson 1994: 50) is highly relevant to the formation of workplace email communities. This is vividly illustrated by Elias and Scotson's (1994) description of how the families and social groupings interacted in Winston Parva.

Insider families existed substantially communally and self-sufficiently, and whilst outsiders were not excluded from local associations, churches, etc, they did not enjoy social cohesion with the insiders and so they remained on the fringes. Insider families were not individually self-sufficient socially, but rather formed the core of social life and formed self-sufficient family clusters; such social affiliations helped to strengthen inter-familial bonds (Elias and Scotson 1994: 43-50). Also, social networking could enhance social status. Social life was dominated by insiders and, whilst open to them, outsiders (with a few exceptions) did not participate in organised social activity due to the outsider-perceived domination of an insider clique (Elias and Scotson 1994: 51-70). Here Elias and Scotson (1994: 43-70) draw a picture that is recognisable in any workplace and certainly in the email communities that figure prominently in this research and the research question: that of outsider-perceived cliques, and consequent perceptions of inclusion (and exclusion) from them through conformity (and non-conformity). This demonstrates that it is possible for elites to develop and establish in the perception of outsiders, to apparently monopolise social life and to exclude outsiders: in Winston Parva these apparent aristocracies were defined in the English way where conformity is required for membership and non-conformity results in exclusion (Elias and Scotson 1994: 65-69).

The foregoing consideration illustrates how, by projection of Elias and Scotson's (1994) general paradigm to the workplace situation and the email communities within it, the existence and dynamics of them may be explained and problematised. Email communities, however, do not simply arise. There is a "motorisation process" by which they run, and that motor is the transmission of words, sentences, stories. The same can be said for conventional communities and Elias and Scotson (1994) consider this motorisation of their Winston Parva people in the context of gossip. Elias and Scotson (1994: 89-105) found that insiders' gossip characteristically, through what was considered newsworthy, was self-promoting in respect of themselves and derogatory in respect of outsiders. Also, unlike the outsiders, the insiders had highly developed gossip channels, as evidenced in the way that news about Scotson's original research got around: the researchers quickly became the subject of insider gossip whereas among the outsiders they did not, because there was no outsider gossip (Elias and Scotson 1994: 90). Among the insiders, gossip was by nature either "praise" or "blame"; both types reinforced solidarity (Elias and Scotson 1994: 89-100). Gossip, however, is not an independent entity, but something inextricably woven into the community in which it operates, facilitating the characterisation and operation of the community (Elias and Scotson 1994: 100-101), hence its description earlier in this paragraph as a motorisation process. As a factor in social formation Elias and Scotson (1994: 94-97) note in relation to gossip that hierarchies develop due to competition for the ears of listeners, with those whose gossip is the most orthodox in nature yet extreme in substance (i.e. most praising of themselves and blaming of outsiders) being the most competitive. "Competitive", however, does not equal successful: those people whose gossip was the most extreme were those who were most hierarchically insecure, whilst the gossip of those whose positions were secure

was generally characterised by proximity to the commonly held view (Elias and Scotson 1994: 94-95). In the workplace this can be equated to the newcomer who tries too hard; the newcomer could also be a new recruit or perhaps a newly promoted manager who, in the context of this research, finds himself gaining entry to a new email community and wishes to fit in, or establish himself as a central character.

Elias and Scotson (1994: 146) conclude by noting that it is possible to separate the problems of communities into economic, historical, political, religious and administrative aspects. It is also possible to ask what it is of those that are specific aspects of a community; when communities interact, it is their different experiences of these problems that distinguish them and cause them to fall into a status order (Elias and Scotson 1994: 146-147). This is what occurred in Winston Parva: it was easy for the insiders to look for and find and, through their gossip, communicate, negative aspects in relation to outsiders, and cohere in a common fear of being infected with their perceived lower standards (Elias and Scotson 1994: 147-149). In communities, insiderdom is a specific configuration where cohesion, standards and privileges are passed from generation to generation, excluding outsiders. But ask insiders if they welcome the presence of outsiders, and they will answer "no". Conversely, ask outsiders whether they welcome their situation in relation to the insiders, and they too will answer "no". Effectively they are placed in a situation which neither insiders nor outsiders can control. Insiders behave towards outsiders as their norms and traditions dictate they should behave towards deviants in their own community. This ensures there can never be harmony between them. There is a kind of inevitability with respect to insiders who, living in an "official" community, are led by situations that evolve and decisions that are taken in the development of their own "unofficial"

communities that makes more sense in the local context than does the official one (Elias and Scotson 1994: 146-156). This parallels the workplace situation, where as described in Chapters 5 and 6, alternative communities, here facilitated by email, develop to make sense of what are perceived by actors to be local realities. And like the people of Winston Parva, they develop with their own hierarchies, alignments, antipathies and relative statuses.

In completion of the general paradigm, this pattern of social development is not uncommon. In instances of social mobility, newcomers are often cast as outsiders. If the newcomers have visible differences these issues are typically cast as racial problems. If language is the distinguishing factor, the issue is cast as one of ethnic minorities. Social differences are cast as class issues, etc. None of these were evident in Winston Parva, but the situation there bore similarities with other instances (Elias and Scotson 1994: 157-158).

Newcomers will always try to improve their situation, whilst the established will seek to preserve theirs. The established – long-standing insiders – are usually more powerful and able to ostracise deviants within their own community and stamp their superiority on the newcomers' self-image and their view of themselves by characterisation of themselves according to the minority of the best, and characterisation of the newcomers according to the minority of the worst. In a socially mobile world people are apt to imagine pre-industrial immobile communities as being the ideal type. The Winston Parva example shows that there are drawbacks in both social mobility and immobility. Investigations such as that of Winston Parva may lead to more realistic approaches in this respect. Clearly social mobility is a

wider phenomenon than the currently accepted understanding of people moving from one social class to another. Also prejudice is not an isolated phenomenon, but one ingrained in the community in which it resides (Elias and Scotson 1994: 156-162).

Support for the insider-outsider social habitus concept

The work of Elias and Scotson (1994) has been strongly relied upon in developing the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) for the purposes of this research, however the concept also receives support from other authors. Representatives of these are considered in this section.

Elias and Scotson's (1994) general paradigm bears comparison with Azzam et al's (2007) study of the reactions of young adults to outsiders. Here it was found that individuals will perceive a greater threat when the rival is an immigrant, rather than coming from a native-born group (Azzam et al 2007: 665). Significantly this threat, when measured, was found to be inversely proportional to the level of perceived power felt by the individual, and so when insider-outsiderdom is considered as a matter of degree rather than an absolute, self-perceived power is found to have a moderating influence (Azzam et al 2007: 665-666). This study was carried out in 2006-7 in California, and the subjects were US college students, but the findings bear startling resemblance to those of Willis (1977) in his study of West Midlands teenagers. Here, the outsiders believe in the nobility, honesty and desirability of manual labour, yet experience the visibly accelerating decline in the industries that provide the opportunities they seek (Willis 1977: 99-116). Their situation is especially poignant: formerly insiders, they now find themselves to be outsiders in the

community they inhabit, even though they are representative of the majority group (Willis 1977: 14-22 and 166-169). The insiders, those whose attitudes and expectations are more attuned to their post-industrial environment, are viewed by the outsiders as a threat, even though both groups' geographical, social and economic origins and life-chances are more-or-less identical (Willis 1977: 4-6). The findings, in respect of the outsiders as people with low self-perceived power, correspond to those of Azzam et al (2007) in that the people concerned perceive themselves as outsiders, yet carry strong antipathetic views with respect to immigrants (Willis 1977: 47-49) and to some extent with respect to women (Willis 1977: 43-47), who also represent a threat in the coming post-industrial times for which women, with their different ambitions, appear to the outsiders to be much better suited (Willis 1977: 147-152).

The insider-outsider social habitus concept with respect to email

Drawing focus from the generally applicable to the specific, revisiting the work of Khoo and Senn (2004), Kibby (2005) and Skovholt and Svennevig (2006), each examined in *The structural culture concept* and *Organisational rules* above, shows how the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) explored above relates to email and the issues surrounding it. The basic differences between men and women and their consequent different reactions to unsolicited, frequently sexually hostile email creates an insider/outsider divide along gender lines, with women being cast as the outsiders (Khoo and Senn 2004: 204-206). The community nature of email – the self-appointment of insiders – appears in studies of email groups, characterised as "fostering detachment" (Sipior and Ward 1999: 91 in Kibby 2005: 772) and the maintenance of group identity (Kibby 2005: 774). By the selection of an addressee in

the "to" field of an email, and secondary recipients in the "cc" field, the sender is assigning full insider and secondary insider roles to some, and by exclusion outsider roles to others (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 48). This echoes Clark's (1992: 218 in Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 47) participation roles in normal speech of speaker, addressees and participants, which in turn bears favourable comparison with, respectively, the insiders of Winston Parva with their internal elite and non-elite subdivisions, and the wholly non-elite outsiders (Elias and Scotson 1994: 35-41). And so the circle of the paradigmatic and the focused subject matter is joined; this conceptual joining of the insider-outsider social habitus paradigm (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) with the subject matter of this research is revisited and features strongly in Chapters 5 and 6.

As a postscript to this section it is worth mentioning that, notwithstanding the volatile motivations towards the formation and sustenance of email groups identified by Khoo and Senn (2004), Kibby (2005), Sipior and Ward (1999) and Skovholt and Svennevig (2006), evidence for factors that disadvantage email groups compared to their face-to-face counterparts is offered by Alpay (2005) in his enquiry into the effectiveness of email groups in learning situations. Alpay (2005: 8-10) discovered that the formation of formal groups for the purpose of study requires greater central facilitation due to the remoteness of members leading to the making of assumptions among them, for example individuals within a formal email group may not feel motivated to contribute if they feel that other group members are not pulling their weight. Also, group activities, such as brainstorming, that rely for successful outcomes on spontaneity on the part of the members, are less effective in formal email groups due to the greater need for central facilitation and the inherent physical remoteness of members (Alpay

2005: 11-12). These findings, dealing as they do with formal, organised study groups, raise the question of just how sustainable organically arising email communities can be (Alpay 2005: 13). This is explored in Chapters 5 and 6. Alpay's (2005: 10-11) findings also raise the question of how useful email is as a means of study in a formal setting. Chapter 3 examines this from an organisational perspective, both in terms of how responsible managers can use email in the cause of learning, and also how they need to inform their people about email usage in the light of the issues of insiderdom and exclusion explored here. Importantly, as this research not only concerns email but uses email in its execution, the implications for Alpay's findings in this respect are examined in Chapter 4.

Summary

In terms of the research question, where the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) described in *Culture as an organisational concept* above provides a utilitarian conception of culture, the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), with its identification of gossip as prime motivator, identifies the community element – set out in the research question as "email communities" – and, importantly, sets out a means of conceptualising and understanding them that is not only applicable to the analysis of this research, but is also philosophically sustainable.

Conclusion

The *Introduction* to this Chapter began by setting out the research question:

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

This Chapter has sought to examine existing literature around the first part of the research question – that concerned with "organisational culture". Beginning with the general concept of "culture" to consideration of "organisational culture", two distinct threads have been drawn out, that of a reified structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001, Deal and Kennedy 1982), and that of a dynamic, insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept is, from an organisational management perspective, pragmatic. It is, however, problematic on philosophical and methodological bases (Baskerville 2003, Garsten 1994, McSweeney 2002, Williamson 2002), and the way in which its uncritical acceptance can lead to the sidelining of deep-seated cultural issues (Currie 2008), yet it cannot be set aside due to its influence generally and its influence in informing the conceptualisation of "organisational culture" for participants in this research. For this reason the structural culture concept is included in this research as a contrast to the philosophically superior insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Flowing from this model in the context of email is problematisation from the point of view of rules and legislation (Levene 1997, Shea 1996, Spence 2002, Christacopoulos 1999, Stokely 2007), privacy (Australian Federal Privacy Commissioner 2000, Friedman and Reed 2007, Miller

and Weckert 2000, Woodbury 1998), and values and behaviour (Khoo and Senn 2004, Kibby 2005, Alpay 2005).   Conversely other authors' research contexts revealed no problems (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006, Thomas and James 1999).

The insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), however, provides a rigorous and sustainable base for academic research and hence forms the primary concept within the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1. Within this concept, email is not so much bound by constructed structural culture models or rules as emergent from individuals' experience, values, self-identification and sensibilities – the facets that determine their insider and outsider statuses in relation to it.

Here in this Chapter are presented two concepts, one of which, the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), draws its inspiration from qualitative observation, interpretation and reflection; the other of which, the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) with its adjunct in the form of organisational rules, is based on the outcomes of a quantitative study conducted within a single international company.   Given such different origins, it is hardly surprising that the two concepts do not at first sight intersect or engage with each other.   Yet both concepts co-exist within organisations and society.   Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva had its static political structure as well as its dynamic, gossip-driven pushing, pulling and ever-changing social phenomena.   Willis' (1977) "lads" knew formal hierarchies of teachers and parents as well as experiencing the subtle and fluid effects of creeping social displacement due to external pressures and fears.   On the other hand, Hofstede's

(2001) IBM must have had its Eliasian phenomena, as indeed must the organisations considered by Deal and Kennedy (1982). Significantly, however, the structural culture concept is blind to the activity of the insider-outsider phenomena carrying on in its midst, whilst the insider-outsider phenomena sideline the structural culture concept to varying degrees of irrelevancy. This tortuous relationship – the only way in which the two concepts interact – is revealed in the stories told by the participants in this research.

Here concludes the literature review in respect of organisational culture. The research question, however, consists of two parts. The literature around the second part – that concerned with organisational learning – forms the consideration of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT:

A LITERATURE REVIEW IN RESPECT OF ORGANISATIONAL

LEARNING

Introduction

As explained at the beginning of Chapter 2, the research question falls into two parts. The research question is as follows.

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

Chapter 2 examined the existing literature around the "organisational culture" part of the research question, drawing out two concepts. The first, the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), is a static, reified model that suits the purposes of organisational practitioners. It enables the setting of rules, explains the application of them and the application of relevant legislation. The second, the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), is a dynamic concept suitable for research and analysis. It is necessary to consider both of these as the first accords with the understanding of the participants in this research in certain contexts (being, as they are, organisational practitioners of various kinds), whilst the second is important as it also accords with the conceptualisation of participants in certain other contexts. In Chapter 2 it was also explained that the insider-outsider social habitus concept is necessary to this research

in order to achieve academic rigour, conceptual validity and analytical depth and relevance in a social science context.

This Chapter examines the second part of the question; that concerned with organisational learning. The Chapter begins by considering the literature around two concepts that flow from the structural culture (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) concepts drawn out in Chapter 2. The first of these, the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998), bears comparison with the structural culture concept. The second, the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991), bears comparison with the insider-outsider social habitus concept. This is illustrated in the two vertical threads of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1. As with Chapter 2, each concept is explored before being applied to email and the research question.

Mapped conceptually, this Chapter appears as follows.

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │  Introduction   │
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                          /             \
┌──────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ The Knowledge Management │   │ The Situated Learning Concept │
│ Concept                  │   │ •  The situated learning │
│ •  The knowledge         │   │    concept and its parallels │
│    management concept, and│  │    with the insider-outsider │
│    its parallels with the│   │    social habitus concept │
│    structural culture    │   │ •  Critical appraisal of the │
│    concept               │   │    situated learning concept │
│ •  Applicability of the  │   │ •  The situated learning │
│    knowledge management  │   │    concept further developed │
│    concept               │   │ •  The situated learning │
│ •  The knowledge         │   │    concept with respect to │
│    management concept with│  │    email │
│    respect to email      │   │ │
└──────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────────┘
              \                     /
              ┌──────────────────────────┐
              │ Comparison and           │
              │ contextualisation of     │
              │ the knowledge            │
              │ management and           │
              │ situated learning        │
              │ concepts                 │
              └──────────────────────────┘
                          │
                   ┌─────────────────┐
                   │   Conclusion    │
                   └─────────────────┘
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This conceptual map derives from the conceptual framework of Chapter 1.

Literature considered in this Chapter was sought using key-word search criteria as follows: commodification; community/communities of practice; core; email community/communities; emotion; emotional intelligence; identity/identities; individual knowledge; informal learning; knowledge management; knowledge market; learning; legitimate peripheral participation; non-formal learning; participation; peripheral/periphery; situated learning; tacit knowledge.

These key-word search criteria were used singly and in Boolean combinations in electronic resources including ATHENS and those provided by the University of Leicester library.

Here follows a critical review of the existing literature that forms the background in respect of organisational learning to the research that follows in Chapters 5 and 6. The volume of the existing literature is such that exhaustive consideration here is impracticable. What follows considers that which is most influential in the research area, as guided by the exigencies of this research. Where the preferences of this author may become manifest is not at the selection/omission stage, but in the critical review aspect – it is hoped that such preferences may be transparent and fully explained. In common with other ethnographic work, however, the research exigencies are set ultimately by the participants.

It should be noted, however, that the standpoint taken in this research favours the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991), flowing as it does from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) of Chapter 2 and sharing that concept's qualities in respect of academic rigour, conceptual validity and analytical depth and relevance in a social science context.

However, the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) is included due to its role in forming the understanding of participants in this research.

The knowledge management concept

The knowledge management concept, and its parallels with the structural culture concept

This section considers literature central to the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998), and the literature concerned with its general applicability and specific applicability to email.

Organisations like to weigh and measure as it gives them criteria for determining success and failure so, for the same reasons as they favour Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept, they are attracted to a concept that permits the packaging of learning into something that can be "delivered". Davenport and Prusak (1998) conceptualise an objectified knowledge, consisting of information that has been compared, connected-up with other information and discussed. Within Davenport and Prusak's (1998: 1-6) conceptualisation, information is in turn made up of data (for example, raw statistics) that have been processed, categorised and contextualised. Further, they posit the idea of a knowledge market, whereby that which people know is bought, sold, brokered, borrowed, lent and given (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 25-51). That Davenport and Prusak are, respectively, the Director of the Accenture Institute for Strategic Change and the Executive Director of the IBM Institute for Knowledge Management is telling in their way of addressing the problem of learning – it is organised around the needs of organisations, just as is Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept.

It is therefore not surprising that Davenport and Prusak's (1988) contribution is as central to this knowledge management concept as is Hofstede's (1997, 2001) to the

structural culture concept. These contributions to the literature around the "organisational culture" and "organisational learning" parts of the research question comprise the same vertical thread of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1.

Applicability of the knowledge management concept

Davenport and Prusak (1998: 162-178) are writing for managers, and illustrate this by lavish use of anecdotes from the likes of Monsanto, BP, Coca-Cola and Chrysler; they use terms such as "win rates" and "losses of key personnel" designed to be of relevance to managers, and indeed in their conclusions they take the trouble to address managers directly with practical advice such as "convert the knowledge you manage into cold, hard figures, cash the company has made or saved…". Similarly Serban and Luan (2002: 5) state, in the abstract of their overview of knowledge management, that the aim is to "… achieve efficiencies, ensure competitive advantage and spur innovation." Such reification of learning and knowledge that knowledge management represents can be easily challenged and criticised, but its value to managers searching for strategies and solutions is difficult to deny. And, as with the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), it has relevance for participants in this research in certain contexts.

The knowledge management concept with respect to email

Davenport and Prusak (1998: 45-46), however, having quantified and commodified knowledge, warn against relying too heavily on the rigid structures of information technology in applying their knowledge-market paradigm, on the ground that knowledge is too fluid for such application. This admission of fluidity for knowledge

represents a remarkable departure from their main point of pinning knowledge down. They suggest the setting up of knowledge "yellow pages" on organisations' intranet sites (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 131-132) – something that occurs widely at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, but which was more novel at the time they were writing. Certainly with regard to the use of email this approach – the addressing of email's problems through its own electronic medium – would appear to be logical, since one can reasonably assume that email users would have access to and knowledge of their organisation's intranet. They do, however, caution that the technology must be used to its full advantage, noting by reference to (and contradiction of) McLuhan's (1964: 61) assertion that "the medium is the message" that having the best and most up-to-date technology will not ensure the quality of the information (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 4). Without information technology, however, the theory of knowledge management would have remained just that, and would not have enjoyed its rapid take-up within organisations (Serban and Luan 2002: 6-7).

The situated learning concept

The situated learning concept, and its parallels with the insider-outsider social habitus concept

This section considers the literature central to a situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991) that links to the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) of Chapter 2, and in doing so completes one vertical thread of the conceptual framework of Chapter 1. Here the literature central to the concept is joined by the literature that critically

appraises the concept, shows it in action generally and with respect to email specifically is presented.

The insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) is evident in Lave and Wenger's (1991: 34-37) concept of a dynamic core and periphery in workplace-situated learning, where those whose personal viewpoints place them in peripheral positions with respect to others, working towards a core whose members may themselves feel, in some respects at least, peripheral. As with the "insiders" and "outsiders" of the insider-outsider social habitus concept, the "core" and "periphery" here are not static constructs, but a way of understanding the transitions that people make as they learn and develop in their workplace roles. This notion of constant organisational change and constant personal reinterpretation accurately represents workplaces in constant flux and consequently continually learning, as indeed many workplaces appear to their constituent individuals to be (Deal and Kennedy 1982: 157-176). The core-periphery concept is not a new one, having been successfully utilised in economic-oriented explanations of employment in capitalist societies to identify "insiders" and "outsiders" (Davis 1994). The application of this concept in the organisational learning context appears to have substantially pre-dated the economic application in the form of Vygotsky's (1978) identification of learning as a fundamentally socially located activity, which he termed "situated learning". It is from this base that Lave and Wenger (1991) developed their concept of occupational and workplace learning as a community of practice (the insiders, or core) with a corresponding group engaged in legitimate peripheral participation (the outsiders, or periphery). The legitimate peripheral participants are those who are at the learning stages of their careers, for example

junior doctors and industrial apprentices. Unlike Elias and Scotson's (1994) outsiders, these outsiders – so long as they adhere to the expectations and norms of their craft – are accepted, hence the "legitimate" label. Within the notion of a "career structure", i.e. the expectations and milestones set out for legitimate peripheral participants, the insider-outsider horizon is at least bounded and their movement between statuses is at least guided, unlike the case in Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva, where the situation was complex and the participants had only their wits to guide them around such indefinable and nuanced criteria as "neighbourhood norms" (Elias and Scotson 1994: 50). However, by considering the community of practice and the legitimate peripheral participants in the context of the insider-outsider social habitus concept it is easy to distinguish that workplace learning is not merely a matter of doing the job and reading the books – it involves social interaction and the developing of position and professional identity (Lave and Wenger 1991: 52-54). The gaining of the respect that comes with position and professional identity certainly involves the development and demonstration of competency, but it also involves interacting and sharing in communal memory (Lave and Wenger 1991: 109 and 121-123) or, as Elias and Scotson (1994: 103-105) would put it, gossiping.

Critical appraisal of the situated learning concept

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning concept has been thoroughly tested by case studies carried out by Fuller et al (2005) in the disparate arenas of the steel industry and secondary schools, and by Fuller and Unwin (2003) in an associated study of modern apprenticeships. "Modern apprenticeships" are comparable to traditional apprenticeships but with the addition of central government as stakeholder (in terms of both specification and partial funding) and regulator (Fuller and Unwin

2003: 409). In the three industrial settings Fuller et al (2005) found different experiences which they categorised as expansive and restrictive. "Expansive" describes that which creates fully rounded members of the relevant community of practice, possessing transferable skills and party to communal memory (Fuller et al 2005: 56-58). "Restrictive" describes that which secures trainees with narrow, task-based knowledge that is in turn passed on to more junior trainees; and that where training is wholly informal and on-the-job, and where membership of the community of practice is achieved wholly by moving into vacancies as they arise, whenever they arise (Fuller et al 2005: 58-59 and Fuller and Unwin 2003: 419-423). In four school settings, learning that was understood by participants within the situated learning concept was consistently evident, although the evidence for legitimate peripheral participation was patchy, being more adaptable according to new entrants' skills and experience; for example, a head of department who was parachuted in as a full member of the history department's community of practice found himself in the role of learner due to being unfamiliar with local processes (Fuller et al 2005: 62). Interestingly, the department where learning that was understood by participants within the situated learning concept was most clearly formalised was the IT department, where the members may have experienced (or at least to have been influenced by) the formal structure of the traditional industrial apprenticeship (Fuller et al 2005: 59-63).

Fuller et al (2005: 65-67) conclude that, whilst Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation is generally useful, it fails to address the case of legitimate peripheral participants other than those who are new, "clean slates", and underestimates learners' influence in setting the tenor of legitimate peripheral

participation, underestimates the importance of formal learning and underestimates the influence of power relation factors. This view is echoed by Lawy (2000) in his case study of a plumbing apprentice. Lawy (2000: 601) found that, far from the apprentice who was the subject of his case study being a clean slate, he was in fact the product of his environment and experience which, even at a young age, was influential – learning is not merely the absorption of skill and information, but a personal social evolution. Succinctly and elegantly, "learning is becoming" (Nixon et al 1996 in Lawy 2000: 601), a finding borne out by Billet and Somerville (2004) in their study of workers' identities. A mechanic will not become a mechanic by learning to use tools in college – the mechanic becomes a mechanic by working alongside other mechanics, interacting with them and becoming "accepted" through the understanding of mechanics' socialisation and the conscious adoption of certain behaviours that constitute the behavioural norms of mechanics (Billet and Somerville 2004: 315-317). The case studies of Fuller et al (2005), Fuller and Unwin (2003), Lawy (2000) and Billet and Somerville (2004) are supported in the context of individual versus organisational learning by Popper and Lipshitz, (2000: 192) who identify *inter alia* the need for learning mechanisms within a learning culture and Hong (1999: 183-184) and Owenby (2002: 58-59), who identify the need for organisational structures that support learning. The influential traffic is not, however, all in one direction: the cultures of occupations also evolve due to the contributions of newcomers (Billet and Somerville 2004: 317-321).

The situated learning concept further developed

Eraut (2000: 116) considers this in some detail, setting out situated learning, or "non-formal" learning, as a combination of tacit understanding, routinised actions and the

application of tacit rules in relation to the doing of work. Eraut (2000) draws on the work of Dreyfus (1986) relating to skill acquisition where, across five levels, level 1 represents the novice whose work is typified by strict adherence to rules, and level 5 represents the expert whose work is typified by intuition and vision, and analysis is only necessary in novel situations. Eraut's (2000) concept of tacit understanding is that which exists across all five of Dreyfus' (1986) skills levels and is based mainly on experience. Routinised actions are developed in the transition from level 1 to the level of competence, level 3, its purpose being to enable effective functioning in busy situations – in other words being able to act and decide without having to think too hard (Eraut 2006: 2). Lastly the application of tacit rules, which enable apparently automatic responses to situations (Eraut 2006: 2), are in fact not automatic at all, but consist of the seeing of big-picture patterns accompanied by the application of experience and understanding. These are not, however, uniform responses due to each individual bringing their own experience and career context to each situation (Eraut 2000: 113).

The combination of tacit understanding, routinised actions and tacit rules – "tacit knowledge" – including its biases, is largely gained through social intercourse, personal theorisation and routinisation rendered tacit by repetition (Eraut 2000: 123 and 2006: 2). Eraut (2000: 123-125) argues that tacit knowledge has a role to play in its apparent opposite – explicit knowledge and traditional decision-making. This takes the form of interpreting individual cases against a background of general evidence. This is Eraut's (2000: 125-126) reconciliation of these apparent opposites, and extends to theory-based decision-making, which always includes the influence of previous experience. This can be encapsulated in the term "rapid intuitive decision-

making by experts". Eraut (2000: 126-127) makes clear, however, that in implicit knowledge-based decision-making, reflective deliberation is an important element. It is partly explicit (i.e. a conscious action) and implicit (i.e. a reflexive action). The balance of these processes is determined by the time available for and the "crowdedness" of, i.e. the amount of other stuff going on around, the action in question (Eraut 2000: 121-130).

Eraut (2000: 130-133) then considers how "personal" is a person's individual knowledge. He cites the example of workplace culture that survives changes in personnel, leading to the concept of situated knowledge. The existence of situated knowledge demonstrates that personal knowledge contains elements of social knowledge (Eraut 2000: 130-133). This illustrates that knowledge is to an appreciable extent a shared dynamic process and is not, as some constructions set it out to be, an individually tradable commodity (Sfard 1998: 5-6). "Knowledge gained is constructed in a social context whose influence on what is learned, as well as how it is learned, cannot be denied"; "knowledge" here clearly encompasses both the explicit and implicit, but knowledge is not only received but contributed, and individuals' differing social and educational histories contribute to the diversity of situated knowledge (Eraut 2000: 130-132).

Eraut (2000: 134-135) concludes that by drawing out tacit knowledge into becoming explicit knowledge, the performance of individuals and teams may be improved, knowledge may be more effectively communicated, links may be made between actions and outcomes, and decision-making models may be developed.

The situated learning concept with respect to email

The tacit knowledge concept as described above provides a direct link from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) to the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991), and provides an opportunity to connect with the subject matter of this research inasmuch as it concerns the dealing-with of the problems of organisational email use explicated in the earlier sections of this Chapter. What Eraut (2000: 134-135) makes clear in his conclusions is that it is not sufficient to develop a policy, propagate it and apply it. Within the insider-outsider social habitus and situated learning concepts the social acts of gossiping, of drawing the tacit into the explicit, getting at the values of the protagonists, is essential. That gossip is a significant feature of email use places these concepts at the centre of the argument concerning remedies for the problems of organisational email. The problems of email gossip within the context of communities of practice are addressed by Schwartz (1999: 599) who, drawing on general concerns regarding validity in communication noted by Habermas (1981), asserts that in organisations comprehensibility, truth, trustworthiness and appropriateness are all put at risk through communication in email form. Bourhis et al (2005) examined this in their case study of ten email-facilitated communities of practice. Whilst real- (as opposed to virtual-) world communities of practice can succeed through natural evolution (Wenger and Snyder 2000 in Bourhis et al 2005: 23), success for email communities relies significantly on motivational leadership (Bourhis et al 2005: 33). In the terms used hereto this can be expressed as gossip providing the medium which, as Elias and Scotson (1994) have shown, allows real-world communities to evolve, whereas this is not enough on its own for email communities, which require leadership. This is crucial in using email communities to

resolve their own difficulties: as explained in Chapter 2, unguided communities develop their own characteristics which can include, for example, illegal behaviour (Stokely 2007) and sexism (Khoo and Senn 2004) – difficulties which, together with the rules-based remedies offered by these authors, can be addressed intra-community by leadership (Bourhis et al 2005). This is not to say, however, that leadership will displace rules (Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000: 273). Leadership, of course, imports consideration of personal characteristics into the discussion: this is addressed by Hughes (2001) who, drawing on the work of Goleman (1999), conceptualises these characteristics as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence comprises honesty, openness, lack of fear, non-judgemental attitudes and self awareness (Goleman 1999: 26-27; Hughes 2001: 16-19), and manifests itself in intelligent and individually appropriate flexibility, negotiability and leniency in interaction, opposition and co-operation (Hughes 2010: 44-45). Like situated learning, these manifestations of emotional intelligence can be traced to Elias' conceptualisation of individuals in relation to others (Hughes 2010: 32) – see diagram *A figuration of interdependent individuals (family, state, group, society, etc.)* under *An analytic, rather than merely utilitarian, alternative "social habitus" concept of "insiders" and "outsiders"* in Chapter 2. Leaders, therefore, should be emotionally literate practitioners guiding individuals and organisations to fulfil their goals (Goleman 1999: 183-185; Hughes 2001: 26-29). Indeed, emotion is a function of power relations – a potent combination that can act effectively for leaders (Vince 2001: 1325).

Comparison and contextualisation of the two organisational learning concepts

Clearly Davenport and Prusak's (1998) concept of how knowledge may be managed conflicts with the learning concept proposed by Eraut (2000 and 2006). In the context

of this research it seems unlikely that Davenport and Prusak's (1998) guidance will address the problems of, for example, email's role in the creation of division along gender lines, with women being cast as the outsiders (Khoo and Senn 2004: 204-206); the fostering of detachment (Sipior and Ward 1999: 91 in Kibby 2005: 772) and the maintenance of group identity (Kibby 2005: 774); and email's function, by its "addressee" and "copy to" facilities in constructing exclusion (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 48) and participation (Clark 1992: 218 in Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 47) as described in Chapter 2. And here is the point: the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)/situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991) connection suggested here addresses the problems of organisations in relation to their people, and those people's problems with each other, all in the context of organisational email. The structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001)/knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) connection also suggested here addresses the problems of business management, albeit within the same email context. Easterby-Smith (1997: 1085-1086) notes this cross-disciplinary confusion and argues against its resolution on the grounds of conflicting ontologies, but whilst it would be easy to say that these are different concerns, each with their own exigencies in the workplace and their own approaches and philosophy in the academic world, to do so is to ignore the problems of people working in organisations who are subjected to organisational remedies that constitute, as will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6, a story of conflation of approaches in their application to problems and the finding of remedies.

This section completes the exploration of the research question by defining email communities in an organisational learning context. As with the consideration of

culture in Chapter 2, two distinct concepts emerge, one of learning as something commodified and tradeable, the other of learning as something personal to the individual. Links have been made between the popular structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) on one hand, and the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) and the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991) on the other.

Conclusion

The *Introduction* to this Chapter began by setting out the research question:

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

This Chapter has sought to examine existing literature around the second part of the research question – that concerned with organisational learning. This was done within contexts that flow from those set out in Chapter 2.

Emergent from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) is the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998). Like its counterpart of Chapter 2, knowledge management provides a reified model that is useful for practitioners (Serban and Luan 2002) but misses the points concerning individuals. Emergent from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) is the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger

1991). This situated learning concept (Vygotsky 1978, Lave and Wenger 1991, Eraut 2000, 2006) addresses the concerns of individuals and, like its counterpart of Chapter 2, provides an academically robust and sociologically situated concept upon which this research may be founded. The standpoint taken in this research favours the situated learning concept, flowing as it does from the insider-outsider social habitus concept of Chapter 2 and sharing that concept's qualities in respect of academic rigour, conceptual validity and analytical depth and relevance in a social science context.

However, the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) has been included due to its role in forming the understanding of participants in this research.

In the context of the research question – that concerning organisational email – it has been shown that within the structural culture (Hofstede 1997, 2001)/knowledge management (Davenport and Prusak 1998) vertical thread of the conceptual frame developed in Chapter 1, learning will be pre-prepared, quantified and delivered in response to and aimed at preventing the transgression of rules concerning email usage. Within the insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)/situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) vertical thread of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1, learning will be organic and characterised not so much by stated values as emergent from sensibilities and individual histories and, being so individual, is better made to address individual concerns (Khoo and Senn 2004, Sipior and Ward 1999, Kibby 2005, Skovholt and Svennevig 2006, Clark 1992, Bourhis et al 2005, Wenger and Snyder 2000). The

logical pinnacle of this concept is emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001, Vince 2001).

By way of conclusion to the literature review of Chapter 2 and this Chapter 3, the concepts for the research that follows may be mapped as follows. This representation combines, in simplified form, the conceptual maps shown at the beginning of these Chapters.

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Introduction   │
                    └─────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
          │  The structural  │   │  The insider-outsider│
          │  culture concept │   │  social habitus concept│
          └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────────┘
                    ┌─────────┐
                    │  Rules  │
                    └─────────┘
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                    │   Conclusion    │
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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Introduction   │
                    └─────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
          │  The knowledge   │   │  The situated learning│
          │management concept│   │       concept        │
          └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Comparison and  │
                    │ contextualisation│
                    └─────────────────┘
          ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
          │                Conclusion                  │
          └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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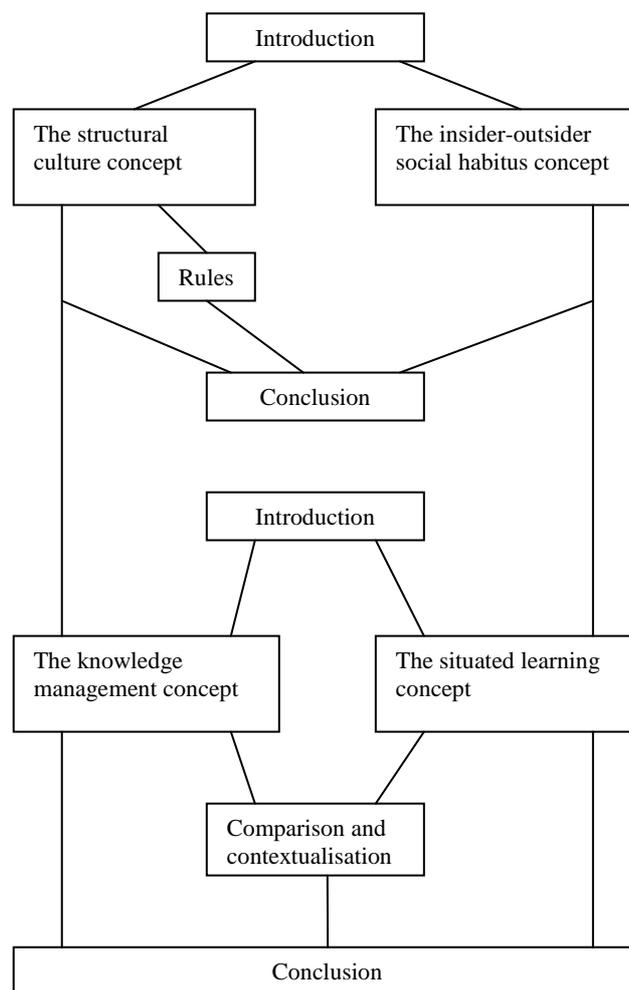
The conceptual maps of Chapters 2 and 3 and their combination represented above bear comparison with the conceptual framework for the research developed in Chapter 1.

Having by means of the preceding literature reviews set the context within which the research is to be accomplished, it is necessary now to consider ways and means. Whilst the two competing vertical threads of the conceptual framework of Chapter 1 are relevant in respect of data gathering and analysis, they must not be ontologically conflated (Easterby-Smith 1997). Consideration of these ways and means, and how they develop within this philosophical stricture, follows in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research sets out to examine "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

The research question concerns organisational culture and organisational learning. The background to these was set out in the literature reviews of Chapters 2 and 3. In these Chapters two themes emerged. The first, the structural culture (Hofstede 1997, 2001)/knowledge management (Davenport and Prusak 1998) concept, focuses on matters of importance to organisations and that will, in some contexts, inform the conceptualisation of participants in this research. The second, the insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)/situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991), provides a basis for analysis and understanding and also features in participants' conceptualisation. These themes, emergent from consideration of the existing literature, form a conceptual framework within which this research is to be conducted. This conceptual framework is fully explained in Chapter 1.

The literature of the subject matter is, however, not the only consideration in relation to this research. The method used to conduct the research has its own body of literature, which is considered in this Chapter. The method chosen is that of evocative ethnography and evocative autoethnography, each of which is explained below.

The methodological standpoint of this research is, philosophically, firmly located within evocative ethnography and evocative autoethnography, as will be fully explained in this Chapter.

The literature of the various forms of ethnography and autoethnography is the first consideration of this Chapter, followed by the literature concerning the particular concerns of evocative ethnography and its validity and authenticity when conducted online. Like any methodology, evocative ethnography and evocative autoethnography have their own ethical concerns in addition to those applicable to social research generally, the literature of which is then considered.

Against this methodology literature background and the ethical considerations stands the research design. Here the general in relation to evocative ethnography, evocative autoethnography and ethical considerations becomes the specific in relation to this research. There then follows description of the execution of the research design, leading into the presentation of initial data and its analysis in Chapter 5.

Ethnography in its various forms

Ethnography originated in 19th and early 20th century anthropology. In its early form, inspired by an interest in the outside world that emerged from commercial and imperial adventures, ethnography involved European researchers travelling to far away places to study people who lived simpler, purer lives. By this means anthropologists sought to understand humanity in its raw form, without the overlying complexities arising from extensive interaction between peoples and technology that muddied understanding of social relations in their own countries. By visiting and

immersing themselves within cultures different from their own, anthropologists sought, as ethnographers do today, to achieve understanding of their subjects through participation in their lives. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1 in Hine 2000: 41) describe the work of the ethnographer as "participating… in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions". The aim is to achieve understanding rather than simply gathering data. Ryle (1984 in Geertz 1993: 6-8), elegantly explains this difference by consideration of the act of winking. At its simplest, a wink may be described as the closing of an eye and, were someone who had only superficially observed winking to be asked to describe a wink, "the closing of an eye" is probably the answer they would give. By participating in winking and experiencing being winked at by other people, however, the participant soon learns that winking may be *inter alia* conspiratorial, flirtatious, an involuntary facial tic, or may even be a lampooning of conspiratoriality, implying a conspiracy where there is none. Such participation is the role of the ethnographer: to go beyond the asking of questions and the recording of things that are done, to understand why people do the things they do in the context in which those things are done, and to reveal the meanings therein.

Early anthropology and ethnography were realist-based: that is, they assumed that the cultures and situations being studied possessed realities independent of the researcher (Potter 2000: 245). Whilst some ethnography remains realist, postmodern understanding challenges the realist anchors that hold social science to its realist bedrock and highlights the limitations of realist concepts concerning the cultures and situations of research subjects. Researchers become increasingly sensitive to the effect that their own cultural backgrounds and *a priori* assumptions or habitus

(Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) might have on their interpretation of the cultures of their research subjects, and on the ways in which readers of their work may in turn bring their own contexts to bear upon their own interpretations. Returning to the analogy of the previous paragraph, this is the act of winking subjected to successive interpretation by the ethnographer and his readers as "winks upon winks upon winks", with the purity of the ethnography being successively diluted by increasing time and degrees of separation (Geertz 1993: 7-10).

From this challenge to the *a priori* assumptions of researchers and their readers it is but a short step to challenging the effect that researchers have on their research subjects. By immersing themselves in unfamiliar cultures, anthropologists sought to live the lives of their subjects. What they saw, however, was the culture of their subjects influenced by their habitus (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) within it. As a result of ethnographers' understanding of this influence, postmodern ethnography has consciously moved from being the realist-based study of independently existing things with strong positivist underpinnings – effectively social science with the emphasis on "science" – to an interpretivist phenomenon subject to influence and dilution from both within and without. The logical step forward has been for postmodern ethnographers to allow research subjects into their lives in the same way that they enter the lives of their subjects. Subjects become participants; researchers too, become participants. It is not going too far to say that participants on both sides of the increasingly indistinct subject-researcher divide have become co-researchers in what Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualise as a "community of practice" in the research project.

Dunning and Hughes (forthcoming: 262-263) recount how in a study concerning *The Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*, Elias encouraged a research practice that encouraged depth, and involvement and reflexivity on the part of researchers (Goodwin and O'Connor 2006). Elias' views on methodology were, like so many of his guiding concepts, based around process and development; indeed he found the notion of a research method determined upon in advance of beginning research – a "methodology" – unhelpful, preferring to allow a kind of method-as-process to develop as guided by the discoveries of the research (Dunning and Hughes (forthcoming: 265-266). Even with this conceptual difficulty arising when setting out a methodology for this research, it seems logical and consistent to draw on the work of Elias as primary contributor to the conceptual framework of Chapter 1 in order to conduct this research. The insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) arrived at in Chapter 2 offers a means by which the social effects of organisational email may be analysed. Similarly, the situated learning concept of Vygotsky (1978) and Lave and Wenger (1991), associated with the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation in the conceptual framework of Chapter 1, offers a means by which participants' suggested remedies may be analysed. As Elias did not confine his work to a predetermined method, it is difficult to label him methodologically, however his work in Winston Parva (Elias and Scotson 1994), the work around which the conceptual framework of this research is built, bears the characteristics of an ethnography, and its analysis can be considered to be ethnographic. With this in mind it seems sensible to make use of the terms "ethnography" and its derivative "autoethnography" to carry forward the consideration of the methodology for this research.

There are other, practical reasons for making use of this methodology. Willis' (1977) study of teenage boys at a Midlands school, and Elias and Scotson's (1994) study of the Leicestershire community of Winston Parva are popular not only because they provide fascinating entries into the lives of participants in a way that quantitative studies cannot, but because of their readability. Willis' (1977) data reads almost like a play or a film-script, with the analysis corralled into a section entirely separate from the main text in order not to interrupt the flow of the story. Elias and Scotson's (1994) work similarly has a flow characteristic of storytelling, with analysis occurring at the end of each chapter. Each work can be read to a depth suited to the needs of the reader, whether the reader is the casual observer of social life or the academic researcher. In practical terms, ethnography and autoethnography represent a methodology likely to yield original findings in an area not usually subjected to this treatment. Despite these powerful advantages, however, ethnography at the beginning of the 21st century is considered by a significant body of ethnographers and critics of ethnography alike to be a discipline in crisis (Hine 2000: 42).

What the critics and ethnographers cannot agree upon is the nature of the crisis they identify. Denzin (2002: 482-483) explicates the crisis as being three-legged, each leg being representation, legitimation and praxis. This approach is essentially postmodernist and interpretivist, representing the most extreme divergence from realist approaches. There can be no representation that is not rendered equivocal by the influence of the ethnographer's values and theories. Praxis, flowing as it does from theory, is similarly equivocated, with legitimation ceasing to be a matter for the ethnographer at the moment ethnography enters the public domain: no loss of legitimacy would entail the reader being theoretically and ethically identical to the

ethnographer. From this one can project participant status not only onto the "research subjects" of the previous paragraph, but onto the critical reader as well. Flaherty (2002: 481) questions how a relativist ethnography can replace a realist one, in the absence of realist definition, judgement and hierarchy of researcher, participant and student. However, far from being potentially fatal to ethnography as a social science, the interpretivist approach empowers participants – researchers, "research subjects" and critical readers – through their participation to engage in meaningful and influential dialogue. 'Truth' now "is understood as authenticity in a social context" (Christians 1997: 16), with the social context being that of the ethnographer, the "research subject" and the reader, and a wider social context inclusive of all of them. Ethnography in its social context, deeply reflexive, empowering its researchers, participants and readers, is in this research termed "evocative ethnography".

Autoethnography in its various forms

The role of the ethnographer as co-participant facilitates the ethnographer's contribution to research data in their own projects – a broad approach termed autoethnography. This may at first sight confirm one of the criticisms of ethnography – that of the researcher's *a priori* personality and culture setting the context of the research project – but has been claimed by autoethnography's proponents as being effective resolution, through deep reflexivity, of two facets of the crisis of representation described above (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 200). Rather than attempting to expunge these elements – representation and legitimation – of the crisis of representation from the research process, this approach embraces them and validates them through in-depth analysis. It was stated above that there can be no representation that is not rendered equivocal by the influence of the ethnographer's

values and theories. This is correct inasmuch as "representation" is a methodological entity, however it is not consistent with the philosophy of this research to reify concepts in this way. Viewed consistently as process, representation starts out as *a priori* researcher-created rough stuff or habitus (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) which, as the research progresses, is fine-tuned by reflexivity on the part of researcher, participants and ultimately reader. It was also stated above that legitimation ceases to be a matter for the ethnographer at the moment ethnography enters the public domain, with no loss of legitimacy entailing the reader being theoretically and ethically identical to the ethnographer. From this it appears that legitimacy (as methodological entity) appears as tension between researcher, participants and reader, however legitimation-as-process enables reflexivity to build legitimacy into the research as it develops. In brief, to resolve the crisis of representation in respect of representation and legitimacy, the researcher reflects upon these and sets out those reflections as the research develops. These reflections are made known to the participants, who can then consciously offer their own reflections, or subconsciously adjust their behaviour in respect of the research. The researcher makes explicit these participant reflections and behaviour adjustments, thereby permitting further reflection, with researcher and participants spiralling ever inwards towards perfect representation and legitimation centres. There is an old conundrum that posits "When a tree falls in a lonely forest, and no animal is near by to hear it, does it make a sound?" (Mann and Twiss 1910: 235). In the same way can be asked, "Does representation and legitimation in research make any difference, if there is no-one there to reflect upon it?" Clearly the answer to this is "no"; representation and legitimation require the final reflection of readers, who can each apply their own fine-tuning to that reflexively contributed by researcher and participants, thereby achieving

their own conclusions in these respects. Like the noise made by the tree that depends on the presence of the ears of the listener, so representation and legitimation in research rely on the reflection of the reader. In this research and in parallel with the consideration of the previous section, autoethnography in its social context, deeply reflexive, empowering its researchers, participants and readers, is in this research termed "evocative autoethnography", a term coined by Ellis and Bochner (2003). Ellis and Bochner (2003) present a powerful example and exposition of evocative autoethnography by writing their own autoethnography concerning Ellis' experience of introducing the methodology appropriate to this philosophical approach to a PhD student seeking a methodology appropriate to the qualitative study of breast cancer. The student, herself a sufferer from breast cancer, is encouraged to examine her own experience reflexively and to seek input from other sufferers through the writing of what Van Maanen (1988) refers to as "confessional tales". The narrative of the student's evocative autoethnography and her associated reflexivity is embedded within Ellis' own evocative autoethnography and reflexivity concerning the guidance she gives to the student. Ellis and Bochner (2003) make a compelling case for an approach for which they are clearly strong advocates.

The critique of evocative autoethnography comes both from within the genre and from a comparatively traditional base. Within this latter viewpoint Atkinson (1997) argues that [evocative] autoethnography, due to its creative aspect and lack of traditional objectivity, does not meet the criteria for inclusion in that range of philosophies and methodologies that are encompassed by social science. With his emphasis on the "science", Atkinson (1997) also argues that the telling of one's story reifies one's life experience: by use of the smoke and mirrors that characterise one's

perception and interpretation the autoethnographer creates existence for a life as a research artefact. In the case of Ellis' student this claim may be justified; her cancer was such an important facet of her life that it was difficult for her not to structure her (post-diagnosis) life around it. It is difficult to see, however, how a life can be constructed around something as tangential to life as, say, organisational email. If the mere setting-down on paper of one's experience (or indeed that of others) constitutes reification, then the same criticism can be levelled at all social science philosophies and methodologies. Ellis and Bochner's (2003: 220) response to Atkinson's (1997) criticism is that it is only by this creative process that deep truth such as that accessible through evocative autoethnography may be revealed. This point highlights the importance of personal reflexivity in evocative autoethnography – by having the autoethnographer's reflexivity laid bare before them, readers can form views, discuss amongst themselves and draw their own conclusions. In a similar way to that explained under *Ethnography in its various forms* above, by this process the reader joins the researcher and the researched as co-participant. Atkinson's (1997) critique betrays a deeper conceptual divergence, however, than one that merely concerns the "science" of social science. What is at issue here is the very nature of truth. Evocative autoethnography it appears must be postmodern in tooth and claw, with truth residing in narrative and discourse: indeed, "truth" progresses via words being uttered or written just as a chess game progresses by means of movement of its pieces (Lyotard 1984: 9-11, Wittgenstein 1953: 23), something that realist social scientists have difficulty accepting. As a way of conquering this conceptual obstacle this author suggests that the answer may lie in reflexivity. If proponents and critics alike were to argue reflexively, the argument would be deeper, more involved and more inclusive.

This would involve the realists entering the postmodernists' conceptual tent, but the outcomes could be fruitful and meaningful.

Another criticism, however, emerges from within autoethnography; one that upsets the neat postmodern-realist duality set out above. Anderson (2006) offers what Lofland (1995) terms "analytic" autoethnography in contrast to the evocative autoethnography offered by Ellis and Bochner (2003). Anderson (2006: 378) presents his option not as being in competition with, but rather representing a sub-genre within the evocative mainstream. Anderson's (2006: 386-388) analytic autoethnography allows a realist perspective that traces its origins to realist anthropology and, being realist, demands non-absorption by the researcher in the research project. This stands in stark contrast to the total absorption demanded by Ellis and Bochner (2003: 213-214). By this device of retrenchment in realist justification, Anderson (2006: 386-388) seeks to resolve the crisis of representation described above and, for those ethnographers whose standpoint is realist, this device is legitimate. Ellis and Bochner (2003: 229-231) also seek resolution of the crisis, however coming from a postmodern standpoint they offer not retrenchment but a leap forward out of the crisis through new qualities in findings achieved through the evocation of emotion in research. This accords with the development of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999; Hughes 2001) from the insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)/situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) conceptual vertical thread noted in Chapter 3. It is difficult to see how the analytic variant can sit comfortably as a sub-genre within evocative autoethnography: the analytic variant's approach to the crisis of representation faces in the opposite direction to that of evocative autoethnography's mainstream and, by

connecting with realist approaches and to some extent seeking validation therefrom, it invalidates itself in the eyes of those who seek postmodern resolution for what is an essentially postmodern problem. In the context of the crisis of representation, of course, realist is exactly what analytic autoethnography is, if one takes on trust the postmodern, reflexive turn paradigm that embodies evocative autoethnography (Atkinson et al 1999: 461-463; Denzin 2002: 482-490). Whilst Ellis and Bochner (2003) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994), as evocative autoethnography's significant protagonists, are influential in the propagation of this paradigm, it is by no means unquestioningly accepted. Atkinson (1997) for example cautions that not all 20th and 21st century ethnography is postmodern, any more than all 19th century anthropology was positivist. Field research past and present does not always accord with what contemporary sociological and anthropological theorists think and write (Atkinson et al 1999). Others, however, see in analytic autoethnography a pragmatism and a focus on theory that offers the autoethnographic experiment an accommodation within social science (Snow, Morrill and Anderson 2003: 182-183). There is a very real risk that evocative autoethnography may come to be seen as something other than social science altogether, although being overly concerned with the "science" aspect can be detrimental. Elias (1978: 41-47) explicitly warns against use of the scientific method in the science of sociology on the grounds that observable facts are not the same as human knowledge and should not be analysed in the same way. It is, however, unlikely that the social science community will ever agree to resolution of the crisis in representation in any terms other than its own, however cogently such other terms may be expressed. This is not to say, however, that the reflexive argument solution proposed above would not be fruitful, rather that it is unlikely ever to happen. It seems that discussion of the crisis of representation will go on, with arguments

ranging from its nature (Flaherty et al 2002) to its effects (Atkinson et al 1999), but what is certain is that in its own postmodern context, evocative autoethnography will, in this author's view, seek and achieve legitimation. Its potential contribution to in-depth understanding and the consequences for the development of theory are too great for it to be set aside.

The philosophical standpoint taken in this research is therefore firmly situated in the evocative ethnography/ autoethnography methodological approach. The purpose of the research is to make an original contribution – something that this approach offers. This approach also offers real participation on the part of researcher, participants and readers. As an approach it offers the potential to create something that is accessible and readable by people on a number of levels. This powerful methodological approach also intersects with the standpoint taken in the literature review of Chapter 2 – the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

New horizons, old problems: validity and authenticity in virtual ethnography

This section introduces two terms that are important in the method and interpretation of research, authenticity and validity. The degree of authenticity in research can be defined as the extent to which the raw materials of the research actually are what they purport to be (Bryman 2004: 197). The degree of validity in research can be defined as being dependent on the integrity of conclusions – the extent to which that that has been discovered reflects the concept to which it is being applied (Bryman 2004: 541, 545). The use of email as a means of conducting research raises its own questions as

far as authenticity and validity are concerned; these questions are considered in this section.

From around the middle of the 20th century technologists and science-fiction writers alike saw the possibilities for networks around the world that allowed computers (often connected to items of dangerous and powerful weaponry) to communicate with each other. Few could have imagined that the network of computers that developed in the 1990s would one day become the artefact of technology, community and culture that is today known as the internet. What could certainly not have been imagined is the internet's multi-facetedness – the way in which it is different things to different people. Chambers' Dictionary (2003: 773) defines it as "an international computer network of digital information linked by telecommunication systems and using a common address procedure", which hardly does it justice; this nuts, bolts, wires and electrons definition would be recognised by a programmer working in a server-centre, but this programmer would readily admit that the many uses to which the internet is put endow it with a multitude of definitions as varied as its uses. For the purposes of anthropology, ethnography and autoethnography it appears to offer whole new cultures or communities ripe for study, and the means of access to it, information technology, appears to offer a means by which it may be studied. The postmodern ethnographer "logs on" and types the URL of the newsgroup/chatroom under consideration in much the same way as Mead (1943) travelled to Samoa in order to study her community under consideration. That the Samoans were able to misrepresent themselves to Mead (1943 in Freeman 1996) is highly relevant to this comparison, as the internet offers much in the way of opportunity for misrepresentation, the playing out of fantasies and even the adoption of multiple

identities with respect to other members of the community and ethnographers alike. Truly if postmodernism requires an arena for the construction of relative realities and comparative truths, it has found it in the internet chatroom; such is the tacit acceptance of the use of imagination in the building of the online persona that in most online communities it is unproblematic (Hine 2000: 43-50), only becoming problematic when the online life can no longer be separated from the offline. Strange as it may seem, through the triumph of postmodernism over realism in the virtual world (Flaherty 2002: 479-482) this drastic lowering of the bar in terms of authenticity in online identity may offer resolution of the crisis of representation that is (in the eyes of their critics) ethnography's and autoethnography's Achilles' heel. This is not to say, however, that fictitious identities are unproblematic for ethnographers: triangulations of ethnographies with the outcomes of face-to-face meetings have been conducted in order to achieve validity and to demonstrate authenticity (Mason 2008: 39). This assumes one personality for one physical entity, which is fine until consideration is given to the multiple, complex and contextual personalities that inhabit each body (Hine 2000: 49). Such assumptions repeat the mistakes of the 19th century anthropologists arriving at the site of their study with a structure of assumptions ready-built around their own contexts and cultures. This pitfall can be overcome by reflexivity, setting the boundaries for conclusions that may be drawn from ethnography by examining the equivocations with respect to authenticity and validity present in the methodology (Hine 2000: 52). It may well be that, in the uses to which Hine (2000) examines the internet being put with respect to ethnography, namely study of communities composed of people interested in a particular topic, ethnography would have to be limited to that topic and not extended to a wider general newsgroup or chatroom community. It is possible for a single

person to belong to two chatrooms (and exhibit entirely different behaviours in each) without pulling the wool over the eyes of that person's interactors in each, just as it is possible for a single person offline to belong to the Roman Catholic church and the RSPCA, adopting a different persona according to context. One would not, however, try to construct a Roman Catholic/RSPCA community for the purposes of ethnography or any other kind of study. In a relatively new medium such as the internet it is important to carefully delineate the communities therein and not to assume that mere access to the internet constitutes membership of a single community. Whilst in the 1980s membership of a computer network equalled an interest in and knowledge of computers (and therefore membership of a computer-network community), at the beginning of the 21st century internet access is for most people (with the exception of a minority of technology enthusiasts) merely a tool used to work in pursuit of something else such as communicating, studying, working, recording or calculating. The internet as a means of conducting ethnography is no more problematic than were the ship that carried Mead (1943) to Samoa or the pencils and paper she used to record her findings: as with all research, validity and the demonstration of authenticity ultimately reside with the researcher. The way in which this can be explicated in research is by the means of the researcher keeping a research diary that records the thoughts and reflections of the researcher as the research progresses. A research diary was kept throughout this research, and referred to during the analysis and writing-up stages.

In the context of this research, however, when the subject of the ethnographic research is email and it is conducted via the medium of email, email is the setting for ethnography just as Winston Parva was the setting for Elias and Scotson's (1994)

ethnography and Yucatan was the setting for the situated learning of Jordan's (1989 in Lave and Wenger 1991: 67-69) midwives. Hine (2000:47) allows that internet ethnography need not require physical travel, as the internet itself is the place which is visited, albeit one in a virtual rather than a physical space. Authenticity is achieved by the confluence in email of subject matter, medium and methodology; the ethnographer is immersed in the medium – the social context – of the research, and the subject matter as well as the methodology being email allows the ethnographer to observe behaviours within the subject matter at the same time as hearing what participants have to say about it (Orgad 2005: 52-53).

In the context of this research, validity may be threaded through the methodology by reflexivity in relation to evocative autoethnography, and by involvement in relation to the evocative ethnography of participants, the involvement of participants with others' ethnographies and the seeking of and reacting to participant feedback. This is built in to the research design, considered in detail below. The involvement of participants in the revealing of deep personal truth (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 220) that authentic research must necessarily entail, however, involves emotional danger for the researcher and participants alike. Whilst authenticity and validity are important, ethical conduct must overarch them both.

Ethical considerations

All research conducted under the umbrella of an academic institution must comply with the ethical guidelines of that institution, and ethics must be maintained and reflected upon throughout both personally on the part of the researcher, and in conjunction with academic supervisors. More generally, the guidance offered by the

British Psychological Society (2007) and the Social Research Association (2002) should be followed.

The British Psychological Society gives specific guidance in relation to research conducted by email that highlights potential problems surrounding privacy online and the related issues of informed consent and understanding the nature of task (British Psychological Society 2007: 4-5). Researchers are warned about the dangers of inadvertent "spamming" through overenthusiastic recruitment of participants (British Psychological Society 2007: 7). In this research, participants were recruited through alternative means. Understanding the nature of the task can be achieved by use of an initial questionnaire or information sheet; in this research, these are combined. Feedback and a summary of findings are also highlighted as important rights for participants in email-based research; here consultation throughout the research and a summary of research findings is suggested. In this research both receiving and giving feedback and a summary is methodologically as well as ethically necessary; this is explained in detail under *Research design* below.

The Social Research Association (2002) offers more prescriptive and general guidance that can be summarised as maintaining professional integrity (Social Research Association 2002: 4, 6), being aware of the researcher's duty of care towards participants with respect to their well-being, privacy, dignity and awareness of the purpose of the research and the uses to which it will be put, and acting within the law (Social Research Association 2002: 13-22). Recounting all of the Social Research Association's guidance would be inappropriate here, although all that is

relevant to this research was considered when developing the *Research design* described below.

Due to emotional and personal involvement being inherent in evocative ethnographic and evocative autoethnographic research, it is essential that the relationship between researcher and researched is as equal as possible, and that all parties feel safe within it. Although this appears here as an ethical consideration, it in fact runs through the research philosophy: the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) informs the process by which findings will be analysed, and the concept applies equally to power relations issues between researcher and participants. This is a complex relationship in that the researcher is, in evocative autoethnographic research, also a participant. The researcher shares ethnography with participants, and in this respect their relationships in the research process are reversed. Applying the insider-outsider social habitus concept to her own autoethnography, Humphrey (2007: 11-15) describes in research diary form how she "activated the hyphen" amongst her multiple personas of academic, trade unionist, trade union self-activating group activist, lesbian and feminist. For Humphrey (2007: 13) the hyphen in "insider-outsider" became a dynamic methodological artefact, and, realising the reificational contradictions in this artefact, she extended her analysis to "becoming the hyphen" (Humphrey 2007: 19-20). The reflexivity required for successful accomplishment of becoming the hyphen is substantial and necessarily involves making oneself vulnerable. In terms of power relations within an ethical context, however, it is a powerful means of redressing the balance between researcher and participants, in addition to setting an example to participants in terms of what is required of them. In this research, reflexivity through

the research diary placed reflections in their correct chronological place, and detailed their development and resolution. The research diary also details the development of the insider-outsider social habitus concept, and its origins within and tensions with Elias' established-outsider concept (Elias and Scotson 1994), in the same way that Humphrey (2007) developed and became her hyphen. The research diary also detailed other conceptual developments, for example the "email community" concept's growth out of the original "virtual communities" described later in this Chapter – a development that led to the rephrasing of the research question. A late but important development was the characterisation of ethnography and autoethnography into various forms, including the evocative forms so important to this research. Importantly, the research diary recorded and contextualised the times when things went less well than they should have, and the effects of these on the research and relationships between researcher and participants; see, for example, the record of the wrong attachment being sent out in *The participant group* in Chapter 5. These records of personal interactions between researcher and participants, together with reflections and located within their temporal and developmental contexts, ensure that ethical standards can be set and examined and re-examined throughout.

Researchers, however, should not assume that their conceptualisation of the emergent researcher-participant relationship accords with the conceptualisations of participants. Some participants may be naturally reticent and even within a relationship of trust may be less forthcoming than others. In this respect, however, Peek et al (2007: 169) observe that the medium of email may be empowering, although May (2002: 20) found that recipients of email can consider it to be anything from "absolutely sterile" to "more thoughtful and eloquent" than normal conversation. The conclusion to be

drawn from these from an ethical and methodological viewpoint is that thoughtful interpretation must be assumed. The context must be clear (on- or off-the-record), precisely worded, verifiably accurate and supported by background research as to the expectations and character of the recipient (May 2002: 21). The credibility of research will depend upon this (James and Busher 2006). More generally, researchers should ensure that their participants are aware of the uses to which their email communication will be put, and to whom the content will be shown (May 2002: 46, 49-50). It is also important to carefully consider what will be deleted; no email should ever be deleted or ignored without justification – to do so would be akin to turning one's back on someone in the middle of a conversation (May 2002: 56). To accurately assess the levels of success for this, a post-research questionnaire was offered (see Appendix 6).

As with all research of this type, participants should be promised anonymity, and this should be actively monitored throughout. It is not sufficient simply to keep participants' names secret. Respondents' privacy and their ownership rights over the data they provide must be respected (May 2002: 59). In all dealings with participants and in the analysis of their data, researchers should remain mindful of the treatment of values, ideas and practices encompassed by social representation theory (Howarth 2002). Just as the researcher should not assume unity of outlook in respect of reticence among participants and the effect of the email medium upon this, so the researcher should not assume unity of outlook in other respects (for example, in respect of attitude to jokes, sexism or racism in email) among a disparate group of participants (Howarth 2002: 26-29). Just because in an ethnographic project participants may, as the research goes on, acquire the characteristics of a group,

"groupiness" in respect of anything other than involvement in the research should not be assumed; to do otherwise would be to take for granted participants' values and experiences. So, researchers who naturally consider themselves to be insiders with respect to their own research should also consider a researcher-as-outsider persona (Howarth 2002: 22). In this respect, researchers should also be aware of changes to their insider-outsider social habitus status: simply by being there, Elias and Scotson became part of the society of Winston Parva during their research there (Elias and Scotson 1994: 90). Therefore, these considerations are important not only for participants' welfare, but also for the validity of the research.

Participants should, at the earliest stage, be requested not to quote directly from emails they have received or sent for reasons relating to data protection. Even if the participant is happy for quotations to be used, emails are by nature exchanged between at least two people and the consent of all parties would need to be obtained (Ess 2002: 6-7), which in most cases will be impracticable. Given that any email that contained a relevant quote is likely to be, for example, discriminatory, offensive or mischievous, even if consent could be sought in respect of quoting, it is unlikely to be forthcoming. It is at least partly for these reasons that the evocative ethnographic/ autoethnographic methodology has been chosen, so that participants can consider the effects of email on them rather than consider the emails themselves. This seems to be the only entry point to the subject if the subject is to be researched in depth.

Research design

Whilst email can in no way be considered to be equivalent to face-to-face conversation (May 2002: 55), there are methodological advantages in its exclusive use

in this research project. Email is the subject of this research. As the participants are self-selected, one can safely assume familiarity with email, which would not be the case were, for example, a virtual forum of the "chatroom" variety to be set up. Also by using the object of research as the medium through which the research is conducted, the ways in which participants use email can, like Ryle's (1984) winks, be used to provide depth and context to the data conveyed.

The research project began with the assembly of 11 participants. This is probably close to the maximum number feasible for research that is constrained by the requirements of the doctoral thesis. Ellis and Bochner (2003: 238) recommend five or six.

In order that the data that participants provide should be as free as possible from distortions arising from researcher habitus (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), respondents were sought through a medium within which the researcher holds no hierarchical position – indeed no position at all, other than that of basic membership of the associated organisation. This medium is the Mensa magazine, the journal of Mensa. Mensa is (among other things) an organisation with a high proportion of interested and intelligent people, of diverse origins, many of whom are helpful to other members and readily respond to calls for help of this kind.

At first sight Mensa may have the appearance of a biased sample, although it is difficult to discern any intersection between the potential bias inherent in a sample chosen by individuals' ability to pass a test – and their inclination to attempt it – and the research question requirement that participants communicate by email with others

in the course of their work. There are advantages in using Mensa as a basis for a sample. It is convenient and accessible, and likely to achieve a good response rate; secondly (as mentioned above) as this researcher holds no office within Mensa (other than basic membership) there will be no *a priori* power relationship issues to consider, although of course relationships would develop as the research goes on, and these may be unpredictable, but this would be case whatever the sample base. Indeed this should be the case where ethnography is done properly: as mentioned earlier, this was Elias and Scotson's experience of working with their participants (Elias and Scotson 1994: 90). In short, the source for participants could have been any broad-based group of people within which volunteer participants who meet the research requirements may be found. For different researchers this would have been any group of people with which they have contact. There would have been no particular disadvantage in using such a group of people, just as for this researcher there is no particular disadvantage in using Mensa compared with any other group of people. For this researcher, however, there is particular advantage in choosing Mensa as a source for participants, for the reasons given above. As can be seen throughout this research, the people who volunteered proved to be lively and interested participants.

Whilst Mensa proved to be a convenient medium for gathering participants, it also attracted a participant group whom as individuals were dispersed among a wide range of organisations and sectors. There is perhaps a danger here in that people from very different sectors may not engage or may do so with lack of understanding or even hostility. A caricature of such lack of understanding could be between a person working in a results-driven commercial sector such as sales, and a person working in a sector where a vocation of service is expected, such as social care. Within such a

caricature, assumptions concerning personal attitudes and priorities could exacerbate hostility, as indeed could structural tensions currently dominating the mass media, such as contrasts between private and public sector retirement age and pension provision. On the other hand, such diversity and the resultant bringing together of types of people who would not normally engage with each other could be effective in introducing new considerations, and thereby inspire deeper reflection among participants, with consequent benefits for originality and contribution to knowledge.

Initial contact with Mensa was made by means of an email letter to Mensa's Research Officer (reproduced in Appendix 2), specifying the nature of the research and the kind of help sought. For Mensa's comfort concerning involvement and to provide detailed information about the research, a copy of the research proposal with information of particular relevance to Mensa highlighted was attached to the letter (reproduced in Appendix 3). The only qualifying criteria for participants were the use of email in the workplace (in order to keep within the research question context of organisational email), and the language of the workplace being English. On the advice of Mensa's Research Officer an article was then written and subsequently published in Mensa Magazine, inviting prospective participants to make contact by email (reproduced in Appendix 4).

The 11 participants did not all make contact at the same time. Within two months of the Mensa Magazine article appearing, five people had responded with expressions of interest. The remainder made contact over the following three months. All those who made contact were invited to take part, so no selection on the part of the researcher was necessary. In order to anonymise the 11 participants, they were assigned names

taken from the most popular English and Welsh boys' and girls' names of 2008 (Top 100 Baby Names 2008). Readers of this research should therefore not assume anything about respondents beyond their gender; by this means of anonymisation no conclusions about other factors (for example age, ethnic origin or social class) can be inferred by me as author or drawn by readers. Some information about these factors may, of course, emerge in the data that the participants provide, but it is important that it should only emerge if it is relevant to them in relation to their experiences with organisational email. It could be that by not seeking information about participants' age, ethnic origin and social class, useful information that could help to explain important contributions emergent from issues around these characteristics would be missed, and although participants could mention such information if they consider it to be relevant, it could be that they might not recognise or be willing to publicly acknowledge relevancy when it arises. On the other hand, a researcher's assignation of relevancy to such information could compromise the validity of the research by introducing the researcher's attributed meaning. This would be further compounded were readers, in their role of readers-as-participants, to unquestioningly accept the researcher's attributed meaning or introduce their own. These are knotty problems which are worthy of and indeed have formed the subject of methodological research; for example, see discussion of meaning being attributed rather than present (Barth 1989 in Friedman 1994: 74) in Chapter 2. In order to preserve validity it is necessary to reflect upon these problems and to keep them in mind, however exploring them further falls outside the compass of this research as set out in the research question.

The 11 participants with their anonymised names and the business of their organisations (from their pre-research questionnaires) are given below, in order of participation.

Name	*Organisation's Business*
Jack	Research/education
Oliver	Medical consultancy
Thomas	Food industry
Grace	Civil Service
Harry	Not disclosed
Alfie	Facilities management
Olivia	Information technology
Ruby	Research/education
Sophie	Translation
Emily	Finance
Lily	Education

Each participant was asked, upon joining the research, to complete a pre-research questionnaire, reproduced here as Appendix 5. The purpose of the pre-research questionnaire is not so much to elicit information as to inform participants of the process and allow them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have about it and what is expected of them. In this way, they are encouraged to feel knowledgeable and comfortable, and to consider themselves to be "insiders" with regard to the project.

The next stage was to respond to questions emerging from the pre-research questionnaire and to invite each participant to write their own email autobiography – their personal evocative autoethnography – about their personal experiences with email, how it affects and forms their relationships with colleagues, managers, subordinates and external business contacts. Specific guidance on completing this was kept to a minimum – the depth of response achievable in ethnographic research lies partly in allowing participants to guide the process (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 238-239), raising issues that are important to them rather than being asked to comment upon issues that are important to the researcher. There is a risk here that participants may raise issues that fall outside the compass of the research, however this is all part of the process. In such circumstances it is up to the researcher to reflexively consider whether the initial parameters of the research need to be adjusted, or whether such data can be legitimately excluded.

The extent to which the research was guided by the participants is illustrated by the difference between the research proposal of Appendix 3 and the way in which the research actually developed. The research proposal offered such concepts as "outsider email", whereas the participants drew no clear distinction between email as being "insider" or "outsider" – rather the "insider" and "outsider" epithets arose in respect of them as individuals with email being merely the medium by which insider or outsider status was mediated. The research proposal also offered a concept of virtual community – an idea that proved to be unhelpful due to participants' differing conceptualisations of virtuality. In respect of organisational learning, this for the participants was less a matter of organisational initiatives (although these do have a part to play) than a matter of the nature of individuals themselves being manifested in

their communications generally, organic processes and emotional intelligence. So the research question itself changed to reflect these participant-led changes. For example, as a result of this the original research question:

- "To what extent do virtual communities, as defined by outsider email, affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning initiatives, to promote the positive effects and ameliorate the negative effects of such virtual communities?"

became

- "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

It was not only the research question that changed. In the initial research design and in the pre-research questionnaire the possibility of face-to-face contact as an element in the research was raised. Responses showed that this would be difficult simply because of the geographical dispersion and occupational mobility of participants. Reflection recorded in my research diary in the early stages suggested that this practical difficulty could result in less depth in the research findings, however in the light of findings with respect to face-to-face and telephone interaction which suggest that the nature of relationships can change through changing the medium through which they are conducted (see Chapter 6 *Discussion points 1 – participants' reflection and analysis* point 1 and *Discussion points 2 – participants' reflection and analysis* points 1a and 1b), it appears that contact through email only was the right course to take for methodological as well as practical reasons. The research diary records

reflection on the effects of maintaining authenticity in this respect (see *New horizons, old problems: validity and authenticity in virtual ethnography* above). There was, however, no difficulty among the participants in understanding the topic, or indeed, with various degrees of encouragement, making their contributions.

These developments are nothing unusual in evocative ethnography – indeed they show that in terms of being participant-led, the process is working properly (Ellis and Bochner 2002: 213-214).

During this process I, as researcher and 12th participant, was writing my own experiences of email in the workplace. I was also writing my research diary, detailing my own thoughts and reflections on the research process: "By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Of the 11 participants, Oliver, Grace, Harry, Alfie, Olivia, Sophie, Emily and Lily asked for further guidance on writing their email autobiographies. By way of an example they were sent my email autobiography, which at that time was very much a work-in-progress. This led to what was described in my research diary as a "worrying raggedness" in the research process which, on reflection, led to a different treatment for these participants' contributions (see Chapter 5 *Introduction*). Later (at the writing-up stage) this "worrying raggedness" was described in my research diary as "organicality characteristic of ethnographic research".

Having received participants' email autobiographies, each one, together with my email autobiography, was analysed to derive a series of discussion points. These were

circulated around the participants as a form of "interactive conversation" (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 238) so that they had the opportunity to add to what they had previously written, and to comment upon the issues that were important to other participants. Although the pre-research questionnaire mentioned the possibility of face-to-face interviewing, it became clear that this was not only going to be methodologically equivocal due to the combination of different media for the gathering of data described above, but also impracticable due to the diverse locations of participants (Emily, for example, although working for a British bank, spends most of her time in Geneva).

There then followed a second round of discussion points, giving participants the opportunity to comment further upon new issues emergent from the first round and upon new issues arising from the email autobiographies of later-joining participants.

In order to maintain balance between the participants' contribution and mine as researcher, throughout the interactive conversation of the discussion points my contribution retreated progressively from active contributor to reflexive administrator of the participants' contributions. This seemed appropriate, given that the participants, once set in motion, needed no more than administrative facilitation to keep the process going, and always bearing in mind the passive but real effect of my cultural filter at the analysis stages. As mentioned in *The insider-outsider social habitus concept with respect to email* in Chapter 2, Alpay (2005: 8-12) found that administrative facilitation is important to maintain momentum. This was the case in this research, although no participants exhibited the demotivation arising due to remoteness from their peers noted by Alpay (2005: 8-10).

The participants were then invited to take part in two stages of final validation, the first of which provided them with the opportunity to review the written-up research and make their own comments (Kopinak 1999: 180-181), and the second of which invited them to complete a post-research questionnaire, in which they had the opportunity to comment and reflect on the research and their experience of it. The post-research questionnaire is reproduced here as Appendix 6, and the outcomes of this final stage of validation can be found in Appendix 10.

As mentioned above, not all participants were involved at the beginning of the research process. Also, not all participated in every stage. At whatever stage they joined, they were invited to complete the pre-research questionnaire and write their email autobiographies. The patterns of participation with respect to each participant are mapped below.

Name	Participation					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Jack	●	●	●	●	●	
Oliver	●	●	●		●	
Thomas	●	●	●	●	●	●
Grace	●	●	●	●	●	
Harry	●	●	●		●	
Alfie	●	●	●		●	
Olivia	●	●	●		●	
Ruby	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sophie	●	●	●	●	●	●
Emily	●	●	●		●	●
Lily	●	●	●		●	
Key:						
1 = Pre-research questionnaire 2 = Email autobiography 3 = Discussion points 1 4 = Discussion points 2 5 = Review 6 = Post-research questionnaire						

Participation levels varied throughout from a maximum of eleven at stages 1, 2 and 3 in the table above to a minimum of four at stage 6. The participation level of five for stage 4 was disappointing. It is observable that those who did not participate in stage 4 had not been very reflective participants in stage 3, with the exception of Emily who had taken time out of her work to have a baby (see Appendix 10 *Introduction*). The only participant for whom there is no discernible explanation for non-participation at stage 4 is Lily. Thomas, Ruby and Sophie's participation at every stage is

unsurprising, given their clear interest in the research and the deep reflection evident in their contributions. Participation levels throughout the data gathering stages (1 to 5), however, do not fall below Ellis's recommended minimum of five for emotive ethnographic research (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 238). That only four participants contributed to stage 6 is disappointing, however it is probably not safe to attempt to draw conclusions from this. The thoughtful and reflexive contributions of those that did participate in stage 6, and the way in which this corrected and nuanced the research, lends authenticity to the way it was finally presented.

Conclusion

This Chapter has demonstrated that methodology itself has a body of literature around it that is at least as important to research as the literature around the subject matter.

The literature of ethnographic methodology traces the development out of anthropology of a realist ethnography and a postmodern, evocative ethnography within which the ethnographer becomes part of the group being researched and hence becomes part of the research itself (Geertz 1993, Potter 2000). This is unavoidable (Elias and Scotson 1994: 90) but it does not invalidate the research, as long as the researcher reflexively determines the effect of the researcher's presence within the group – "authenticity in a social context" (Christians 1997:16).

It is but a short step from ethnographic reflexivity to autoethnography – the participation of the researcher as participant in the research project. Autoethnography as a social science methodology is criticised on the basis of creativity and subjectivity placing it outside the compass of social science (Atkinson 1997), although Ellis and

Bochner (2003: 220) reply that what they term evocative autoethnography can reach truths inaccessible by other means, and it is through deep reflexivity that subjectivity can be overcome; in other words, by analysing and explaining subjectivity in research, readers can consider the research findings in conjunction with reflexive analysis and make up their own minds about the findings of the research. This is a powerful argument as it involves researched, researcher and readers as participants in the research or, in Elias' terms, insiders (Elias and Scotson 1994). Anderson (2006) offers a retrenchment in realism through the introduction of a new, comparatively detached analytic autoethnography. The reply to this comes again from Ellis and Bochner (2003: 229-231) by the introduction of emotion – or, rather, emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001) – into the autoethnographic process. This "evocative" form (Ellis and Bochner 2003, Denzin and Lincoln 1994) represents the most reflexive incarnation of autoethnography.

Because of its potential for revealing new truths in the experience of using email in organisations, and the possibility of deriving imaginative and original organisational learning solutions to the problems that emerge, evocative ethnography and evocative autoethnography have been chosen as the methodologies to address the research question:

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

In this process the participants – the "subjects" of ethnography – are their own evocative autoethnographers. Similarly the researcher-as-autoethnographer becomes, through reflexivity revealed in the process of participating in an interactive conversation, a subject of evocative ethnographic research for the participants (Ellis and Bochner 2003).

The subject matter of this research is email, as is the medium by which it is to be accomplished. This device of keeping the subject of the research and the means by which it is accomplished within the compass of email may be methodologically compact and elegant in that the ethnographer is not only immersed in the medium of the research, but can also observe behaviours within the subject matter at the same time as hearing what participants have to say about it, which has positive consequences for authenticity (Orgad 2005: 52-53). However, the conduct of research in the virtual world raises its own problems with regard to authenticity. On the face of it, one major drawback of ethnography in the virtual world is the possibility of misrepresentation – that of participants being something other than that which they "really" are. This "really", however, is a realist construct; in the postmodern context it is unproblematic – and indeed can be revealing – to consider participants as complex entities with authentic multiple personas (Hine 2000:49). In conducting research within a postmodern context it is necessary for the researcher to ensure that the personas exhibited by participants are those relevant to the research, rather than to eliminate any that may be invalidated by means of a pre-determined notion of reality.

It is for the reasons given above that evocative ethnography and evocative autoethnography are the loci for the methodological standpoint of this research.

Validity is woven into the research design, through the recording of reflection and process in a research diary, reflexivity throughout the research and in its writing-up, and continuous discussion with and final review by participants.

Research must above all be ethical. This research is designed to ensure that all participants can as far as possible assume insider status within it from the beginning, although the possibilities of this not being the case are considered and resolved through the researcher's involvement as participant (Humphrey 2007). It is necessary too to ensure that participants are fully aware of the use to which their data will be put (May 2002, James and Busher 2006), and that their contribution will not be ignored (May 2002). In pursuit of these aims, a pre-research questionnaire (see Appendix 5) was provided which not only solicited information from participants, but informed participants as to what is expected from them and allowed them to raise issues and encourage knowledgability about and insider status with respect to the project.

A post-research questionnaire (see Appendix 6) was made available to participants, giving them the opportunity to comment upon their experience of and feelings about being involved in this research. This added validation and determined the extent to which the research has been conducted ethically (see Appendix 10).

The practical aspects of the research design have been described, including the selection of participants, their anonymisation and the process by which the research was undertaken. So at this point there is effectively an empty shell consisting of the pre-research questionnaire, the email autobiographies of the participants and researcher, their two rounds of discussion points, their review of the written-up

research and their post-research questionnaires. The following Chapters 5 and 6 add

substance to this empty shell, revealing findings and providing analysis.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANTS' STORIES AND INITIAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

This Chapter presents the data provided by the 11 participants in the group formed by the process described in Chapter 4, and that of the 12th member of the group, the author of this research. The format closely mirrors that of Willis' (1977) work in Hammertown and to some extent that of Elias and Scotson in Winston Parva (Elias and Scotson 1994). In these works, analysis is presented separately from descriptive and dialogic ethnography. This format was chosen because it allows participants' contributions to appear unencumbered by the researcher's analysis. Therefore, any reflection and analysis appearing within a narrative is that of the participant who provided it. Reflection and analysis against the background of the literature reviews of Chapter 2 and 3, and with respect to the research question and the proposition of this research restated in this Chapter at *Reflection and analysis: part 1 – culture*, appears in the analysis that follows the evocative autoethnographies or "stories". It is important that this separation is maintained so that when participants review this Chapter as the final stage of their input, each will be able to find their own contribution and assess representation of it. Also, this means of presentation renders the stories readable and engaging, which was very possibly what Willis (1977) and Elias and Scotson (1994) had in mind when deciding how to present their works.

Three participants (Ruby, Jack and Thomas) have their email autobiographies presented complete as "stories" in discrete sections within this Chapter. These stories are their own work; the only prompting received in advance being that detailed in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5. Ellis and Bochner (2003: 238-239) allow for the

possibility of rewriting and paraphrasing whilst retaining authenticity, but beyond occasional redacting to preserve anonymity and the correcting of unintentional typos and conforming style[1], this has not been necessary. Those participants whose email autobiographies were written having first been provided with an example for guidance (Oliver, Grace, Harry, Alfie, Olivia, Sophie, Emily and Lily) have their stories interwoven into the analysis as acting in support of, dissenting from or contrasting with, the discretely presented stories. This is the case where the point being made is very much in the nature of a response. This is because these latter stories bear to varying degrees the character of a response to the example they were given, and so the two kinds of research data are kept separate so that the reader may be able to separate that material which is wholly authentic from that whose authenticity carries the mark of influence arising from the research process. In some cases these points have been carried over into the further analysis of Chapter 6. In summary, those that can be demonstrated to be stand-alone works of their authors stand alone here, whilst those that cannot are used as interwoven commentaries or appear in Chapter 6. In order to address the consequences for validity arising from this approach, the draft version of this research was presented to all participants for their comment.

Here follows a description of the way in which the 12 individuals who took part in this research developed into the participant group. There follows four email autobiographies (*Experiences of email: participants' stories*). Initial analysis based on these email autobiographies and the initial data provided by the other eight

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[1] Where mis-spellings or colloquial words have been included for effect, these have been left as-is. Where text is quoted, any researcher's explanatory additions are placed in square brackets. Where errors are genuinely unintentional, e.g. "eduction" for "education", they have been corrected. Conforming for style includes correcting distracting but irrelevant inconsistencies, e.g. "e-mail" to "email", to correspond with the style of this research, and adjusting font, spacing etc to meet presentational requirements.

participants is provided in respect of culture (*Reflection and analysis: part 1 – culture*) and organisational learning (*Reflection and analysis: part 2 – remedies and organisational learning*), reflecting the problems raised in the research question and referring to primary literature sources of Chapters 2 and 3. Finally for this Chapter, the findings are summarised with respect to the research question "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?", and the literature-derived conceptual map of the *Conclusion* to Chapter 3.

The participant group

The participants were at the outset not known to each other. Initial contacts were friendly but formal. Some typical examples are as follows.

- "Hi, I read the snippet it the March Mensa magazine about email. I work for a major UK food manufacturer, and although business would be impossible without it, I find that dealing with email is a huge burden. I will be happy to take part in your research. If you think I can help, please reply to [email address]. Regards, Thomas"

- "Hi David – I'd be happy to participate in your email study. Regards, Olivia"

- "Hi David – I saw the thing in the Mensa mag about your research. I may be able to provide some useful info. Let me know what you need. Kind regards, Oliver"

As the interactive conversation progressed formality was progressively set aside. It is important for this kind of research that participants feel safe and confident in the research environment in order that depth may be achieved to a level beyond that achievable by, say, completion of formal questionnaires (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 207-208). Insight into the depth achieved appears in the honesty apparent in the stories and responses detailed below and in Chapter 6, and also in the conversation that took place in the preambles and sign-offs that surrounded the stories and subsequent conversations. Wry humour and self-deprecation such as that apparent in the examples below, are significant indicators of healthy trust-based relationships.

- "… if you need more, or if I've totally missed the plot…" (Alfie)

- "I have been snowed under with work, and most of it is down to email handling! Best of luck…" (Oliver)

- "… sorry – I know it was something about sexism in emails!!" (Grace)

- "I didn't get the job with [name of employer] – they employed a PhD (£17K!!!)" (Ruby)

- "David – unless you are a dragonfly in your spare time…" (Jack)

At one point in the research process I (the researcher) emailed an incomplete attachment to Thomas. On realising this mistake, the following exchange took place (ordered as per numbers).

1. **Researcher**: I am sorry – I provided the wrong attachment with my email of 16th July. Please use this one instead…

2. **Thomas**: Another rule should be "Always check that you have attached what you intend to send". But we've all done it wrong many times ;-)

3. **Researcher**: Indeed it should, Thomas! I stand chastened and better informed…

Do these examples of growing familiarity signify the development of trust between participants? Thomas himself describes such relationships as being akin to those between pen-friends or for the email age, "key[board] friends". The lack of physical proximity does not invalidate ethnography conducted by email (Hine 2000: 45-46) and, whilst meeting as key-friends rather than physically proximate friends may result in the missing of nuances, inflections and non-verbal cues (Hine 2000: 65), the relationships that have developed here are promising in their displayed trust and candidness with regard to the achievement of deep, insightful and reflexive research (James and Busher 2006: 403). In the consideration of means by which the participant group was assembled, the dangers and benefits of having a disparate group were explored (see *Research design* in Chapter 5). The examples given above suggest that the outcome of having a disparate group has been positive, in that the bringing together of types of people who would not normally engage with each other has been effective in introducing new considerations, and thereby inspiring deeper reflection among participants, with consequent benefits for originality and contribution to knowledge.

Experiences of email: participants' stories

The stories presented below are done so in the first-person, as they were presented. Therefore the "I" and "my" etc refer to the person telling the story.

Ruby's story

I first used email at work in the early '90s, during the privatisation of British Rail. It was the perfect antidote to that new phenomenon, the Open Plan Office, although the novelty soon wore off as response times were so poor. By the time you had messaged the colleague sitting opposite regarding the sandwich filling you were hoping they might be kind enough to pick up from the shop for you, lunch break was over.

Come the late '90s, my summers were quiet, doing administration for a small private research institute. I whiled away many a balmy lunchtime in an empty office, enjoying a steamy e-affair with my distant lover until the Systems Manager tipped me the wink (in the stairwell one day) that my e-conversations were not as private as I perhaps thought they were. It then dawned on me that such organisations, by necessity, must carefully monitor and analyse incoming data traffic.

Email came into its own when I worked in Further Education. For 30 hours per week I helped run an online learning centre. I was part of a team that developed e-learning systems, monitored student progress and course take-up via email. For me the best bit email-wise, however, was the 10 hours per week spent teaching basic IT to refugees and asylum-seekers who were studying English as a Second Language. My policy was to bore students stiff for the first month with the necessary assessments, introductions, chasing up log-ins and similar administration and then, once the start-of-term college networks had been proven to be robust, launch email upon the class.

These lessons were even better than the "first snow" lesson, where students from hot climes run to stand outside in awe at the white wet stuff descending so prettily from the sky.

Motivation soared sufficiently to see the most tedious syllabus through to at least half term. Sad and lonely faces would light up at the first hotmail message. Students who had not talked to many people since their arrival in England were soon hammering away messages to each other; here, emoticons and text-speak were useful. Technical aptitude soared as students who had initially seemed to lack interest or ability clamoured to email photos to far-flung family and perform tasks way beyond the ken of this teacher, who gave up keeping up with email bells and whistles around the time mailing ringtones as attachments arrived on the scene.

Finally, working nights in a silent, open-plan office gave insights into email use. Under such conditions, email patterning could be observed by the rattle and report of keyboards. One could spot the crescendo of a clique – easily identified as hot-deskers rarely move far – in full swing. Such swells were frequently punctuated by sounds such as staccato snorts to signify, one surmises, receipt of a humorous item. Or tuts and muttered expletives at bad news. Percussion thundered furiously during times of scandal. It was interesting to observe who seemed to be talking to whom, and when, if not about what. Occasionally a lone voluntary would fire off, perhaps a fifth reminder in the direction of the supervisor (or conductor?) to order more office supplies… has the email society

changed us very much, or is the office still jungle drums? Are we still Tarzans and Janes, I ask myself.

Jack's story

Email is a vital part of communication within my academic department, as well as being my preferred method of correspondence with both individuals and groups. Since many of us spend much of our time tied to our computers, it is a fast and efficient way to exchange information. I suppose my use of email could be classified hierarchically into three categories according to the level at which information is shared: departmental, group and individual.

Bulletins from the department are frequently circulated concerning seminars, jobs and health and safety. I pay relatively little attention to many of these as they are largely irrelevant to me. Occasionally people will hijack the larger email lists with inappropriate (personal or irrelevant) comments, but this is swiftly chastised… One exception is an ancient professor who occasionally composes short poems about his particular gripes. These appear to be circulated on far-reaching lists without any retaliation from the administrators.

I also receive information that is more specific to me, as a result of being part of the various groups (research or social) within the department. These are frequently of interest to me, either because the seminar/talk is on a topic close to my area of expertise of because there are after-work drinks being arranged. I also make use of such lists myself, as I co-ordinate a number of departmental

discussion groups. However, it is difficult to tell how many people actually read the emails that I send around.

When information is important (e.g. late notice of a change of venue for a meeting), I prefer to go office-to-office to make sure that the information gets across.

Clearly personal email correspondence is the most relevant and it also makes up more than half of the 5-20 emails that I receive each day. I correspond most with my research supervisors, despite them each having offices less than 200 yards from my desk. I frequently send computer documents (MS Office files) for them to read. Other correspondents are collaborators at a nearby university with whom I am currently writing a grant proposal. There are three academics with whom I am working, although most of the email contact is with only one.

Less frequent (though regular) contact is also maintained with other collaborators at other organisations. Some of those individuals have collaborated with me in the past and so I am updating them on projects. Others have similar interests and, as such, we exchange information about topics related to those interests. Finally, some personal emails come from occasional or one-off inquiries either from people who have read about my research or responses to my enquiries about the research of other people. I suppose you could say that I email most those people who are geographically closest to me.

The email that I send tends to be largely personal, although, as I mentioned above, I also run a few discussion groups which require extensive lists (20-40 emails per list). These groups largely overlap in membership. I am often hesitant about sending emails to groups of people in case I bother them unnecessarily. However, the wonder of email is that the 90% that is irrelevant can be very (too?) easily ignored. In an attempt to avoid ignoring important email, I tend to make extensive use of "flags" to highlight email that requires action.

I know a few of the older academics in my department are unreliable at email, treating it the same as they would "snail mail": they plan to respond within 7-10 days. On the other hand, the younger staff (myself included) tend to have a turn-around time of a few minutes on occasion. The former group frustrates me as I see it as inefficient.

Thomas' story

I started using email at work maybe 20 years ago (I cannot be sure) where the company had an IBM system called PROFS. This ran on terminals which connected to the site mainframe, and offered green screens and only text. This was initially before the days of Windows as far as I can tell.

It was excellent for communicating for someone who cannot type and did not have a secretary keeping a record of messages. In those days people were not fanatical about copying in everyone (including God and his dog). It also had the useful feature that you could recall a note if it had not been opened by the

recipient. I remember once accidentally sending a note to the whole of our company instead of just to the local site. I thought that I could redeem myself by recalling it. Unfortunately on top of the thousands of emails already sent, I burdened the system with an equal number of requests to recall it, and a third level of confirmations coming back to me. After a few seconds my terminal froze, and shortly after that the phone rang – a somewhat annoyed helpdesk operator told me what a silly boy I had been. For half an hour [name of firm] was without email while they sorted it out.

As an aside, I refer to the helpdesk as the not-much-helpdesk, in homage to those little chocolate bars that are called "Fun Size" but are really not-much-fun size – what is the fun in a chocolate bar that small? What is the help of a department who… ?

We eventually progressed to Lotus Notes, which is a mature and versatile office system. As well as the email facility it manages many of our systems in the form of databases. It does its job very well, but unfortunately many (if not most) users are simply given it on a PC, and after five minutes' familiarisation are left to get on with it. Us old timers explain the address books and address groups, phone book, calendar, tasks, room bookings, blah de blah.

There is absolutely no training on etiquette. Therefore it is common to get emails with no subject line, or a meaningless one – "Meeting". People will "reply to all" including the CCs who really have no interest as to whether a

particular task has been completed, or whether a minion can attend a meeting – just tell the chairman for Christ's sake!

I am seriously considering a rule to bounce empty subject lines.

Another aside. I volunteered a few years ago to take part in a trial of the national identity database – at that time I was in favour. A few days later I got an email from a stranger, with no subject line. This was before the deluge of spam, but I cautiously viewed it using the properties pane in Outlook Express, and to my utter amazement it was from [name of company], a contractor to the Identity Project. I was horrified that an international company, in a critical public project, was training its staff so badly. I did not take part, and events over the last couple of years show that my initial trust of the scheme was misplaced.

We have several systems running in Lotus Notes or interfacing through it, which sends out automated emails when actions have to be taken or deadlines will be missed. These are useful reminders, and often have a link to the area of interest. However systems designers are not always the brightest of folk, and it is common to receive a group of notes from "IS" with a generic subject. Therefore each note has to be opened to prioritise them all. I tend to open them and edit the subject line for future reference.

Ideally I will keep my inbox empty apart from items which I am deliberately holding, but I frequently go through periods (as at the moment) where I have

dozens of notes – unread/read but unactioned/read and actioned but I forgot to dispose of them. I counted this afternoon 88 unread (displayed in red) and a similar number read (displayed in black). This is very unsettling, as some have been sitting for a couple of weeks and it is easy to miss a vital message. My boss helpfully said I should print them all off daily, then delete or file them and prioritise them on paper but, being in a technical function, many lead to specific tasks or contain data, and cannot merely be read and disposed of. This is a great source of stress.

Many mails have attachments – pdf files of packaging artworks for example. These I detach and save elsewhere as we get nagged for a large mail file, but they don't notice the same files separately on the server.

One of the pleasures of email on a personal level is its immediacy. I can write to a friend and have a reply in minutes; we can exchange photos and snippets so much more easily than by post, and of course free of charge. It can be a bit disruptive having an email conversation with someone, but better than 20 minutes on the phone. I have a couple of quite close workmates at other sites whom I have never met and probably never will. Perhaps they are key-friends rather than pen-friends.

I never forward chain letters (and not doing this has never brought me bad luck). But I am more than happy to pass on a good joke, story, internet link etc to a considered number of recipients (if for no other reason than never sending these things out would mean no-one would send any to me).

Some users seem happy to have a pop-up and a boing to announce each incoming message, but I think this is much better turned off – each interruption loses you a few seconds of concentration even if you just close the pop-up, and in a technical task it can take a minute or two to pick up the threads even if the mail isn't opened.

I think this will do for now – feedback would be appreciated.

As Thomas requested feedback I replied with the following.

"This is just the thing, Thomas. There are some very interesting things here. Funny, I've always thought that "fun size" isn't as much fun as normal size, but then I have always been suspicious of anything that needs to announce it is "fun" – but that is by the by.

"Keep it coming as you wish – either in additional instalments or amended versions of this. It's your thoughts that encompass your experience and opinions that are important – whatever they are."

Thomas then added the following.

After three days' holiday I have received 122 emails.

My normal strategy is to keep the inbox as empty as possible – perhaps a dozen opened emails that I have to act on in the next few days (almost a to-do list), and

everything else actioned or filed or deleted as far as possible. Having six pages of inbox is therefore very daunting. Quite a lot of email needs action or a response within a couple of days, and within my technical role this frequently involves providing correct data, or approving specifications or artworks. All this requires care and concentration, which is difficult. With this many notes it is difficult to prioritise, and my boss is currently looking for a source of £12,000 due to a misunderstanding.

The first task is to weed out the obviously unrequired stuff: headings that tell me it is a routine round robin or project that doesn't concern me (which I delete), a thread of replies (for which I delete all but the latest), jokes or gossip (which I would normally happily read, but have to forgo in this situation) etc. This got rid of 23 notes. There were probably more that were sent straight to trash by my "rules".

My next strategy is to pick half a dozen notes that I know I can action quickly – therefore at the end of the day I will have completed at least a few tasks. After that I look for critical tasks…

It will probably take me two or three weeks before I am keeping pace with the influx.

Sadly I live in an environment of chronic understaffing (or "lack of resource" to use the marketing bollocks), so I rarely get to complete a complex task without

interruptions. I have long since turned off any notifications about incoming emails, but of course I will get phone calls about unanswered mails.

Then later still, Thomas added the following.

It is now a week since I returned to work, and I still have 100 unread emails, though probably only half of these are from the original 122.

I've not bothered to plan a day for about 15 years, because whatever the consultants say in their time management courses, at my level I have no time to manage – it all belongs to someone else. If something breaks, or some material is faulty, I just have to drop everything and go. I once told an HR manager how I prioritise my tasks – the things that will get me the biggest bollockings get done first, then the little jobs that I know I can finish. Five jobs completed in ten minutes gives me more satisfaction than one big unfinished task. Childish, isn't it?

My story

I began using email at work in 2000. The legal proofreading department that I joined that year (the one I'm still in) uses email as the primary means of communication. Most of the documents I receive for proofreading arrive as email attachments, with the emails to which they are attached containing a greeting, some instructions as to what the sender wants me to do and how they would like the work returned. The work I return to clients is also returned as an attachment. Most departmental information is also distributed via email; this is

necessary as my night shift doesn't often see the higher-level managers face-to-face. I am now line manager for a group of 12 legal proofreaders. Even among the 13 of us I use email a lot as there is no one day in the week when everyone is present as the night people work a four-day shift system, providing coverage over a seven-day week. The recent introduction of BlackBerries has reinforced the primacy of email over the telephone.

I try to write my own emails as if they were normal letters, whether they be to the department as a whole, a client or an individual within the department. Emails to the department will typically be prefixed "Dear All", and emails to clients will be prefixed "Dear [first name of person]". At the end I will close with "Best wishes, David" or "Kind regards, David". Generally speaking I try not to use abbreviations as I imagine that my readers will think that abbreviated text indicates that I can't be bothered, or haven't time, to give due time to that person's question, concern, work or whatever. I have a feeling that I may come across as rather formal and old-fashioned, but I am conscious that, given the circumstances of our work, most of my colleagues and clients know me to a significant degree through this medium.

Generally speaking, my experience of email has been positive. I have not experienced any of the common and widely reported errors such as being the recipient of a message about me that was inadvertently sent to me, neither have I sent one to an unintended recipient, although I am extremely careful in this respect. Quite often, however, I have been in the process of writing an email when someone comes into my office to talk to me, and I am conscious of them

perhaps trying to read the message over my shoulder. Usually I can maximise another window to obscure what I am doing without the visitor seeing much (although they may see enough be aware of who I am writing to). In such situations I do feel a little uneasy about deliberately and obviously hiding something from another person. Similarly, when I visit someone else's office and I am the prying visitor, I find it very difficult not to look at that person's screen and, similarly to me, they will perform the same concealment ritual.

In the whole of my working experience of email I have only been flamed once. ("Flaming" is the act of writing an inappropriately angry or insulting email; the anger usually being denoted by the use of CAPITAL LETTERS.) On this occasion a client was very unhappy about the late delivery of her work and took out her anger on me by email, copying her message to the whole of my department. This generated comment but all the comment directed to me was sympathetic. Many commentators imagined that I was far more upset by this incident than I was, expressing sentiments such as "I hope this won't cause you to lose confidence" or "I hope this won't upset you for too long". Actually at the time I was a little surprised at the lack of professionalism of the author of the message (particularly in the way that she copied it to the whole department) but not very upset; if anything it provoked an exaggeratedly "adult" response to the "child" persona she exhibited. I have wondered since whether the lady in question ever felt as sheepish as I would have were the roles reversed; I've also wondered what I would have done in her position. I'd like to think I would have apologised a little later, perhaps with a bit of explanation, but would I have copied my apology/explanation to the people to whom I'd copied the original

flame? No, I don't think so. In any event, I received neither apology nor explanation. This incident has coloured my view of the person concerned; there are some clients – most clients – for whom I will pull out all the stops, even to the extent of taking big jobs home at the weekend if it is the only way they will get done, but this lady is now off my most-favoured-person list, although I do the run-of-the-mill work that she sends in the normal way without any discrimination or alteration in approach, thoroughness etc. I had a rather mischievous thought when some time later she got married – I wondered whether getting satisfactory conjugalities would make her loosen up a bit. The office environment in which I work (rather PC, caring, sharing, inclusive of everyone and everything etc etc – hmm…) would not in any way permit me to repeat such an un-PC thought.

Although I expect others see my emails as being old-fashioned and perhaps representative of someone of my age (49), they don't say so. There's not much point looking for honesty in today's workplace, though. Nobody dares. In some ways this is a good thing – everyone's entitled to hold an opinion, but that doesn't give them an automatic right to inflict it on other people – but the downside is that no-one really knows what's in other people's minds.

In the emails I receive I expect the same level of consideration and obvious time taken as I try to put into the ones I write. One kind that I don't like are the ones that are sent to me as part of an email group and which mean nothing to me. For example, "XXX's leaving party is at YYY on Tuesday – be there". I don't know XXX and I don't know the sender of the message (usually XXX's PA),

and do either of them really want me to turn up and partake of their free drinks and nibbles? Worse among this type are those peppered with exclamation marks, such as "XXX is leaving!!!...". As if it's such a big deal; until this moment I've never heard of XXX, and have managed perfectly all right so far. The subtext being that everybody knows XXX, and by not knowing him I am somehow made to feel like an outsider. These are a minor irritation and, if I can recognise them from the subject line, I delete them unread. These are annoying but not influential. Similar are those which begin "Hi there". Am I being paranoid, or is the sender assuming a superior position to the recipients? I think so, particularly if the recipient is me individually (why not use my name?) or a distinguishable group (why not use the group name?). "Hi there" as a salutation in email comes in the category of (in normal speech) "I say, you fellow" or (on the telephone) "Who speaks?". It's got that easy, informal superiority such as used by bright young Marketing types. They seem to be setting out their own conceptualisations of hierarchy, and responding to them (a response is always required) implies acceptance.

Other minor irritations include using no salutation; "David" instead of "Dear David" or "Hello David". Is something meant by this lack of politeness? Similar annoyance comes from "KRs" at the end in place of "kind regards", the implication being that the writer is a very busy person, much too busy to bother typing out the whole words to someone like me. It's interesting how these little things can carry implications of hierarchy and status.

I sometimes sign my emails with a single initial – I wonder if my recipients draw the same conclusions? I must ask.

More amusing than annoying is use of right-on jargon. The buzz of the moment is "going forward"; many's the time I've sat in a meeting (usually one with a strong HR presence) and counted the occurrences of this phrase. For me it signifies that the speaker is a dynamic, driven, ideas-person, and anyone who disagrees with what they are saying is stuck in the past, obsessed with trivialities. Its use in email is currently very prevalent: to me it says that this person thinks that anything that has gone before is now irrelevant because of the brilliance of their important new idea. One of my colleagues (I'll call him ZZZ) was engaged in a long email correspondence about the terms and conditions of his employment, following a change of working hours. The HR component of this message was peppered with incidences of "going forward"; ZZZ forwarded these emails to me for information and comment. I made my comment and concluded with "ZZZ, I'm glad to see we are going forward". I don't think my irony was lost on him.

As in normal speech, however, the emails that are more personally disturbing are those that are addressed personally to me and have apparent subtexts. "Thanks for that" – does this imply thanks for stating the obvious, or for providing something that isn't required or hasn't been asked for? I asked a colleague about this and I was told very unequivocally that I was being paranoid.

One email that gave me a red-mist moment – a reply to an enquiry I'd put to a person for whom I am line manager – commenced with "Yeah, well". My initial enquiry concerned a piece of work that I wasn't sure was finished or not. I wrote a reply that began "Don't 'Yeah, well' me laddie", but fortunately I thought better of it and deleted it unsent. The response I sent was one of slightly stiff formality, but one that ignored the obvious disrespect. The sarcasm of this "Yeah, well" commencement leapt out of the screen, was utterly inappropriate, but had I sent my original response it would have been me who would have been hauled over the coals. Propriety and professionalism is so much more important when the email goes from manager to managed than when the direction is reversed. This occurrence happened only once, some time ago. I was, in fact, in error in making the enquiry that prompted this response as the answer I sought was available had I taken the trouble to look for it. This response has, however, coloured my perception of this person ever after, to the extent that all emails I send to him now are checked and double-checked for accuracy and possession of all facts in order not to provide an opportunity for a repeat performance. Other colleagues who would have replied something like "I finished this work yesterday and I think I filed it – could you have a look please?" get my sometimes-unnecessary queries same as usual. Although these enquiries may sometimes be unnecessary, they enable me to resolve queries quickly and give others the opportunity to give me often-useful extra information when they reply. Unnecessary doesn't have to mean unreasonable.

The facet of email I've left until last in this autobiography is perhaps the most serious. Certainly for me it is, and it was the thinking that emerged from this

and its possible implications that inspired me to conduct this research. As I said before, I am manager of a team of 12 proofreaders who work during the night. I came into the job two years ago, when the previous departmental manager became ill and would not be returning for a long time, if ever. Shortly after taking over I started receiving emails from a member of staff with "[Private]" in the subject line; the text of these emails usually concerned perceived misdemeanours of the author's colleagues and what the author wanted me to think were transgressions of "rules". A typical example would concern a colleague eating a sandwich at their desk; the author would report the perceived transgression and then conclude with "Has the rule changed?" Often I was not aware of such rules and, even when I was, would not have described them as such. We have customs and practices that are commonly agreed and adhered to, but to call them "rules" is too strong and misinterprets the collegiate nature of our department. I responded to a few of these but was uneasy from the start about a colleague being so willing to pass on tittle-tattle about colleagues. When it became clear that the author of these emails thought that I should report back to her on actions taken as a result of her information I made it clear (verbally in private, not by email) that I would do nothing of the sort; disciplinary matters should always be private. The outcome of this was that the "[Private]" emails dried up to a trickle and I ceased replying to them, although I did read them when they arrived and acted upon them when it was appropriate to do so. This took an altogether more serious turn when a new arrival to our department told me privately that this same colleague was sending her "[Private]" emails which criticised and corrected her work. This colleague felt that she was being bullied but equally felt that as the emails were headed

"[Private]" she was breaking a confidence by reporting them. I immediately rethought my attitude to the emails I'd received and came to the conclusion that they could indeed be classified as bullying on two counts: (1) with respect to me, in trying to secure the enforcement of non-existent rules, and (2) with respect to the people who were being reported. I knew immediately that I had to take action on this, and did so. This incident, however, illustrated to me how inappropriate behaviour can be hidden in the medium of the email, and unofficial and invisible hierarchies can develop.

My view is that email is undoubtedly a good thing, but it has yet to develop its own safeguards and the means of monitoring and enforcing them.

Supplementary note:

An odd event occurred shortly after writing the above email autobiography, which highlights what happens when email access is unavailable. I attempted to log on to my email account in the office, only to find that it froze almost immediately upon opening. I called the helpdesk, only to be told that there was a problem and it was subject to a [buzzword – forgotten, but didn't understand at the time]. Now, there were only two other people besides me in the office, yet I felt totally disconnected. In the end I walked over and asked them if there was anything I needed to know, and of course they told me, but the feeling of disconnection from what is the main means of disseminating information was most strange. It wasn't the emails directly addressed to me that I minded not seeing, it was the ones on which I would have been copied that I missed. Interesting point here: being copied on emails, which mostly means being part

of an email group, gives a sense of belonging that is not immediately tangible, but which when withdrawn even for a short time leaves one feeling cast adrift.

Reflection and analysis: part 1 – culture

The first part of the research question sets out to determine the extent to which email communities within organisations affect organisational culture. This section begins to answer the question using the stories above and the initial offerings of the other participants, against the background of the literature considered in Chapter 2 and the proposition made in this research.

The proposition made in this research is that email is central and essential to organisational culture. It forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious.

Thomas' email autobiography describes a busy person for whom email can be something of an annoyance. He reports not having bothered to plan a day for about 15 years, continual interruptions and a two- to three-week backlog of emails to sort out after having taken a few days off. This begs the question, why not disengage? Thomas can't wholly disengage as it is by email that his designs and data are

delivered to him, but this doesn't explain his continued engagement in something that in many ways he finds disruptive and controlling. Thomas is in many ways hostile to those people who are the facilitators of email – the "not-much-helpdesk". Thomas' view here bears comparison with that of Ruby, whose systems manager told her that her email conversations were not as private as she thought, or that of Grace, whose employer routinely monitored email traffic and, where subversive content was found, warned employees that "such issues should be taken up with line managers and not through the email network". The communities formed within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) may not always be invisible from the structural standpoint, although there is nothing here to suggest that it is any more than the employer finding that "something is going on". There is still some distance between awareness of something going on and being aware of the existence of a community. Suspicion of email facilitators and management's covert monitoring of it is a concern represented in the literature (Miller and Weckert 2000, Friedman and Reed 2007: 7-8, Stokely 2003:3, Woodbury 1998), although respondents appear to be remarkably relaxed about privacy issues, conceiving email as analogous to postcards in the conventional mail situation rather than sealed letters (Australian Federal Privacy Commissioner 2002: 2).

None of the participants expressed a desire to disengage from email altogether. Further, none even wished to treat it as a necessary evil – something bolted on to the real work of the day. For all participants email is both essential and central to their working lives: "I correspond most with my research supervisors, despite them each having offices less than 200 yards from my desk" (Jack); and "I use email at work

exclusively to any other form of communication these days, particularly with the BlackBerry innovation where email is constantly with you whether in the office or on site or mobile" (Alfie). This centrality emerges in the literature as a combination of "advantages, disadvantages, social dynamics, problems and opportunities" (Hiltz and Turoff 1985 in Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000:279). The way in which email is, per the proposition of this research, both central and essential to their organisational lives is supported in *My story*: "The recent introduction of BlackBerries has reinforced the primacy of email over the telephone".

There is nothing here, however, to credit email as anything other than a valuable and useful business tool, such as the telephone or the post-it note are. What is it that makes email different from these, and what is it that signifies it as of cultural significance?

The engagement (or unwillingness to disengage) experienced by Thomas, Ruby and Grace featured in Garsten's (1994) work at Apple, where employee engagement was found to be a feature of a dynamic concept of culture.

The literature review of Chapter 2 offered two distinct concepts. The first, the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001, Deal and Kennedy 1982: 18) is represented as being of use to organisations as it consists of something static and quantifiable, and so organisations can easily measure and value their culture and use it as a means of presenting the organisation to its people and the outside world. The structural culture concept is evident in the stories of the participants, for example Grace's employer believed that issues should be addressed through official channels –

clearly an invisible (and uncontrollable) alternative was not acceptable to it. Similarly in *My story* I note a "rather P[olitically] C[orrect], caring, sharing, inclusive of everyone" environment. Strikingly, however, both these examples are written from an outsider, almost subversive, point of view; in these cases Grace and I are both outsiders, and our comments are directed at an officially contrived artefact.

The other concept considered in the literature review of Chapter 2 is the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). The inside-outsider social habitus concept is one that emerges strongly in the respondents' stories. Jack mentions the importance of group membership and how group memberships overlap – "I also receive information… as a result of being part of the various groups (research or social) within the department" and "These groups largely overlap in membership". These groups are formal, such as those delineated by receiving email directed to a particular address, but even so Jack is keen not to risk his insider status by breaking the rules of etiquette – "I am often hesitant about sending emails to groups of people in case I bother them unnecessarily". Shea (1996: 32-33) sets out the need to remember that behind email lies human beings worthy of consideration and respect; clearly Jack (who may or may not be familiar with Shea, but is very likely familiar with the principles of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001, Vince 2001)) keeps this in mind.

Ruby's focus lies with informal groups. In her open-plan office she observes the "rattle and report" of keyboards which, in her delightful alliterative style, she calls "the crescendo of a clique". For Ruby, viewpoint is everything. She observes (from an outsider perspective) the firing off of what she supposes could be a reminder

directed at her supervisor. In her view, her supervisor and the author of the reminder are insiders. Would her supervisor, however, feel like an insider in relation to the author of the reminder? Only the supervisor could answer that and any assumed status in relation to this may be influenced by the wording of the reminder – if indeed that is what it is. For example, "Can I confidentially remind you…" may well leave the supervisor feeling like an insider, whereas "We all think you should be reminded…" may well leave the supervisor feeling very much on the outside (and, for that matter, imagining that Ruby is on the inside). As proposed in this research, the extent and form of the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon are indeed fluid, unclear and mysterious. Equivocal and viewpoint-related status arises in *My story*. I note being offered a glimpse into others' communities by being invited to free drinks and nibbles with people I don't know. I can't help feeling that the door is being opened to me, but were I to go through I would be unceremoniously ushered out again! In conventional conversational terms this equates to being the bystander who hears that which is intended to be overheard, but is not invited to participate (Clark 1992: 218 in Skovholt and Svennevig 2006: 47). Like Willis' (1977) "lads" and "ear'oles", Azzam et al's (2007) college students, Thomas and James' (1999) GPs and Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva communities, Ruby's office and mine consist of groups where insiders are insiders and outsiders are outsiders in their relations with others, their perceptions of themselves and the degrees of acceptance and exclusion they experience and, importantly, the acceptance and exclusion they observe between others. Cohesiveness fostered by insider status may be more equivocal than Kibby (2005) and Thomas and James (1999) suggest. Indeed, the equivocation suggested by Spence (2002: 48), where cohesion is accompanied by a natural corollary of exclusion, may present a more accurate illustration in this respect.

Jack's formal email groups and Ruby's rattling cliques offer respective parallels with Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural and the insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) concepts. How valid are these parallels, however? Formal email groups are, like communities, delineated by addresses; an email address such as "Marketing" acts in the same way as a postal address such as "High Street". Addresses are convenient descriptors of communities defined by proximity (being proximate in terms of function in the case of Marketing, and in location in the case of High Street), but addresses do not exclusively describe something as organic, evolutionary and fluid as the communities formed within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation. Structural culture concepts such as those of Hofstede (1997, 2001) are unlikely to help in addressing the research question, because the focus of the question lies in questions of personal status with regard to perceptions of self and others, not with respect to official hierarchies. That the hierarchies exist and are reflected in officially sanctioned email groups is undeniable but, as the subversion practised by Jack's "ancient professor" shows, the hierarchical email structure merely provides a vehicle through which insider and outsider statuses are formed, disintegrated, attacked, defended, assimilated and isolated as individuals communicate, form alliances and work out their differences.

The validity of the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) with respect to the research question is supported in the way that insider and outsider statuses feature in participants' stories. The importance of insider status and the lengths to which insiders will go in order to enhance and preserve it is a preoccupation of all participants. Even Jack, whose view has been shown to be relatively hierarchical and

Hofstedian, expresses concerns about maintaining his insider position through not breaking the rules of etiquette (in this case by replying promptly) with respect to older academics – outsiders – who treat email "the same as they would 'snail mail'". Jack's concerns mirror those expressed in *My story*: "I am conscious that… most of my colleagues and clients know me to a significant degree through this medium".

So, whilst the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) may, as the literature review of Chapter 2 suggests, have a place in describing and developing official organisational hierarchies and official groups therein, in order to analyse, in the terms of the research question, the email communities within organisations, it is necessary to do so in an organic context and one which accords with the respondents' contexts in telling their stories. The insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) meets this requirement.

Thomas describes relationships between "key[board] friends" – the parallel being drawn here with "pen friends". These are colleagues with whom he exchanges news, photographs, internet links and jokes. This group of insiders demonstrates a bond of trust that goes beyond that of the functional bond between colleagues; the sharing of jokes and links can be risky, as Thomas subconsciously acknowledges in his choice of a "considered number of recipients". Thomas does not, however, consider it suitable to forward chain letters. Every culture has its taboos, the breaking of which can lead to ostracism such as that experienced by Elias and Scotson's (1994: 38-39) lady who invited the bin-men in for tea. In not sending on chain letters Thomas is avoiding such ostracism, but by forwarding acceptable communication he is maintaining his position: "I am more than happy to pass on a good joke, story, internet link etc… if

for no other reason than never sending these things out would mean no-one would send any to me".   Thomas' experience of organically developing and self-sustaining email groups suggests that their sustenance requires work on the part of key members (Alpay 2005: 11-12, Bourhis et al 2005: 23, Schwartz 1999: 599). This bears comparison with my email correspondence with ZZZ, concerning the use (by an outsider, in relation to ZZZ and me) of the words "going forward" as described in *My story*; here is recounted the dynamic of an insider group, formed for the moment for a particular purpose, but done so against a backdrop of trust and past insider experience.

Inclusion in a like-minded and supportive group such as that exemplified by Thomas' key[board] friends has its advantages. In *My story* I recount the story of being flamed, and the way in which my group formed an email huddle around me when it happened: "This generated comment but all the comment directed to me was sympathetic. Many commentators imagined that I was far more upset by this incident than I was, expressing sentiments such as 'I hope this won't cause you to lose confidence' or 'I hope this won't upset you for too long'". Such supportive gossip was noted by Elias and Scotson (1994: 13-21) as being essential to the dynamic of communities, and as Skovholt and Svennevig (2006: 52-60), Peek et al (2007: 169), Weare et al (2007: 238-241), Cater (2003) and Radcliffe (2007) observe, email plays a significant part in the dynamic of the 21st century organisation. Although located on the inside in this particular instance, I can see that this spontaneously arising community will be, as proposed in this research, ill-defined at best, and invisible at worst, to those on the outside. Yet there is no malice here, and no motivation to draw outsiders in.

Emergent from the participants' stories are elements of unsupportive gossip. Olivia relates a story about an email conversation concerning the parentage of a pregnant colleague's baby, with various humorous suggestions of various men in the organisation being offered. Grace offers a similar story about female colleagues being rated on their attractiveness by male colleagues in a round robin into which she was on one occasion inadvertently copied. These examples validate the role of gender in the determination of what is and what is not acceptable for propagation by email (Khoo and Senn 2004: 210-212). They also illustrate the lack of clarity proposed in this research regarding extent and form of cliques to outsiders; the pregnant lady apparently knew nothing of the community that grew up around speculation regarding her condition and so was an unwitting outsider, whereas Grace was inadvertently granted insider status to which she was not entitled – a very equivocal position to be in. *My story* relates the odd experience of receiving emails headed "[Private]" which detailed the misdemeanours of others, and then to be told that a colleague was also receiving such emails from the same person and which my colleague interpreted as bullying. The author of these emails could of course have been concerned about the running of the organisation, but the use of email in this way is redolent of alternative hierarchies, constituency development and power play. Leadership has been shown to be important in the sustenance of organically arising email groups (Alpay 2005: 11-12, Bourhis et al 2005: 23, Schwartz 1999: 599), however for it not to constitute bullying it must be characterised by emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999: 183-185, Hughes 2001: 26-29, Vince 2001: 1325). The emails received by my colleague did not appear to be emotionally intelligent to me and, indeed, my colleague used the word "bullying" in her description of those she received.

The first part of the research question asks "To what extent do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture?". Participants' stories illustrate the existence of an official, culture-as-artefact construction that corresponds with Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept, one that espouses the aims characteristic of organisations' stated values and where email address groups formed largely around functions and rules concerning email usage reflect those values. Participants' stories also, however, illustrate the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) that operates through email groups that bears no relation to the official one and where the gossip by which the email community evolves is both supportive and destructive, and inclusive and exclusive dependent upon the viewpoint of the individual. Outsiders' experience is characterised by a lack of clarity with respect to the extent of their outsiderdom, and the extent and form of the entity from which they are outside. The picture that emerges in relation to this alternative email community is, however, not of one that deliberately sets out to subvert the structure and aims of the official one, but rather sees it as irrelevant, as are its rules and values.

The further stages of the research process encouraged participants to reflect and comment upon the stories offered by their peers. How this further builds upon the cultural phenomenon derived here is discussed in Chapter 6.

Reflection and analysis: part 2 – remedies and organisational learning

At the email autobiography stage, all participants had significantly less to say about remedies than they had to say about the problems they encountered with email. Thomas mentions a lack of training in the use of email, saying that "many (if not

most) users are simply given it on a PC, and after five minutes' familiarisation are left to get on with it". Any further learning occurs through on-the-job training received from more experienced colleagues. "There is," Thomas adds, "absolutely no training on etiquette". This is not limited to Thomas' organisation: he tells of being involved in a project of national importance with an external contractor, one of whose employees emailed him with an empty subject line. This, to Thomas, consists of a serious breach of email etiquette.

Although Thomas claims that there is no training in etiquette, in the presence of on-the-job training in other aspects of email use it would be unlikely that email etiquette would be specifically excluded. It seems likely that Thomas' organisation follows the pattern of situated learning described by Vygotsky (1978) and developed for the 21st century organisation by Lave and Wenger (1991: 34-37). The pattern Thomas describes appears to be restrictive, i.e. largely conducted in the course of work and limited to the particular organisation's imperatives (Fuller et al 2005: 58-59).

Ruby on the other hand tells of teaching email to students from first principles. Ruby's students were new arrivals from abroad and she describes their first encounter with email as being "even better than the 'first snow' lesson, where students from hot climes run to stand outside in awe at the white wet stuff descending so prettily from the sky". She describes how "sad and lonely faces would light up… Technical aptitude soared as students who had initially seemed to lack interest or ability clamoured to email photos to far-flung family…". What Ruby describes here is an apprenticeship in email which offered something of personal use to the trainees, and something that is usable outside the context for which it was being taught –

presumably the context here being becoming employable, and being able to apply for jobs – expansive in Fuller and Unwin's (2003: 419-423) and Fuller et al's (2005: 56-58) characterisation.   Further, the specific context of Ruby's students reflects the importance of their experience, environment and imperatives, and their contribution to learning (Eraut 2000: 130-132, 2006: 13, Lawy 2000: 601, Nixon et al 1996 in Lawy 2000: 601, Popper and Lipshitz 2000: 192, Hong 1999: 183-184, Owenby 2002: 58-59).

The context of Ruby's story differs significantly from that of Thomas in that Ruby's ultimate intention is to prepare her students for life external to her workplace. Also, unlike Thomas, Ruby has responsibility for achieving this. Both Ruby's and Thomas' stories are housed within Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning context – the absence of any knowledge management context (Davenport and Prusak 1998) is telling. Does the absence of knowledge management, with its commercial motivation (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 1-6, Serban and Luan 2008: 5) demonstrate that organisations are missing a trick here by failing to take seriously the commercial consequences arising from the alternative culture effects embedded in email usage? The second part of the research question asks "What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?" From the evidence emerging from Ruby's and Thomas' stories it is clear that organisations are not seeing the problem, and that what learning is taking place is being done on an ad-hoc basis. Suggestions may yet emerge in the further analysis of Chapter 6, but for now, this part of the research question must remain open, and apparently unacknowledged by the organisations to which it applies.

Conclusion

This Chapter has described how the participants developed from a disparate collection of individuals into a participant group of what Thomas would describe as "key[board] friends". The breaking down of barriers that accompanied this allowed and encouraged the telling of intimate details of participants' experiences with email. These experiences have been presented in the form of verbatim[2] stories (in respect of those participants who presented their initial offerings unprompted by guidance) and in the form of contributory responses (in respect of the other participants).

The research question sets out to examine "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?", and the reflection and analysis presented in this Chapter follows this two-part culture and organisational learning format.

The concept of email as a facilitator of organisational culture was unproblematic to the participants as none of them regarded email as purely a business tool. Even though some described being frustrated by it, none had difficulty with regarding it as being central to their working lives and they had no wish to disengage from it. This centrality reflects the proposition made in this research. Their stories and initial responses describe groups with hierarchies, rules and taboos, sustained by gossip, reminiscent of the insiders and outsiders described by Elias and Scotson (1994), conceptualised here as the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). The participants described

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[2] Within the specifications set out in footnote 1

unofficial, fluid communities where insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift and where the extent and form of such communities are unclear and mysterious as per the proposition made in this research, and just as sophisticated as that explored in the literature review of Chapter 2 (Bocock 1992; Cater 2003; Elias 1978, 1987, 2000, 2001; Elias and Scotson 1994; Garsten 1994; Humphrey 2007; Peek et al 2007; Radcliffe 2007; Sipior and Ward 1999; Skovholt and Svennevig 2006; Thomas and James 1999; Weare et al 2007; Willis 1977). Participants' personal experience of organisational email usage fits well with this concept and they inherently apply an insider-outsider social habitus understanding to it.

Firmly located within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), social propriety is important to participants and the issues that receive prominent attention in the literature, respect for other people (University of Bath), discrimination (Frazier et al 1995, Khoo and Senn 2004), and emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001), receive prominent attention among the participants too.

Yet when the participants refer to officially sanctioned email groups – those designated by common addresses set up for business purposes – they readily adopted the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). This reified structural culture concept was explored in the literature review of Chapter 2, where it was found to sit comfortably in a practitioner-oriented HR/management context (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Hofstede 1997, 2001; James 2004; Sachs 2001). Participants' experience of

officially sanctioned organisational values and official, top-down email hierarchies are unproblematically located in this structural culture concept.

The participants seemed also to be relatively unconcerned by issues of privacy (Friedman and Reed 2007; Miller and Weckert 2000; Ruggeri Stevens and McElhill 2000; Shea 1996; Spence 2002; Stokely 2007; Vince 2001; Woodbury 1998; Yale University). Often based on well-publicised statute law, regulation, case-law, organisational rules (Christacopoulos 1999; Christians 1997; Lucas 1963; Australian Privacy Commissioner 2000; Smyth v Pillsbury 1996), privacy issues for participants are located firmly within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001).

In respect of the second part of the research question, that concerned with organisational learning, participants' stories and initial responses suggest that what learning there is is of the situated learning variety described by Lave and Wenger (1991), flowing in the conceptual map described in Chapter 3 from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). This sophisticated, socially located situated learning concept (Billet and Somerville 2004; Bourhis et al 2005; Dreyfus 1986; Easterby-Smith 1997; Eraut 2000 and 2006; Fuller et al 2005; Fuller and Unwin 2003; Hong 1999; Lave and Wenger 1991; Lawy 2000; Nixon et al 1996; Popper and Lipshitz 2000; Schwartz 1999; Wenger and Snyder 2000) has been exhaustively explored in literature. In sharp contrast with the practitioner-oriented knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998), it is within this situated learning concept that participants consider their learning about email to have taken place.

A well-developed literature area that describes quantified and commodified learning (Sfard 1998) which naturally follows from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and is located in the HR/management practitioner-oriented knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998; Serban and Luan 2002). In the experience of participants this appears not have been applied in any meaningful way by organisations with respect to email use, even though its inherent tangibility and qualities of reification makes it popular in other organisational contexts.

Revisiting the conceptual map of the *Conclusion* to Chapter 3, it is possible to see how these preliminary findings compare with the broad outline presented by the literature examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

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                            │ Introduction │
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            ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
            │ The structural   │        │ The insider-outsider │
            │ culture concept  │        │ social habitus concept│
            └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
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            ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
            │ The knowledge    │        │ The situated learning│
            │ management concept│       │ concept              │
            └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
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                        │ Comparison and   │
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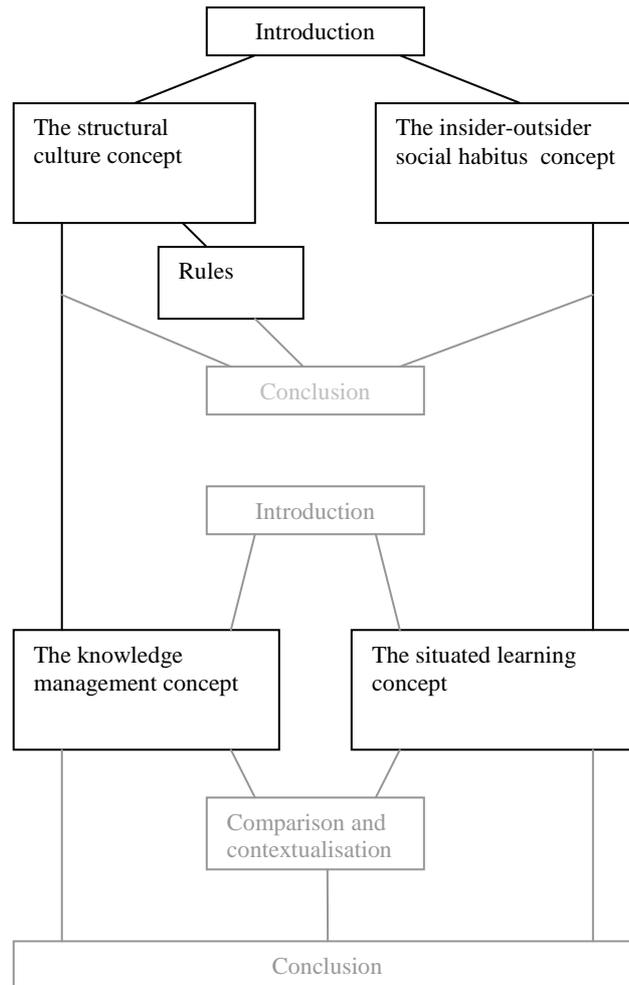
However, the participants' stories and initial analysis are not the whole story. As explained at length in Chapter 4, the purpose of evocative autoethnographic research such as this is to achieve depth and meaning. In Chapter 6 the participants embark upon a process of email discussion and reflection around the issues identified as important to them, with this in mind.

CHAPTER 6

THE INTERACTIVE CONVERSATION AND FURTHER ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter 5 introduced the participants and presented their initial thoughts on email, based on their own experiences. This Chapter details the carrying forward of the research process with respect to the research question "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?", and the literature-derived conceptual map of the *Conclusion* to Chapter 3.

Each participant was encouraged to reflect on their initial thoughts through reviewing the thoughts of the other participants. So that this may be done whilst maintaining the process within the remit of the project and respecting the confidences expressed by participants (May 2002: 59) – and encouraging further confidence in the process – a number of discussion points were selected. These discussion points, together with their derivations from the email stories, are presented under *Discussion points 1*.

This first round of analysis is crystallised under *Discussion points 1 – participants' reflection and analysis*. From this, further discussion points were derived and, where necessary, further exploration of the original discussion points was undertaken. The process and outcomes of this appear under *Discussion points 2* and *Discussion points 2 – participants' reflection and analysis*. As explained in Chapter 4, the interactive conversation as a means of developing analysis retains the living voice of the

participant and as such is faithful to the aims of ethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 240). For this reason, participants' contributions are recorded verbatim[3].

In the *Conclusion* the research question and the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 are revisited with respect to the findings of this Chapter.

Discussion points 1

The discussion points presented here are derived from the issues raised by respondents in their email stories. The wording of each point draws on the expressions of respondents themselves and, where clarification is required, the language of the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. The only limiting criteria were (primarily) relevance to the research question and (secondarily) the time and length limitations of the project. Each discussion point, its derivation and the name of its contributor is given in Appendix 7.

Discussion points 1 – participants' reflection and analysis

The 18 discussion points derived from the email stories were presented to the participants for comment and reflection. Here is what they found. Participants were not required to reply to every point although some (Ruby, Thomas, Lily, Emily and Sophie) did. At this point in the process my input becomes purely analytical and reflexive – more "researcher" than "participant", although centred on the proposition of this research: that email is central and essential to organisational culture; it forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and

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[3] Within the specifications set out in footnote 1

Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001); within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift, and unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious. This input appears for each discussion point under the heading *Reflection and analysis* below, and is directed towards addressing the research question and relating participants' findings to the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.	*Friendships between remote colleagues can develop by email without the necessity of meeting such friends face-to-face.*

Ruby: "Yes, although generally within professional boundaries. Only once in my experience has such a relationship extended into friendship outside the professional sphere. It graduated to phone calls, then a meeting. Five years on, we talk every week on the phone. We no longer use email to communicate unless we need to exchange documents."

Thomas: "This is true, though it is quite exciting when you finally have cause to phone the colleague!"

Lily: "True, it can be much better than telephone conversations when you need to be polite, diplomatic and amiable."

Emily: "I would agree to a point. I do not think these friendships would be very deep or lasting compared to friends you have met in person; but you could definitely build a friendly rapport through email."

Sophie: "Yes, this is something I experienced. However, at least one face-to-face meeting was necessary at one point, for the friendship to grow stronger. I find that written communication is sometimes more detailed than the oral one. So the written message seems sometimes to leave a lasting – or longer – impression on the memory."

Oliver: "Yes, although only up to a point. I think the email friendships I have would fizzle out if I didn't have other reasons for keeping in touch."

Reflection and analysis: All participants who commented here noted the limitations of email, either pointing out that the development of friendships are dependent on progression to telephone or face-to-face contact. Lily comes at the issue from another direction, seeing email's limitation as an advantage. The literature supports their view in this respect – Bourhis et al (2005) note the need for purpose and leadership in order for electronically mediated groups to be sustainable.

2.   *Emoticons reduce the need for careful written expression.*

Ruby: "Yes. So I find emoticons too informal for professional emails. That 'sloppiness factor' and the way they look can provoke annoyance so I rarely use them anyway and only when I know how the recipient will react. I do not think I have used them when communicating with management unless emailing a manager on a matter of low importance. I have used email and the web for a long time yet remain unsure of the exact meaning of some emoticons, so would rather not risk being misinterpreted."

Thomas: "Don't use them – perhaps I'm a snob, but they seem childish. However at the same time I realise that they can stand in for the body language/tone of voice that is missing in emails."

Lily: "I would be extremely careful using these. They do not really have a place in the workplace. If the recipient is a trusted colleague, then maybe. I suppose they could be used to break the ice, but this would be a gamble in my opinion. It could be a generation issue."

Emily: "Emoticons can be of some help to express one's feelings in informal correspondence but should not be used instead of carefully written expressions. More of an add-on I would think – they should not be relied upon to bring one's point/mood across."

Sophie: "Not at all. I like careful, precise expression, with all the nuances punctuation affords us. I almost never use them, aside from the occasional ☺ or :) ."

Jack: "Never use them."

Reflection and analysis: Thomas says here that he doesn't use emoticons, but did so when chatting to me – see *The participant group* in Chapter 5. The other participants who commented on this point treat them with caution, using them only in informal contexts. It is interesting that these participants take written expression very seriously and are anxious not to be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Email for them clearly has meaning and consequence – a finding that supports the proposition that email is central and essential to organisational culture.

3.   *Newsletters that are circulated in the workplace by email are less effective than printed ones.*

Ruby: "Impact must depend partly upon workplace culture (are employees expected to read newsletters?) and the extent to which the individual enjoys using email and keeping up-to-date. I love email but am not particularly concerned with news so if it is busy at work, newsletters take second-to-junk priority."

Thomas: "Agree."

Lily: "Not true. Newsletters via email get to their correct destination(s) more efficiently and everyone receives the information at the same time."

Emily: "I agree. The amount of emails I receive per day per day tends to devalue email as a means of communication. There is a limited time in the day after all. I pay a lot more attention to paper-based newsletters and similar."

Sophie: "Yes, I believe so. I pay better attention to print material, my eyes seem to read it better than on a screen. Of course, it all depends on the importance of the message."

Reflection and analysis: Participants who responded to this point had widely differing opinions about the effectiveness of this use of email in what is an organisational context. Ruby refers specifically to workplace culture, here conceiving culture in relation to what employees are expected to do – a top-down, stratified model such as the structural culture concept proposed by Hofstede (1997, 2001). Lily and Emily understand the point differently, interpreting it in a practical context – that of efficient delivery. Sophie understands the point in the context of personal convenience.

4. *Workplace email users have little thought for the etiquette that applies in other means of communication.*

Ruby: "Yes, depending on the person. I think this is partly because messages, unlike paper planes, disappear off into the ether and cannot accumulate around the manager's desk to remind the sender that firing off that fifth reminder to order more rubber thimbles rather than bother him/her face-to-face might not be the most considerate route. It is also silent, which appeals to subversive elements – colleagues have shared jokes with me (although not to me) that could never be voiced in the office. These were all from men, sent to men. I rarely receive emails from female colleagues so am maybe out of the loop but cannot imagine that they are circulating jokes about sausages and dongers. Instead, I have seen and received emails from a female colleague [*here Ruby describes behaviour so unusual as to suggest that verbatim reporting here would risk identification of her and the female colleague*]. Here, I have to wonder if email can bring out the less attractive qualities each sex conceals when observing other workplace etiquettes. To stereotype: sexism and herd instinct in men and paranoia and snitching on colleagues to the manager in women. (I am guilty on all counts.)"

Thomas: "Absolutely – I frequently tell the IT section and HR that training is required in the etiquette (and common-sense) of email."

Lily: "This is not the case in my experience."

Emily: "I do not agree. I think most email business users have been made aware of the necessity of email etiquette. That is not to say that most emails are still much more informal than a posted letter would be."

Sophie: "I am not sure I fully understand this statement."

Oliver: "I would say I am reasonably careful, but only to the extent that I don't want to cause offence. I don't go out of my way to find out about accepted etiquette for email, if there is any."

<u>Reflection and analysis</u>:   Thomas, Emily and Oliver interpret etiquette narrowly, limiting their consideration to the conventions applicable to this communication medium. That is not to say that they agree; Thomas is frustrated by the behaviours he sees (see his story in Chapter 5) and sees a need for formal training. Emily sees that people are aware of etiquette, which seems to be what Oliver is saying about being careful. Emily and Oliver's observations seem to relate to an organic, expansive situated learning form of etiquette (Lave and Wenger 1991) whereas Thomas seems to be calling for training as understood in a knowledge management context (Davenport and Prusak 1998). Ruby has a much wider understanding of etiquette, including questioning whether email is the correct medium to use in certain circumstances, e.g. the making of simple requests that could be better expressed verbally. She also raises the issue of inappropriate subject matter – "jokes about sausages and dongers" – and the exclusionary effects of this. Ruby clearly sees an insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) element in her consideration of etiquette, which corresponds strikingly with Elias and Scotson's (1994: 38-39) lady whose social faux-pas in giving tea to the bin-men caused her to be ostracised. Email in the eyes of these participants is not a rule-free medium, nor do they want it to be although as proposed in this research, the "rules" are frequently disregarded, leaving participants feeling disempowered in an unclear and mysterious environment. Please note that Sophie offered reflection on this in her final review (see Appendix 10).

5.   *Because the delivery of email is so much quicker than "snail mail", recipients of workplace email should feel obliged to respond with more immediacy then they would respond to a letter arriving in the post.*

Ruby: "No, depending on the outcome of delay and deadlines understood between parties. But I observe that others seem to feel obliged to respond by return – and be responded to. I recently put off replying to an email from a member of HR for what seemed like a couple of days and was surprised at how seriously she took the incident – the word disciplinary was mentioned."

Thomas: "Not at all. This may be the thoughts of some users, but of course the same amount of consideration and research is needed to answer an email as for a written note."

Lily: "*As the sender* – Absolutely – and if they don't they cannot use the excuse of 'I never received that!' Especially if you set up your outgoing emails to send automatic notification of when the email was opened! *As the recipient* – Nooo – I'll have to reply straight away now! I wish they'd post me the memo!"

Emily: "I would agree with this; even though when thinking of why this should be, my reasoning is not flawless. I just feel that one should respond to an email within a day or two, whereas a posted letter response can take longer than that (and one can always blame the delay on the postal system which is not an option with email).

Sophie: "Yes, very true, especially when the email comes with a red exclamation mark, although it is not always as urgent as the sender would have me believe! But even without this sign, late email replies can give the impression of laziness or that there is a technical glitch, because people are more inclined to phone the recipient when a reply fails to come quickly."

Jack: "I'm not sure whether 'obliged' is the right word – it's a matter more of wanting to do the right thing."

Reflection and analysis: Lily, Emily, Sophie and Jack all, to varying degrees, are aware of a need to respond with greater immediacy to emails than to "snail mail". They consider this to be an element of etiquette – behaviour that they feel is right in the circumstances – although Emily reflects that she is not sure why this should be. Thomas and Ruby disagree, applying practical criteria, e.g. time taken to gather information, although both accept that other email users may expect an immediate reply. This expectation is illustrated by Ruby's experience with HR. This expectation of urgency with respect to email illustrates the centrality proposed in this research in the working lives of participants and the way in which authors of emails attach much importance to them, and expect others to receive and respond to them accordingly.

6. *Because email is so quick, in the workplace there is no need to observe the conventions that apply to paper-based memos or letters.*

Ruby: "Yes. And what a relief. All those paper memos we used to address, reference and lose in the filing where now we can make do with a sentence which, if necessary, can be amended immediately."

Thomas: "It depends what is meant. If you mean politeness, you are wrong. Also it is just as important to keep copies of emails (whether paper or electronic), so that when the shit hits the fan, you have something to shelter behind. However the language can be less formal."

Lily: "This is true in the sense that emails are informal. However, in the company I worked for there was a generally accepted 'in house style' that developed to internal mails."

Emily: "I do not agree. Wording, style and format in emails should not deviate that much from paper-based correspondence."

Sophie: "No, I fully disagree. I am always careful when drafting my messages. I use full words and sentences and a polite address before signing." Sophie then goes on to say "I am always displeased when I see the lack of care and consideration people convey when replying with half sentences, opaque SmS-type abbreviations or don't sign off. It's basic decency to send a well-written message. I think that people reveal a lot about themselves by their writing and language style, which is increasingly eroding online."

Jack: "As long as normal conventions concerning politeness are observed, email senders shouldn't be overly concerned about conventions. It is important, however, not to send emails drawn from a stock of standard ready-made, fill-in-the-blanks replies – I can spot these a mile off and have on one occasion received one with blank parts where the sender has forgotten to fill in the required information."

Alfie: "I think it depends on the context. If I am responding to a complaint from a client I would take more care and be more polite than if I was responding to a colleague asking what kind of sandwich I want."

Harry: "Yes."

Reflection and analysis: Only Harry offers an unequivocal "yes" in response to this statement. Each of the other participants who commented has their own interpretation of "convention", but each interpretation includes an element of care being shown by the writer to the recipient. Even Ruby's "Yes" in response to the statement is qualified by the possibility of instant amendment, which implies that the single sentence she may send will be adjusted in order to convey a carefully worded

message. Lily mentions a house-style, whilst Jack's view further requires individual responses rather than stock replies. Care for Jack means more than just the words, but imports factors of time taken and individual attention. Emily and Sophie, on the other hand, see the use of the email medium as offering no excuse for lack of care and consideration. This care and consideration is further extended into politeness by Alfie and Thomas, although Alfie's politeness is dependent upon the recipient and subject matter.

7.   *Workplace email should always be private between sender and recipient(s).*

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "The privacy factor is no different to any other communication – this seems a peculiar statement. There is danger of accidentally forwarding something to more than the intended recipients, but this is more to do with embarrassment."

Lily: "I think this depends on the individual's position in the company. As a manager I had access to my team's personal email accounts. I was asked as a manager to randomly check everyone's email to ensure they were being used in the correct manner. I personally feel it should be private."

Emily: "In principle, yes. But this is wishful thinking on my part. Emails are an incredibly unsecured form of communication (on the same level as postcards in my opinion) and this should be kept in mind when sending/receiving emails. Once an email is sent out, there is no telling where it might end up in the end or on which 700 servers it will be stored for the foreseeable future."

Sophie: "Yes, a must! Unless it's a bulk message for general, company-wide communication."

Grace: "I think individual emails are pretty safe, unless they contain things that get filtered and attract the attention of IT. Unless emails between people fall into this category then privacy should be respected. Stopping people gossiping by email is like stopping people talking – it just alienates people and ends up being counterproductive."

Reflection and analysis: Each participant who commented believes that email should be private, but in reflecting upon their belief Emily and Grace question just how private email is. Emily echoes the Australian Privacy Commissioner (2000) in her view that emails are like postcards. Thomas' view seems to be that privacy would only be broken by accident, although he seems to be replying in a context of comparing email to other forms of communication which, in an organisation, may not be very private at all. Grace's response is interesting in that it mentions the organisational consequences for failing to observe individual privacy where gossip is concerned – the alienation of people (or assignation of outsider status as proposed in this research). Lily's response, however, is a revelation; managers, of which she was one, randomly but routinely monitoring individual email accounts? She doesn't say whether this was known by the people whose accounts were being monitored, or when she was doing this – her response suggests this was in a previous employment and that, although she believes that email should be private, she wasn't very concerned by it (see her comment at point 8). It seems unlikely that, apart from the routine screening for breaches in security and the transmission of pornography and other unsuitable material that is electronically conducted such as that mentioned by Grace, this is routine or widespread – if it were, the other respondents would be much more definite in their reflection on this point. Friedman and Reed (2007: 7-8) point

out that overt breaches of privacy could provoke alienation among valuable knowledge workers, so employers may have reason to keep even legal monitoring covert.

8.   *Managers are afraid of private email conversations between colleagues.*

Ruby: "I cannot recall coming across such a manager. Although a colleague recently told me s/he suspected that his/her manager had been monitoring his/her email messenger use as s/he chatted with colleagues during quiet times in the office. My colleague took exception to this but I was with the manager as their office is open plan and for a team to be on display, mass chatting on MSN Messenger, to the rest of their company is perhaps not the best image to portray during a credit crunch."

Thomas: "My boss likes to be copied in on everything work related, but I think(?) this is just so he knows what is going on."

Lily: "I wasn't. See above ☺ !!!" (Here Lily is referring to her note at point 7.)

Emily: "I do not think that 'afraid' is the correct term. I would say that they are interested, however, and that is why I think a lot of email correspondence is monitored. That might just be paranoia though."

Sophie: "I'm not sure about that. I did notice in one of my jobs that my supervisor seemed a little annoyed when my two colleagues and I were talking joyously and laughing, but I think the impression was we were doing so at the expense of working."

Grace: "Managers always like to know what's going on, and IT people don't like their systems to be cluttered up, so I think they have their own motives for stopping gossip."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby and Emily each mention the possibility of monitoring going on with surprising resignation. Lily refers to her admission of monitoring without guilt. Thomas, Emily and Grace seem to agree that managers like to know what's going on but see no malign intent. Sophie seems to have misunderstood the statement by referring to "talking joyously and laughing" (although she offered clarification in her final review – see Appendix 10).

9.   *Workplace email facilitates the formation of private cliques.*

Ruby refers here to points 4 and 10.

Thomas: "No more than the phone, the water fountain, or the pub."

Lily: "I think this will happen whatever. I don't particularly think email would make it worse."

Emily: "Not so I'd notice. I haven't had that experience, no."

Sophie: "Very true."

Harry: "Yes, but that happens anyway. People have their own lives, of which the office or whatever is only a part."

Reflection and analysis: Harry's response to this statement is interesting in that it admits email communication between individuals in organisations for purely personal reasons. He explains this important concept further in terms of official structure and personal relationships in point 12. Sophie and Emily disagree with each other, but unfortunately do not elaborate (although Sophie offered further reflection on this in her final review – see Appendix 10). Thomas and Lily do not see any special role for email as a facilitator in the formation of private cliques, yet Thomas says in his email

autobiography that he maintains contact with a group of key[board] friends. Being (within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)) an insider in this respect, he perhaps doesn't see his group of key[board] friends as a private clique. Perhaps it takes someone who has been inside and then excluded to be sensitised to the insider/outsider concept in relation to such groups. Ruby is highly sensitised, having been included in the "Womble" clique until she transgressed and was immediately excluded without being told why (see her responses at points 10 and 11). Thomas and Ruby's experiences represent the opposite ends of the proposition of this research, that within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders (i.e. Thomas) wield power, outsiders (i.e. Ruby) feel disempowered, bullied and cast adrift.

10.   *It is risky to circulate jokes by email in the workplace, even quite innocuous ones, for fear of who might take offence.*

Ruby: "Yes. Recently, I somehow fell into an all-male clique. One guy circulated a picture of three Wombles strongly resembling in face and physiognomy two female colleagues who were not popular with the clique (the third Womble resembled me). By this, I assumed that certain 'etiquette' barriers had come down. But when I gossiped with the same clique, sharing an affectionate – true – anecdote about my brother [*here Ruby describes an event so unusual as to suggest that verbatim reporting here would risk identification of her and her brother*], I was instantly stonewalled. The messages stopped arriving. I concluded that I had caused offence to somebody who had not picked up from my writing style – or inclusive personality – the mutual respect my brother and I enjoy. The clique appeared to operate according

to a set of rules I was not party to and instead of appreciating our workplace being committed to equality, I worried a little that one or more of them might have been offended and storing my email up for a complaint… it would be me versus the clique… I regretted Recycle Binning the Wombles.”

Thomas: “Though this is the official view, I can never understand why – photocopies are just the same, just slower, and more likely to fall into the wrong hands. (I am deeply opposed to the PC movement, where we are supposed to live in fear of offending someone.)”

Lily: “It is risky and probably better not to do it. However, harmless or topical ones can sometimes help to raise morale within a team.”

Emily: “Yes, I agree. This is becoming more an issue with the PC-brigade on guard.”

Sophie: “Yes, I think it happened once or twice at my work. It can create unease or tensions, so it can be a slippery slope.”

Reflection and analysis: Ruby mentions “falling into an all-male clique”. From this she is vicariously operating as an insider – a status that is immediately withdrawn when she attempts to exercise what she believes are her rights as an insider. This bears comparison with the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) and stands in stark contrast to the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) she readily adopted in relation to the official use of email in the form of the newsletter (see point 3). Thomas and Emily also refer to the unofficial hierarchy represented by the “PC brigade” – something that their expressions indicate they feel outside. Again this signifies identification with the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) and accords with Skovholt and

Svennevig's (2006: 48) observations with regard to outsiders overhearing what goes on on the inside.

11.   *Workplace email provides an opportunity for covert bullying.*

Ruby: "Yes. But in my experience more by exclusion and examples such as the Wombles incident – covert circulation of an image or gossip with spiteful intent – rather than direct verbal abuse. One day I asked the same all male email clique what they were laughing at and the same guy who forwarded the Wombles emailed me a picture he had just circulated to the clique because it resembled me – it was a cut-out from The Guardian front page of a frowning stranger who, I guess, looked like me with a serious 'work-face'. I chose, perhaps unwisely, to brush this off as inane where others might not have done but after further incidents (unrelated to email) was planning to take him aside and explain that I was feeling bullied by his behaviour… however he was signed off with stress so I dropped the matter. Stress aside, this person is a very popular member of the team and comes across as everybody's friend. It feels disempowering when one of the Top Dogs is mocking you and other female colleagues behind your backs via email and the clique continues to support itself. You feel you can't tell anyone in case your highly sensitive female colleagues get hurt… you don't know how many other team members are involved… I have to admit laughing too – I'm ashamed to say I did find the comparison funny and note with regard to email bullying that it seems impossible to establish boundaries when you cannot see the fences (on Wimbledon Common)."

Thomas: "Possibly, but on the other hand the victim has the evidence if they want to take this up with the authorities – more so than verbal."

Lily: "Not in my experience."

Emily: "Not in my experience, since email leaves a paper trail which I think bullies tend to avoid? So, no."

Sophie: "Absolutely. Office politics plays a big part too, and emails help stress them I think."

Reflection and analysis: Once again Ruby's vicarious and temporary insider status in this office clique provides a fascinating insight into the way these normally impenetrable (from the outside) groupings work, supporting the proposition of this research in respect of insider power and outsider dislocation and disempowerment. It is as if the "Top Dogs" are playing with Ruby, using her for their own amusement. Thomas and Emily offer reasons why workplace email would in their view not be effective as a vehicle for workplace bullying (evidence to take up with the authorities, paper trail) yet these reasonings operate within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Ruby's experience, however, is one of alternate insider and outsider status, which, as proposed in this research, is fluid and evolving and located firmly within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), and an organisational remedy either does not occur to her, or is unavailable.

12. *Email between colleagues detracts from the organisation's stated values and weakens official hierarchies.*

Ruby: "Yes. Although I note that when colleagues were combining against a change in working procedures, covert chats took place by the coffee machine. I saw paranoia

at the possibility of messages being monitored or forwarded limiting email's potential for any serious weakening of values or hierarchies."

Thomas: "No more so than other communications."

Lily: "I don't agree with this statement. Emails can enhance a company and help make it more efficient and cost effective. The organisation's stated values should include email etiquette. I cannot see why email would weaken official hierarchies any more than written memos or telephone calls."

Emily: "I do not agree."

Sophie: "I don't think so. Hierarchies and job titles are something that I never lose track of, even if emails do create sometimes (the impression of) an informal communication."

Olivia: "Email on its own won't do this, but it provides a way in which people can do their own thing undetected."

Harry: "Hierarchies are part of the structure of the business and anything else that goes on is just personal between the people concerned. A man and woman working in an office can be married to each other, but their relationship and the business' hierarchy are separate. It's the same thing with other types of relationship."

Reflection and analysis: Harry explains, building on his statement of point 9, that "hierarchies are part of the structure of the business" and that personal relationships are separate from this. He interprets hierarchy as something structured and top-down – a reified model in line with the Hofstede (1997, 2001) structural culture concept. This interpretation is shared by Lily, whose view is strictly organisational, as is Sophie's. Harry's description of personal relationships falling outside the structure is developed well by Ruby, who describes colleagues combining against changes

chatting by the coffee machine – an insider-outsider phenomenon coincident with the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Ruby's assertion that "paranoia" about the possible monitoring of email traffic rendered email redundant in this case is telling – it seems that in Ruby's workplace conscious subversion is conducted in a way in which no record can be kept. This implies that groups such as those that Ruby encountered and at whose hands she suffered (see her responses at points 10 and 11) are not seen by their protagonists as being subversive: although Ruby's experience of this group was exclusionary and bullying.

13. *Email stories, jokes and satirical poems are harmless and take some of the stress out of workplace life.*

Ruby: "It depends. They can be pernicious and time wasting but if it is quiet, bread and circuses can keep the masses dulled. Speaking as a Womble."

Thomas: "Absolutely, but we must be aware of when there is no time to look at them! I only forward a small proportion of the stuff I receive, and absolutely never forward a chain mail ('You will have much luck if you forward this to 5 people in the next hour' type of thing). This is just another form of virus."

Lily: "There is a very fine line here. It is probably best not to send any."

Emily: "I do not agree. Most (if not all) of these emails are either lame or sexist and an incredible waste of time. I would rate them just one level above SPAM and they tend to annoy me a great deal if I am inundated with them."

Sophie: "True, but they create an urge to read and reply, and are an excellent procrastination tool."

Reflection and analysis: Participants differ as to the effect of jokes and satirical poems. Emily rates them as lame and sexist; Ruby's response is interesting in that this point reminds her of her "Womble" experience and perhaps her "bread and circuses" quote (Juvenal, Satire 10: 77–81) discloses her contempt for those at whose hands she suffered. Ruby, Thomas, Emily and Sophie each in their own ways mention time-wasting. Only Sophie says anything positive about jokes and satirical poems (but note her further reflection on this in her final review – see Appendix 10); Ruby, Thomas, Lily and Emily each display varying degrees of negativity, signifying that they are not viewed as harmless, but for varying reasons.

14. *Email is difficult to manage, is difficult to prioritise and can set the agenda for the working day.*

Ruby: "That must depend partly upon the importance of email to your job and your aptitude for working on screen. When I worked as an Administrator in a University, email dictated my working day. On occasion I could get bogged down or miss a priority but in general it made life much easier: I liked having my agenda and tasks visible on screen and saved lots of filing time."

Thomas: "Yes."

Lily: "Email is easy to manage if done correctly. E.g. set up an automatic response to say 'thanks for the mail, will get back to you within [ ] days' etc. It is easy to prioritise. Set up folders, 'urgent', 'non urgent' etc. It can set the agenda for the working day, but the same could be said for internal mail and phonecalls."

Emily: "I do not think it is difficult to manage once one has (and sticks to) a system for dealing with received/sent email. Prioritising and setting one's agenda

accordingly is much more difficult in my opinion as the level of importance of an email is not always apparent."

Sophie: "Yes, I agree and I think this is well said. It is extremely time-consuming, and it seems colleagues and team managers have lost track of the concept of oral communication. At my last job as a customer services adviser (in London) I had to manage an average of 30 emails per day aside from the work-related ones. They ranged from meetings, to work performance management, to birthdays, and so on. It added to the pressure given that we had a daily quota of client emails to manage. It was quite easy to drown in the pile. I had to create a few folders to manage them by people, work categories and MISC. I would add that massive email management takes a toll on lunch time."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby, Thomas, Lily, Emily and Sophie all agree that email needs to be managed but, as in their email autobiographies, none even hint at the possibility of managing without it. That they are accepting of the time and trouble they take to manage their email suggests that email is as much part of their workplace as the fabric of the building in which they work.

15. *Workplace IT departments are unhelpful and focused on the purely technical aspects.*

Ruby: "Not in my experience, although I am always wary to approach IT people with caution as they are often under pressure and abused."

Thomas: "Absolutely."

Lily: "This is down to the individual working within the IT department. (It also depends on how often you buy them cakes and sweets!)"

Emily: "Sad but true unfortunately."

Sophie: "No, my experience has usually been excellent with IT departments. They solved my issues quickly and efficiently."

Reflection and analysis: Participants answered the first part of the point, that concerning helpfulness (upon which they disagreed), but ignored the second, that workplace IT departments are focused on the purely technical aspects. (Thomas and Emily's comments are equivocal in this respect as they do not say to which part their response applies; please see, however, Thomas' further comment and reflection on this point following his final review in Appendix 10.) That no-one made any overt comment about this second part suggests that they had no argument with it and perhaps no expectation that IT departments should be concerned with anything but technical aspects – yet a need for improvements in behaviour and etiquette has been clearly expressed. Participants are aware of the problems, but don't see a role for IT professionals in their amelioration.

16. *Important workplace information should not be disseminated by email as it is difficult to tell how many people actually read it.*

Ruby refers here to point 3.

Thomas: "Yes."

Lily: "This could be said for paper memos too. I don't really think it would be a problem."

Emily: "Correct. As I mentioned in point 7, email is not a secure form of communication and should not be used for sensitive material. There is no control

over who ends up reading what you sent. Although I have ignored this from time to time due to convenience and forgetfulness."

Sophie: "Very true. I kept getting important messages at my last job, but I would wait till Friday or spare time to read them. By then the info was sometimes no longer relevant."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby's view (from point 3) is that newsletters count as "second-to-junk" and are only read if she has time. Sophie has a similar outlook, regarding them as something to be read when she has time. Important workplace information may be disseminated by means of newsletters, although not exclusively, and Lily takes this wider view although she sees no disadvantage in using email over other forms, for example paper memos. Emily's point about sensitivity is interesting, implying higher levels of risk for sensitive material. It is perhaps easier to forward sensitive information to those who the organisation might regard as unsuitable recipients by email than by other means[4].

17. *Some authors of workplace email exhibit, through the style in which they write, inappropriate assumptions about their (or their department's) own importance and position in the organisation.*

Ruby: "Yes, but rarely. And in my experience, those specific authors talk and write like that anyway so it is nothing out of character."

Thomas: "Yes. Particularly the IT dept."

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[4] Since writing my email autobiography a case in point has arisen where an incidence of swine flu was notified by email internally, which subsequently found its way out and into the media. This prompted the organisation's senior partner to email staff world-wide, expressing disappointment and reminding all staff of the need to treat such information with sensitivity.

<u>Lily</u>: "Not in my experience. If the individual has this character trait it will be apparent in all forms of communication."

<u>Emily</u>: "That hasn't been my experience, no. Swiss people tend to understate wherever possible and tend to find any form of showing off terribly tacky and best avoided."

<u>Sophie</u>: "Not in my experience. In fact I've had pleasant, unassuming supervisors whose email style was quite friendly and on a par with regular emails from colleagues."

<u>Reflection and analysis</u>: Thomas mentions his particular bête-noir, the IT department, however there is support in the literature for the view that IT departments place themselves at the centre of projects and problems where their position is rightly subservient; the example quoted in that of BP which, when developing a virtual teamworking programme, specifically gave responsibility for the task to a newly formed group rather than the existing IT department, in order to prevent the IT department redesigning the project around their own specialisation and pushing the original, central aims into the background (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 19-21). Ruby, Sophie and Lily interpret the point more personally, their point being that self-importance and showing off will emerge in individuals irrespective of medium if that person possesses these character traits.

18. *Being a member of an email group, or being copied on emails sent between others, gives one a sense of inclusion in a community that is not immediately obvious but which is painfully brought to light when technical failures lead to disconnection from such groups.*

Ruby: "I used to experience similar when networks would crash and deprive me of email but have not since IT standards and recruitment have improved. However, I suspect this is the case for team members who are tele-commuting and relying on less-than-reliable networking links into workplace systems."

Thomas: "I get so much email, I am happy to be removed from a group, provided I get the essential stuff. Indeed most of my rules are related to excluding mail from groups which the company thinks I ought to be in, but I don't actually need to."

Lily: "I have no experience or opinion on this I'm sorry."

Emily: "I would say that is true. I, however, am part of numerous distribution lists and have wished many times I weren't copied in on so many emails. Although – truthfully – I would probably be the first to lapse into catatonic schizophrenia should my emails be cut off for any reason."

Sophie: "I agree with the first part – it is quite true. But I cannot tell for the technical problems as I've never encountered such a problem, as I've never encountered such a problem that would disconnect me from the group."

Reflection and analysis: Lily and Sophie express no view due to having not experienced disconnection. The other participants who responded to this point value email and would not want to be disconnected entirely, although all exhibit frustration with emails that do not concern or interest them. There are groups within which they wish to be, and others they do not. Thomas' personal locus of belonging to groups, set firmly in an insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) context, overrides the official group-belonging structure set by his organisation (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Emily makes a similar point. Ruby makes the point that tele-commuters (those people who work away from their

normal office, either at home or, for example, on secondment) are particularly dependent upon email. The cultural conceptualisations and understanding of external workers provide an area for further study. Emily's statement that she fears "catatonic schizophrenia" if disconnected vividly illustrates the centrality of email to her organisational life and well-being, reflecting the central and essential role proposed for email in this research.

Discussion points 2

In order to carry the debate among the participants forward and to encourage further reflection on and consolidation of their responses, the discussion points presented here were extracted as described in Appendix 8.

Discussion points 2 – participants' reflection and analysis

1a. *"Friendly rapport", rather than true friendships, develops via email. Email alone is not enough for true friendships to develop, although email provides a starting point, and can lead to excited anticipation when the time comes to move from email to telephone contact or a meeting.*

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Not universally true (in the same way as a strong friendship can develop between pen-friends using snail mail)."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby's and Thomas' comments here reinforce the participants' view emergent in *Discussion points 1* number 1, that email friendships are limited unless they progress to more direct forms of contact.

1b.   Whilst telephone conversations and face-to-face contact may be more effective in forming friendships, email contact, being written and therefore recorded and readable, can be more intense and memorable.

Sophie: "I agree as I do re-read some friendly messages sometimes, and also the more serious ones. Afterwards, they tend to leave a lasting impression on me – so much so in fact that I am able to have some very accurate recollection of things that were written to me – whether praise, advice, disappointment etc."

Ruby: "Yes. The process of writing an email allows for careful consideration of literary expression."

Thomas: "Just because a note is re-readable, it's not necessarily memorable. Many people write emails as incoherently as they speak!"

Reflection and analysis: Ruby approaches this point from the perspective of being able to go over her words again and ensure that what she says is as intense and memorable as she wishes it to be, whist Sophie and Thomas' perspective is that of the reader, although their views differ markedly. Ruby and Sophie both value email (both sent and received) as something personal, whilst for Thomas its main characteristic seems to be its function.

2a.   Emoticons can add to, but not replace, careful expression.

Ruby: "I dislike emoticons in a professional context and feel that they detract from careful expression."

Thomas: "They don't really add to "careful expression", but act as the physical wink, nudge, smile etc, all of which are vital in spoken conversation to clarify ambiguity, teasing etc."

Jack: "I'm not sure. I don't feel the need to use them, but appreciate that other people might. My professional correspondents don't use them either."

Reflection and analysis: Thomas' description of emoticons as fulfilling the function of the nudge, wink and smile in speech sets out email's cultural possibilities. Geertz (1993: 7-10) describes the role of "winks upon winks upon winks" just as Elias and Scotson (1994: 89-105) describe gossip as a dynamic phenomenon. Ruby and Jack mention the professional context when discussing their non-use, but neither feel the need to despite both being people who care about expressing themselves clearly.

2b.   *Emoticons can appear childish and flippant and can give the wrong impression, and so should not be used in a formal context.*

Sophie: "I agree that they should be used only in an informal communication with a friend for example, although I did use them once in a while with superiors once I had established a firm but friendly professional relationship. As well, I use emoticons only once the other person uses them first, especially if it is my boss or someone else who isn't a friend or for whom I must use a more formal writing style."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Absolutely agree; they have no place in formal emails."

Jack: "Maybe the reason I don't see them (see 2a above) is because the use of them is not acceptable in my field. This would, however, be a convention rather than a rule as I've never seen anything written down."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie expresses nervousness about how her use of emoticons could be interpreted by her organisational superiors and, in light of Ruby and Thomas' view that they are unacceptable, her apprehension is well-founded. Sophie illustrates here a debate within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) where nuances and impressions in communication distinguish the concept as a dynamic and fluid phenomenon as proposed in this research, where one's insider status is predicated upon acceptable behaviour (Elias and Scotson 1994: 24-41). This could be echoed by Jack in his consideration of acceptability based on convention.

2c.   *Paradoxically, the only context in which emoticons can be safely used is an informal one between people who are well-known to each other, and so their use is not necessary anyway.*

Sophie: "Indeed. Their use simply adds a little cute touch, sometimes a little humour, but I usually don't use them very much. In fact I prefer a simple ':)' or even ☺ but rarely add colour to them, or pick from a list… I personally prefer to express my personal touch in the style I choose and the content of my message, which I believe convey much more on the personal level. I guess it depends on the type of temperament and occupation of the respondent too. I am a translator – I have a weakness for words!"

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "In informal communications, emoticons can be very useful in explaining jokes, sarcasm etc, just as the wink, nudge-nudge etc adds to spoken communication. With no tone of voice to assist in conveying detail of meaning, what is read can be very different to what is keyed. Your recipient may not know you as well as you think."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie and Thomas reinforce their comfort in the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) of their earlier answers by expressing the importance of what they are trying to express and the importance of nuance. Thomas raises the issue of misinterpretation, again important in the dynamic insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation.

3. *Newsletters lose their impact when sent by email (as opposed to hard copy) and may be classified by some as little more than junk mail; this is particularly the case for people who spend all day looking at a screen and filter anything that is not essential. The big advantage of the hard copy is that it can be taken to lunch or even taken home.*

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Absolutely. I send home many of my employer's circulations (there is one on my PC now) or print them off. Worse than the waste-of-time feeling when reading them, these are often sent as pdfs of actual documents (the originals being left around in the canteen, or even dropped off on your desk, wasting paper as well as energy). In

this form they can be very difficult to read, as a whole column often cannot be read on one screen, and when you scroll to the bottom, Acrobat flips to the next page, rather than to the top of the next column, hence the printing."

Reflection and analysis: Besides the technical difficulties Thomas describes, his contempt for newsletters – official organisational communiqués – in all their forms signifies an awareness of the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and its artificiality.   Were Thomas to take the structural culture concept seriously, the newsletters as artefacts of that concept would be accorded greater importance and respect.   Ruby's single-word comment is less helpful but may, if affirming emailed newsletters as junk mail, also indicate email's effectiveness as a phenomenon of the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) rather than an artefact of the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001).   This supports the separation and invisibility between the insider-outsider social habitus concept and the structural culture concept proposed in this research.

4a.   *There is still some way to go to achieve a commonsense-based email etiquette.*

Sophie: "I agree that at least in the workplace – but also for self-employed people – a mini crash course into email – and other communication – etiquette is a must. I say so because from a professional standpoint, people's way of communicating tells me a lot about themselves.   It is a big giveaway – both in a positive and a negative way. Modern technology makes it easier to be slack in communication, and I think in some

professions like mine, this could even cost a candidate his or her potential job or contract."

Ruby: "I feel that every workplace has to establish its own etiquette and policy for email use."

Thomas: "I think sensible people already know the etiquette (and of course I am one of those). For example: give a meaningful subject, only copy in those who need to know, structure and edit the note before sending, AND PROOF READ IT (there is a big difference between spell checking and proof reading). These four points make a good grounding."

Reflection and analysis: As in number 1b, Sophie's perspective here is that of reader learning about the authors of emails she receives from what they say, and she explains the possibly serious consequences of getting this wrong. Sophie recommends formal training in the form of a "mini crash course". Sophie's conceptualisation of training is that of a characteristically reified, commodified knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) which, as described in *The knowledge management concept* in Chapter 3 emerges from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Sophie interestingly demonstrates how for her two closely related and deeply felt concerns – expression and the training she feels is necessary for it – can co-exist whilst located in different and contradictory conceptual bases. Thomas, on the other hand, in his assertion that sensible people already know the necessary etiquette, seems to be promoting a situated learning process by which legitimate peripheral participants learn organically from their experienced colleagues (Lave and Wenger 1991) – a concept that emerges from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) as described in *The*

situated learning concept in Chapter 3. Ruby seems to accord with this approach, saying that she believes each workplace should have its own etiquette and policy. This is not as expansive (Fuller et al 2005: 56-58) as the learning suggested by Thomas (which includes transferable learning), but does not seem to sit in the knowledge management concept of learning-as-a-commodity suggested by Sophie.

4b.   *There is a form of email etiquette, but consensus on acceptability is lacking.*

Sophie: "Yes, but to the best of my knowledge or experience, this standard is consigned into written guidelines that more often than not are never read by employees. That's why I think there needs to be a more dynamic approach taken in this matter. Maybe the crash course could illustrate proven consequences of badly written, incomplete, incoherent emails or simply using a style not fitted for the recipient. PS: I think this could prove quite interesting, actually. You could conduct an interview or survey of recipients of such emails who are in a position of authority and ask for their reactions and experiences, and how they dealt with these!"

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Few users know the etiquette, and I doubt if there are really any agreed standards, despite my rant above [*Thomas refers here to his comment at 4a.*], so common sense would be a better phrase than etiquette."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie further expounds her idea for a course to improve standards of email etiquette, interestingly noting that email etiquette is usually contained in written rules – an artefact of culture falling within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Here Sophie reconciles her knowledge management-

based learning concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) with her structural culture concept. Thomas suggests that his expansive learning concept (Fuller et al 2005: 56-58) becomes even more so by suggesting it is really only commonsense which is – in their own minds – something possessed by all in lavish and equal measure (Descartes 2006). Expectation of this situates Thomas within an emotionally intelligent understanding which incorporates self-awareness and openness (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001) and a valuable personal cultural hinterland (Eraut 2000).

5a.   *Senders of email tend to have their own priorities, which may not accord with the priorities of the recipient(s). This can lead to senders forming an unfavourable opinion of recipients who do not reply as promptly as the sender's priorities demand.*

Sophie: "I usually reply quickly when I see a red exclamation mark next to the email. I usually reply promptly to a "please confirm receipt". However it does happen that I don't reply as fast as I should, for various reasons (out of office/home, busy with answering another urgent email etc). In such cases, I usually apologize (to my clients only, and explaining the reason for the delay). I also tell them not to hesitate to use the good old fashioned phone to call for urgent queries. With friends, I might also apologize, but only if the content of the message is serious or my friend went to great lengths to send me this message."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Of course this point is nonsense as written (actually so obvious that it is hardly worth stating) – it is exactly the same situation as with a paper note, we tend to think our needs are more important than others. I find my reputation is formed by the quality of my replies more than the rapidity of response, as someone with a stupid

deadline will be aware that they are being unreasonable. (It's about managing expectations.)"

Reflection and analysis: It is interesting that Thomas sees no difference between email and other forms of communication in this respect, and that Sophie takes the priorities set by the sender without questioning or reflecting on whether such imposed prioritisation is reasonable. Sophie, however, also invites her correspondents to use the telephone which, if anything, is more demanding of prioritisation that other forms of communication – the telephone ringing demands that the called person stops whatever they are doing and respond to the caller, however trivial the call may be. There is perhaps a contrast of culture here between Thomas' and Sophie's workplaces, but one that is not specific to email and which falls outside the compass of this research.

5b.   *An email should not demand a quicker response than a hard-copy letter or memo – after all, the response should demand the same amount of research and consideration.*

Sophie: "Absolutely. I fully agree. In fact, I have some of my professional emails proofed by a spell check before sending them to a potential employer or a boss. Also, as an example, I maintain both a very cordial and friendly relationship with one of my colleagues. I sometimes use the happy face symbol when I sign my name, in reply to her use of it. Our emails are nonetheless always complete, even if it means greeting each other more than once in a day: "Hello again", and "Have a good day", "See you soon", or "Good luck with work". It only takes a few extra seconds. It establishes a professional, not-taking-the-relationship-for-granted tone, yet not sparing friendliness and congeniality."

<u>Ruby</u>: "Yes."

<u>Thomas</u>: "Unfortunately this is no longer realistic, unless of course you are working for a solicitor or the police. In the real commercial world, answers are wanted much quicker than that. Also of course much of the data required for the reply, in my industry at least, is already in electronic form, so can be pasted or attached in a few seconds (but see 5a)."

<u>Jack</u>: "I don't agree with this, but responding quickly generally makes for a quiet life! I think it's easier to delay responding to a paper communication as the sender can't be sure if or whether it has arrived, and will generally leave a bit of time before enquiring."

<u>Reflection and analysis</u>: Again Thomas makes a cultural distinction here that is not peculiar to email, and Sophie does the same, even though their comments do not agree. Ruby also agrees that email should not demand a quicker response than a hard-copy letter or memo. Jack's particularisation of email depends only on the technical factors, i.e. he can be caught out not replying due to the variability in delivery of paper-based communication, so it is not a cultural factor for any of the participants who commented on this point.

6a.   *Email should be just as polite as any other form of communication. People reveal a lot about themselves in the way they write, and this applies whatever the medium.*

<u>Sophie</u>: "110% true."

Ruby: "Yes, although excessive formality irks me as obsequious e.g. to see a formal email for a job application formally addressed yet attaching a CV containing the sender's home address anyway."

Thomas: "Absolutely – I should have added this as a fifth rule above in 4a."

Jack: "In the previous discussion points [*Discussion points 1* number 6] I mentioned the use of stock emails. Their use is impolite, I think, and impersonal and soulless. Why would anyone want to banish their humanity by use of someone else's pre-prepared words?"

Reflection and analysis: Sophie, Thomas and Jack all agree that email should retain the character of the sender. Ruby partially agrees, although makes the point about excessive formality. This seems to be a point of etiquette rather than culture.

6b. *With email there is no need to conform to the stultifying formal addresses, salutations, sign-offs etc of paper-based communication, and if a mistake is made or a faux pas committed it can more easily be corrected by a follow-up clarification, so people tend to be less concerned with being polite when communicating by email.*

Sophie: "I would disagree. I would agree for informal friendly chats on MSN, but not for email, unless the person can be called right away for clarification – and even then, it is too easy to be slack, when all that's needed is not to rush the message off to the recipient without making sure it is presentable."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "I start all my emails with Hi and then the name (Hi David,) rather than the more formal Dear. I tend to end with Regards…, but this varies much more, depending on the recipient. However the notes need to retain some formality if you

are to be taken seriously by your recipients – and please, no txt spllng. If someone writes to me with pls in the subject line, they get a low priority. If you make a faux pas, it is difficult to correct it – once read, it will be remembered long after the correction."

Jack: "As I mentioned before [*Discussion points 1* number 6] I once received a standard message with blank spaces where relevant names etc should have been filled in. Funny thing, but I remember the sender of the email and always will, but I've completely forgotten the content. In this case the mistake remains long after the subject-matter."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie, Thomas and Jack all make a point of considering the opinion that their addressees will form as a result of the salutation, sign-off and wording of their messages. Jack's point illustrates how the values of the sender, interpreted through their behaviour, serves to form an opinion of the sender that is much more memorable than the subject matter of the message. Only Ruby disagrees by agreeing with the proposition that there is no need to conform to the formal addresses, salutations, etc of paper-based communication, although it is difficult to draw conclusions as she does not expand on her answer.

6c. *Just because an email does not exist in material form it does not mean that its content is any less important, and so should be saved/filed just as a hard copy note or letter would be.*

Sophie: "Important or personal emails that mean something special to me are kept in my account, printed, and recorded on a CD for future reference or as a souvenir. I do all three but don't always print them."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Of course. You cannot run a business and be accountable, if you cannot refer to past communications. There is also an element of arsehole covering – I was able to fend off a claim for £12,000 against my department a few months ago by producing the relevant emails showing that the marketers were well aware of a situation going adrift."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie, Thomas and Ruby all agree that email is not rendered less important due to its non-tangible form, but in different ways. Thomas colourfully explains how emails should be kept for reasons of self-protection; in this way Thomas sees their content as important, if malign. Please see, however, Thomas' further comment and reflection on this point following his final review in Appendix 10.   Sophie sees them as being important for more positive reasons but the implication, in support of the proposition of this research, that email is important and valuable is the same.

7a.	*Workplace email should always be private between sender and recipient(s), however it is important to remember that, in theory at least, any email can be recovered and read by IT professionals and those who employ them. Whilst not necessarily being afraid or suspicious, people do wonder from time to time whether their private email conversations are being monitored.*

Sophie: "Yes, true. I think anything not related to the work per se should be sent via hotmail, Yahoo! or other providers outside the intranet. If a message is particularly sensitive, I would prefer speaking about it face to face, and simply request a meeting by email. I have never wondered if I was being monitored or not, however I don't believe I have ever used an employer's account to send emails that could be controversial. In the past, I did use it for personal communication more often than I should have. I work from home now, but should I work in an office again I don't believe I would use my employer's account for personal communication."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "I have never felt I am being monitored, but the possibility of being read by unintended eyes, just as with paper communications, must always be borne in mind."

Reflection and analysis: All participants who commented on this point showed no expectation of monitoring, but displayed an unwillingness to test the point. This supports the conceptualisation of emails being akin to postcards (Australian Privacy Commissioner 2000).

7b.   *Email is no more or less private than any other form of written communication.*

Sophie: "Absolutely. Just tonight, in fact, I received a message from a friend, who cc'd me to her reply to another friend's message. Reading the message history made me feel intrusive, because there was information I hadn't been aware of. It was nothing confidential, hence the cc, but I still think my friend should have removed the first part and simply addressed her reply to both of us. As such I realize that an email

meant to be private can be made very public, voluntarily or not. That can make for some uncomfortable situations."

Ruby: "I feel it is more private. A work email in-box will inevitably contain private conversations and the personal nature of these should be respected."

Thomas: "Yep."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie makes the point about accidental disclosure due to the technical possibilities of email that can result in email being less-than-private. Here Sophie is overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) and is being made to feel like an outsider in a situation where she had felt comfortably inside. That Ruby feels email is more private is interesting, given the experience detailed in her email autobiography would indicate that she would be suspicious with regard to privacy – perhaps she intends not that email should be private, rather that IT professionals should be discreet. Thomas' response accords with his earlier views regarding email being not very different from other communication forms in this regard.

8. *Managers do not fear private email communication, but like to be copied into (or at least told about) what people are emailing so that they know what is going on.*

Ruby: "I imagine so."

Thomas: "Yep."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby and Thomas both display a benign view of their managers, or at least do not have a view strong enough to warrant discussion.

9.   *Workplace email facilitates the formation of private cliques, but no more so than the groups that form around the watercooler, or in the pub.*

Ruby: "I think more so.   During quiet periods, cliques can email continuously without moving from their desks whereas it would not be acceptable for members to talk across the office or leave their desks for long periods."

Thomas: "I think less, because if there is a good story, it is easier to share with the larger group."

Reflection and analysis: Both Ruby and Thomas answered this point in a context of practical rather than cultural considerations.

10a.   *In some ways jokes circulated by email are safer than, say, a photocopied cartoon pinned to a notice board – although on the other hand that apparent safety and assumed confidentiality may encourage recklessness on the part of senders, and tension/uneasiness amongst recipients.*

Sophie: "It is safer only if the sender is very careful about the address he sends the joke to. Mishaps happen very quickly, so the opposite can be just as devastating."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "I carefully select who particular jokes go to, and would never send someone something I think would offend them (nothing to do with PC, I am just not like that). If an unintended reader gets offended, I would say that is their fault, unless of course someone had pinned it up on the board."

Reflection and analysis: Sophie and Thomas both begin by saying how important it is to be careful. Thomas says that he would never send someone something that would offend them, however offence is a matter for the recipient rather than the sender (Khoo and Senn 2004). Ruby simply says "Yes" to the whole proposition. Ruby has, of course, been the victim of jokes circulated by email (see the "Womble" and the "work face" cartoon incidents she describes at *Discussion points 1* numbers 10 and 11). Thomas means no harm, but then the all-male clique into which Ruby fell and from which she was then excluded seems to have meant no harm either. This vividly illustrates the proposition of this research that within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), insiders wield power whilst outsiders feel disempowered, bullied and cast adrift.

10b.   *One must always be aware of the "P(olitical) C(orrectness) Brigade".*

Ruby: "One might recognise that political correctness is there for a reason."

Thomas: "I abhor Political Correctness – it causes more problems and offence than the words it tries to ban would have done. I am all for being polite and thoughtful, but why should I be penalised for hypothetically possible slights? Brainstorm, Christmas, blackboard, golliwog – all perfectly good words, but some pillock thinks that someone else may be offended. Pahh."

Reflection and analysis: It is interesting that so few participants felt the need to comment on this point, given the almost wholly negative coverage that political correctness receives in the popular media. That Ruby comments positively is no

surprise, and neither is Thomas' what-nonsense comment. Ruby's comment is understandable in that she has experienced being cast as an outsider through, apparently, no fault of her own. Thomas' contributions so far have been from the perspective of an untroubled insider, or at least one who is sufficiently self-reliant and self-assured to take being an outsider (when it happens) with equanimity.

11a. *Workplace email provides an opportunity for covert bullying but, being in writing, the evidence is available should anyone wish to take the matter up.*

Sophie: "I have never experienced this so I can't comment. An email is indeed a valid piece of evidence that can serve in lawsuits. So I would imagine that one should be very careful about the content of a message if it is meant to be offensive or interpreted as such by the recipient."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "I have been bullied in the past, but it never occurred to me that email could be used. The victim would have to be very meek, and the perpetrator very confident for the physical evidence not to be used."

Reflection and analysis: All participants acknowledge that email can be used to provide physical evidence of bullying. Thomas' comment that the perpetrator would have to be very confident, or the victim very meek, is interesting in that it implies unproblematic acceptance on both sides that what is taking place is, indeed, bullying. In Ruby's case she says in her comment at *Discussion points 1* number 11 that she chose to brush off the behaviour that she considered to be bullying rather than confront the bully. This is nothing to do with meekness or confidence, but rather

doubt in the mind of the victim that they are actually being bullied (and not merely feeling bullied) and the bullying being unintentional on the part of the bully. This makes the bullying no less real or relevant on either part, but much more difficult to address, and the evidence much more equivocal. As proposed in this research, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is indeed fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, unclear and mysterious. Given Ruby's experiences, her "Yes" in respect of this point is surprising.

11b. *People can feel left out of email cliques – a kind of bullying by exclusion, made all the worse by not knowing who is involved and where the boundaries are.*

Sophie: "I think this holds some truth."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Probably, but no more so than any other situation, in fact probably less – if this is happening by email, how will they know what they are missing?"

Reflection and analysis: Thomas' point about not knowing what they are missing evidences the secretiveness of email cliques and their distinctiveness from more visible groups such as those that gather around the watercooler. Thomas' point raises an interesting dilemma – can one be an outsider without knowing what the inside is? A moment's reflection shows that the answer to this is "no" – there are many insider-outsider dichotomies that only became such when problematised by the outsiders becoming aware of the insiders through "helpful" notifications that make explicit the outsider's relative position (Kibby 2005: 775-779) or by insider-facilitated overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006). Ruby's position is that of the victim to

such contrived overhearing. Sophie's position seems to be the reflection of an intelligent observer.

11c. *Circulation of email can reinforce stereotypes, for example ribald jokes may circulate mainly amongst men, "snitch and bitch" amongst mainly women. Where exceptions are made, the people included are only accorded status of "guest" rather than "full member" – a status that may be suddenly and inexplicably withdrawn.*

Sophie: "I am not sure about that, having never experienced it."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "This is partly true, but I get many jokes from women, and there is certainly no lack of bitching amongst men. This does not make it wrong or bad – just because it is a stereotype, it doesn't make it untrue or unpleasant. Despite what the Politically Correct morons believe about stereotypes, people generally conform to them because they want to."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby's "Yes" here is not surprising as this point arises directly from her experiences. Sophie again is the reflexive, intelligent observer. Thomas' free-thinking approach is again that of the self-reliant and self-assured person for whom insider or outsider status is something controllable – and conforming to stereotypes is a matter of personal choice, although personal choice is limited (Khoo and Senn 2004) and sensibilities are part of the person (Eraut 2000). Ruby's experience would indicate that the freedom of choice in this regard is to some extent mediated by others, and this view is supported in the literature (Khoo and Senn (2004).

12. *People would rather gather by the watercooler or coffee machine to discuss organisational matters – it is easier to maintain confidentiality this way than putting one's thoughts in writing, and oneself at the mercy of one's recipients.*

Sophie: "I think it is true, and I have discussed some issues with colleagues verbally in the past, simply because it is easier to gather others' thoughts in this spontaneous exchange. However putting these thoughts in writing could have the merit of presenting issues in a more organized and coherent way to better ponder over them and come up with some clear points (if it is necessary to take it to the next level). As a parallel to the work setting, I and two other classmates used this approach with one of our university teachers who sought our ideas and input on how to better organize her second course for the winter semester. Of the 5 students, 2 had diverging opinions, which created some tension and made the class discussion stall and lead nowhere. I drafted my ideas and suggestions, sent them to my other 2 classmates, who added theirs. Then I sent a letter by email to our teacher detailing in a coherent fashion our ideas, and saying we welcomed any other ones from the rest of the group. This approach worked magic! Our teacher had time to reflect on the letter, and came back to us with a mix of her ideas and ours."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "This more likely happens because a) it is pleasant to have a natter, and b) so much quicker to discuss something face to face rather than with an email exchange. This has nothing to do with email."

Reflection and analysis: All participants who commented on this point agree that people would rather chat about organisational matters than use email. Sophie and

Thomas point out that the spontaneity and pleasure of verbal communication is the issue, rather than considerations of confidentiality. Participants have, however, shown concern about email paper trails elsewhere (see *Discussion points 1* number 11). Sophie, however, appreciates how putting things in writing can organise thoughts and lend coherence to discourse. Her example is one of, effectively, an email clique formed with benign and indeed positive intent, of the type described by Alpay (2005), Bourhis et al (2005), Cater (2003) and Currie (2008) – although this benignity would be dependent on how inclusive Sophie was. If there were any outsiders in respect of Sophie's group, the negative aspects of outsider status – its unclear and mysterious nature, as proposed in this research – could arise. Sophie reflected further on this in her final review – see Appendix 10.

13a. *The only harm to come from email stories, jokes and satirical poems is the time wasted in the writing and forwarding of them.*

Sophie: "True, and also of having to scan their worth and delete them!"

Ruby: "Depends on the content."

Thomas: "Unless your boss imagines that you are wasting time. Again, this has nothing to do with email, unless large attached files are involved, in which case the systems capacity can be compromised!"

Reflection and analysis: Sophie and Thomas do not see great potential for harm in such items that are commonly forwarded, and Thomas sees no difference between emailed forwardables and similar matter propagated by other means. Ruby, having explained her experiences in this regard in detail previously (see *Discussion points 1*

number 11), simply makes the apposite comment regarding content. Ruby's experience is that of the overhearing outsider (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) whose sensibilities are offended (Khoo and Senn 2004).

13b.   *Email stories, jokes and satirical poems are frequently childish and sexist.*

Sophie: "In 60-70% of cases, sometimes more, or less, depending on the sender."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "…as is the norm for jokes – nothing to do with email."

Grace: "Yes. People get away with sexism much more in general circulation jokes than they would if the joke was targeted only at a person likely to take offence. This can be a subterfuge for bullying one person under cover of a general circulation."

Reflection and analysis: Again Ruby's response is brief, having discussed this in detail previously. Sophie and Thomas see no particular role for email in this, although Grace sees a particular role for email in that general circulation can provide cover for a message that is pointed at an individual or specific group. Again, elements of overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) and offended sensibilities (Khoo and Senn 2004) are at work here.

14a.   *Email and its administration occupies time that would be much better spent just talking to people.*

Sophie: "I agree 100%. People seem scared of face to face or phone communication these days, or are afraid they will have picked the wrong time, as opposed to an email

that can be read and replied to at one's discretion. Just yesterday I decided to call up a friend to say hi, and I said she shouldn't hesitate to pick up the phone once in a while, and that I won't always have time to answer her daily emails. I can easily spend an hour or more answering friendly emails."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Much of it does, and this is the big difference between email and other communications; it is so easy to copy in far too many people, and also assume that they are paying attention. It is also quite difficult to organise, and very vulnerable to technical problems."

Reflection and analysis: All participants who commented on this point explicitly or implicitly find that the convenience (for the sender) of email acts to the detriment of more direct forms of communication. For recipients this leads, according to Sophie, to time being wasted on replying, or risking causing offence by not replying or, according to Thomas, not even bring read. Although Thomas doesn't make the connection, there could, in the wide distribution he reports, be implications for notions of status and hierarchy (see point 17 below).

14b. *Email can rule one's day, but it saves time when correctly administered.*

Sophie: "100% true."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "Yes, it can rule your day, and it can save time, but the "correctly administered" phrase depends to a large extent on the senders of your email."

Reflection and analysis: Thomas again refers to senders of email, continuing his theme of the previous point. The implications for this are further explored at point 17 below.

15.   *Workplace IT departments: anything further to add?*

Ruby: "No."

Thomas: "Don't know what has been said (though I must have mentioned the "Not-much-helpdesk" title). I have frequently asked that email usage training be given, but this is ignored. In fact ours don't even train in the technical usage of our Lotus Notes; you are expected to beg help from colleagues. They also seem to have no idea of the customer-supplier relationship, or see themselves as the customer preferring to set up everything to suit a generic user. I liken it to getting into a car where the seat adjustment, mirrors, radio and ventilation have been set up by someone else, and cannot be changed."

Reflection and analysis: Thomas' issues with IT departments in relation to his needs and the frustrations he experiences are deep seated and keenly felt. Davenport and Prusak (1998: 19-21) describe how when BP planned its virtual teamworking programme, an initiative by which the organisation was to operate truly globally as an element of its culture, the IT department was excluded from the planning and execution of this in order to prevent the conduct of the programme and its success criteria being defined in terms of IT technical issues; Thomas seems to have experienced this very problem in that his IT department doesn't see problems holistically, but only within its own professional criteria. Thomas clearly sees this as

a matter for formal training along knowledge management lines (Davenport and Prusak 1998), although in the begging of help from others he describes an informal, expansive situated learning process going on (Lave and Wenger 1991).

16. *Concerning dissemination of important workplace information, email is used for convenience rather than effectiveness.*

Sophie: "100% true."

Ruby: "Yes."

Thomas: "It has good and bad usage, it is easy to guarantee that everybody gets something, and all at the same time in principle, but there is no opportunity for instant feedback, so this statement is partly true."

Reflection and analysis: Participants who responded to this point did so positively. Thomas' equivocation is based on purely technical grounds. At point 14a the question of convenience was raised generally; here it is more pointedly made with respect to important workplace information, locating it culturally within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Email therefore has a place at the very centre of organisational discourse as proposed in this research, possibly more so than the other more appropriate but less convenient forms of communication that its presence displaces. This displacement effect shows that email may be more central to organisational culture than Spence (2002: 41) suggests.

17. *Apart from IT departments, do any organisational functions/departments use email to exert influence or raise their profiles?*

Ruby: "Not in my experience."

Thomas: "Of course. Any part of management is likely to send out instructions to reinforce their presence: we were all told to start a Clear-Desk policy last week, for example, by the site services team – nothing to do with IT."

Reflection and analysis: Ruby makes a strong case for artificial hierarchies developing amongst individuals at *Discussion points 1* number 11 in her discussion of "top dogs", although she sees no similar phenomenon taking place within official hierarchies. Thomas sees this as natural within organisations and in the context of this point does so with relative equanimity, however that he mentions the site services team as being the imposers and enforcers of the Clear-Desk policy implies that this is hierarchically at odds with his concept of the organisation in which he works. Thomas made a similar point more forcefully when discussing being included in distributions which he did not feel were relevant to him in his email autobiography of Chapter 5 and *Discussion points 2* numbers 14a and 14b. Both instances indicate Thomas being conscious of email being used as a means of enhancing the presence of individuals and hierarchical entities. This has implications in terms of hierarchy within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and in terms of top-dog status in the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

18.	*The email that one sends and receives in the workplace gives one a sense of belonging to a community.*

Sophie: "It can, sometimes. I think the recipient list must remain the same over a period of time to give this impression."

Ruby: "No."

Thomas: "Not particularly, and no more than any other communication channel."

Reflection and analysis: In *Discussion points 1* number 18 Ruby and Emily both made points about the inclusiveness of email, but this was in the context of disconnection from it. Their responses were within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), with Emily imagining herself as the outsider and Ruby imagining the situation of someone else being cast out. Carrying this forward to email engendering a sense of community elicits quite different responses. The cultural context of Ruby's and Thomas' responses is unclear, but Sophie's, mentioning as it does recipient lists, is set in the structural culture model (Hofstede 1997, 2001), where community is not the major constituent of organisational culture.

Conclusion

This Chapter has detailed the participants' further recollections of their own, and reflections upon other participants' experiences with email. These experiences have been presented in the form of verbatim[5] discussion points, conducted in two rounds.

The research question sets out to examine "How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email

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[5] Within the specifications set out in footnote 1

communities?", and the reflection and analysis presented in this Chapter follows this two-part culture/organisational learning format. This is set within the context of the proposition made in this research: that email is central and essential to organisational culture; it forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001); within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift; and unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious.

Revisiting the conceptual map of the *Conclusion* to Chapter 3, it is possible to see how the further analysis of this Chapter adds to the broad outline presented by the literature examined in Chapter 2 and 3 and the preliminary analysis of Chapter 5.

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                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Introduction │
                    └──────────────┘

┌────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│ The structural │              │ The insider-outsider │
│ culture concept│              │ social habitus concept │
└────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
              ┌─────────┐
              │  Rules  │
              └─────────┘
                    ┌────────────┐
                    │ Conclusion │
                    └────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Introduction │
                    └──────────────┘

┌──────────────────┐          ┌────────────────────┐
│ The knowledge    │          │ The situated learning │
│ management concept│          │ concept            │
└──────────────────┘          └────────────────────┘

                ┌─────────────────┐
                │ Comparison and  │
                │ contextualisation│
                └─────────────────┘

            ┌──────────────────────┐
            │      Conclusion      │
            └──────────────────────┘
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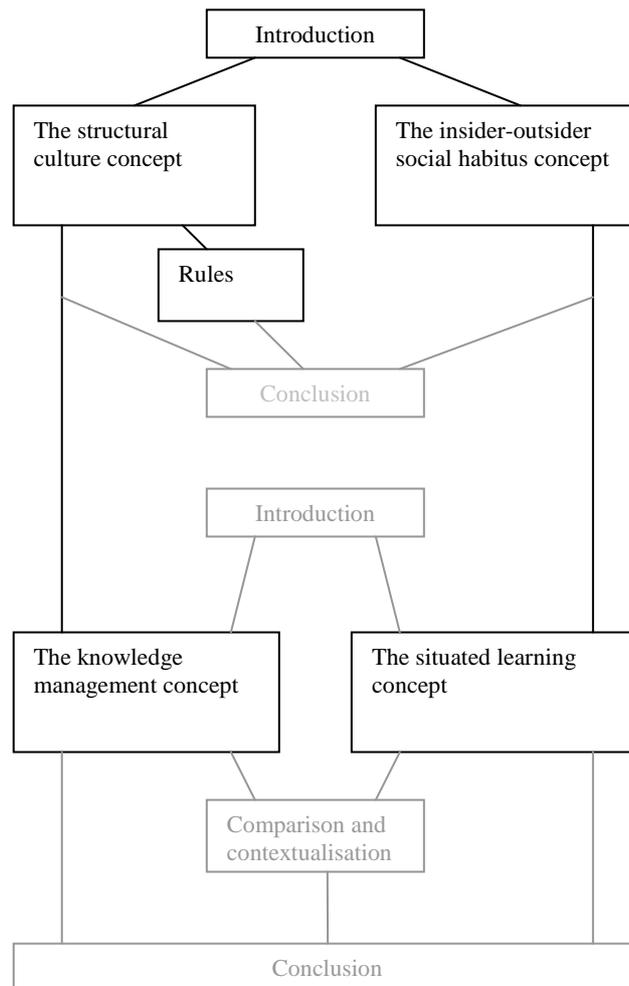
Participants' experiences of email as a phenomenon in its own right indicate that for email to be a driving force within organisations, leadership is required, whether it be in the hierarchical or task leader form within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001)[6], or in the organically arising "top dog" form described by Ruby in the insider-outsider social habitus concept[7] (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). This leadership factor reflects the findings of Bourhis et al (2005).

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[6] *Discussion points 1* number 1; *Discussion points 2* number 1a
[7] *Discussion points 1* number 11

Email is, per the proposition set out in this research, central to the organisation, whether within the structural culture concept[8] (Hofstede 1997, 2001) or the insider-outsider social habitus concept[9] (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

Participants were aware of the structural culture concept that exists in the literature (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Hofstede 1997, 2001; James 2004; Sachs 2001) but the effect email has in supporting it is relatively weak[10], with little evidence of the existence of what could be described as community[11], although this is characteristic of the structural culture concept (Garsten 1994). This effect seems also to be a response to hierarchical competitiveness on the part of individuals and organisational functions[12], which may account for the weakness more than a rejection of the culture model. Considerations of hierarchical competitiveness are implicitly important to participants[13], if not always explicitly[14]. Email's effect in subverting the organisation's stated values, or rendering them ineffective or irrelevant, is very strong[15], however this is largely unobserved within the structural culture concept favoured by organisations (Baskerville 2003: 2-6) due to its covert nature and location wholly within the organisationally unappreciated insider-outsider social habitus concept[16].

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[8] *Discussion points 1* numbers 14 and 18; *Discussion points 2* number 16
[9] *Discussion points 1* number 18
[10] *Discussion points 1* numbers 3 and 16; *Discussion points 2* number 3
[11] *Discussion points 2* number 18
[12] *Discussion points 1* number 17; *Discussion points 2* numbers 14a and 14b
[13] *Discussion points 1* number 5; *Discussion points 2* numbers 5a and 17
[14] *Discussion points 1* number 17
[15] *Discussion points 1* number 12
[16] *Discussion points 1* number12

Participants generally agreed that, in the context of rules (conceptually linked to the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001)), email should be private within the bounds of reasonableness and legality, but their views on the actual situation was at best equivocal, with the onus for avoiding trouble resting primarily with them as users[17]. None were sufficiently enlivened by the implicit injustice of this to test the point, perhaps a wise stance to take in the light of Lily's experience[18] and the determination in Smyth v Pillsbury (1996) detailed in Chapter 2. Lily's disclosure regarding being required to monitor email[19] is a revelation and worthy of further study into how widespread this is and the sectors or sizes of business to which this applies.

Participants possessed a well-developed sensibility regarding insider status (Elias and Scotson 1994), demonstrated by their concern regarding the use of emoticons in email[20] and etiquette generally[21]. Exploring this phenomenon further shows that cliques develop organically, often without insiders being aware[22], but painfully aware to outsiders[23]. It is notable that, because email cliques are covert, outsiders only become aware of their status through the phenomena of insider-facilitated overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) and "helpful" notification by insiders (Kibby 2005: 775-779)[24]. Such cliques are sustained (as is necessary (Bourhis et al 2005)) by "top dogs"[25]. Insiders find it difficult to understand the harm that such cliques do in relation to exclusion and bullying – they may dismiss any challenges as the invocation

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[17] *Discussion points 1* numbers 7 and 8
[18] *Discussion points 2* number 7a
[19] *Discussion points 1* numbers 7 and 8
[20] *Discussion points 1* number 2
[21] *Discussion points 1* numbers 4 and 6
[22] *Discussion points 1* number 9; *Discussion points 2* number 10a
[23] *Discussion points 1* numbers 4 and 9; *Discussion points 2* number 10a
[24] *Discussion points 1* numbers 9 and 10
[25] *Discussion points 1* numbers 10 and 11

of "political correctness"[26] – due to the existence of what they see as an evidential paper trail that can be presented to those in authority[27], but which is not so clear-cut to outsiders due to the insidious nature of such cliques, the popularity of the "top dogs" and no clear idea as to cliques' structure and membership[28]. The insiders in such situations (who choose their own status) hold all the power, whilst outsiders (whose status is chosen for them) are left floundering in a world of shadows, not knowing whether what they see is meant for them, for others, or for everyone[29]. There is also a conflation of concepts at work here, in that the officially sanctioned authority rests squarely in the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), whereas top-dog authority lies within the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5)[30]. That such cliques and the alternative hierarchies they represent is damaging to the organisation's stated values is evident in the participants' experiences, but only where participants' experiences are from the outsider perspective[31]. Interestingly, however, such cliques need not necessarily be insidious. Sophie describes one which is apparently benign[32], but she is speaking as an insider – albeit an intelligent and reflexive one (Vince 2001).

Furthermore, email has an emotional as well as a functional role, as described by Sophie[33]; and Thomas, whilst generally focused towards the functional aspects, is conscious of the need to add nudges and winks[34] – an element of the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and

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[26] *Discussion points 2* number 10b
[27] *Discussion points 1* number 11
[28] *Discussion points 1* numbers 11 and 12; *Discussion points 2* numbers 11a and 11b
[29] *Discussion points 2* numbers 11, 13a and 13b
[30] *Discussion points 1* number 11; *Discussion points 2* number 17
[31] *Discussion points 1* numbers 12 and 13
[32] *Discussion points 2* number 12
[33] *Discussion points 2* numbers 1b and 6c
[34] *Discussion points 2* numbers 2a, 2b, 2c, 5b, 6a and 6b

Sköldberg 2000: 5) that may be found in communication (Geertz 1993: 7-10; Elias 1978, 1987, 2000, 2001; Elias and Scotson 1994). Further, Sophie's reflections on privacy show that the emotional aspect extends to appropriate distribution as well as content[35] (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006).

In terms of the second part of the research question, emergent from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) is the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998). Participants see a need for training within the knowledge management concept[36], but admit the existence of expansive learning (Fuller et al 2005: 56-58) (see 5 below). The exigencies of IT departments (arguably the people with a vested interest in correct and productive email usage) are seen by participants to be purely technical and disconnected from the cultural and more general needs of the organisation[37].

Emergent from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) is the situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991). Participants see situated learning going on[38], but in some ways see it as a second-best option in the absence of a knowledge management-based approach (Davenport and Prusak 1998) (see 4 above). This, however, receives more support upon reflection; Thomas describes a process that reaches out to individuals' values and sensibilities[39] – a convincing appeal for learning systems within situated

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[35] *Discussion points 2* number 7b
[36] *Discussion points 1* number 4; *Discussion points 2* number 4a
[37] *Discussion points 1* number 15, *Discussion points 2* number 15
[38] *Discussion points 1* number 4
[39] *Discussion points 2* number 15

learning (Hong 1999, Owenby 2002, Popper and Lipshitz 2000) and emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001)[40].

From the literature, the participants' email stories and their reflections emerges a picture of email that is central and essential to organisational culture. It forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious. This is the basic proposition of this thesis. However, in addition to this proposition there emerges an important emotional aspect to email's role in the organisation – one of lasting impressions and souvenirs of virtual encounters, and another of expansive learning through emotional intelligence, reaching out to individuals' values and sensibilities, which offers a possibility of amelioration of the subversive effects of email problematised in this research.

Chapter 7 consolidates the findings of the research in terms of the research question and the proposition of the research, and offers emergent possibilities for further research.

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[40] *Discussion points 2* numbers 4a and 4b

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research set out to address the following question:

"How do email communities within organisations affect organisational culture? What can organisations do, through organisational learning, to understand and address the effects of such email communities?"

The proposition made in this research is that email is central and essential to organisational culture. It forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious.

In answering the research question, this research has shown that email is indeed central to organisational culture, in both the structural (Hofstede 1997, 2001) and insider-outsider social habitus (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) conceptualisations. Email emerges as a factor in the power relations that operate within officially sanctioned organisational structures, but also emerges as a factor in the power relations that operate within an unofficially

sanctioned, organically arising, fluid and dynamic insider-outsider phenomenon. Insiders in the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon see no harm in what they do; outsiders, however, feel bullied, cast adrift, controlled – yet despite email being a written communication form, can provide no evidential email trail due to the seemingly innocuous way in which the phenomenon operates. Outsider status in the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon differs from other forms of workplace exclusion in that outsiders can only have at best a partial view of the outsiderdom they experience and the insiderdom from which they are excluded. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious. Because the insider-outsider email phenomenon is located wholly within the insider-outsider social habitus concept, the structural culture concept cannot locate it or engage with it and the organisation, from its structural viewpoint, sees the insider-outsider social habitus email phenomenon as being subversive. However, far from being subversive in a wholly negative sense, this research has shown that subversion can be positive and, through an emotionally intelligent approach to organisational learning, may be harnessed to serve the organisation and its members. This research has shown that informal, self-generated learning is going on, which incorporates expansive organisational learning (Fuller et al 2005: 56-58). Nevertheless formal learning within the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) is lacking, and participants expressed a desire for emotionally intelligent approaches.

The concise answer to the research question given above is unpacked in the narrative of the sections below entitled *Findings*, *Contribution to knowledge – implications for theory* and *Contribution to knowledge – implications for practice*. There then follows

some final reflections in the section entitled *Conclusion*, and finally the *Opportunities for further research* identified in the course of the research are presented.

Findings

Application of the conceptual framework of Chapter 1 and the literature reviews of Chapters 2 and 3 to the reported experiences of participants of Chapters 5 and 6 results in the following findings and contributions to knowledge in respect of email usage. Participants' conceptualisations of email corresponded to both conceptual threads of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1. Email is, as set out in the proposition of this research, central to the organisation, whether within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) or the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Participants were happy to conceptualise email from either basis.

Participants conceptually linked the rules that apply to email usage to the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). They thought that email should be private within the bounds of reasonableness and legality, but they felt that avoiding trouble in this regard was their responsibility. None felt inclined to challenge this.

Participants reported that email cliques develop organically, often without insiders being aware. Outsiders however become painfully aware that something is going on, but are unable to form any clear idea as to the nature and extent of the clique due to email's unique characteristics of requiring neither defined space nor synchronous participation. Participants' understanding of cliques sits firmly within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and

Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Outsiders only become aware of their status through insider-facilitated overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) and "helpful" notification by insiders (Kibby 2005: 775-779). The insiders in such cliques are regarded by outsiders as possessing power, whilst outsiders are left floundering in a world of shadows. "Power" is equivocal as officially sanctioned authority rests squarely in the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), whereas top-dog authority lies within the insider-outsider social habitus concept, and the two power-forms do not intersect just as the two conceptual threads do not intersect.

Email has an emotional function in that it can be kept as souvenirs of praise (or blame) (Elias and Scotson 1994: 89-100); and far from being sterile (May 2002: 20) participants felt the need to add nudges and winks – an element of the insider-outsider social habitus concept that may be found in communication (Geertz 1993: 7-10; Elias 1978, 1987, 2000, 2001; Elias and Scotson 1994). This emotional aspect extends to appropriate distribution as well as content (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006), with participants reporting emotional reactions to being copied in.

Participants' email stories and their reflections paint a picture of email that is central and essential to organisational culture. It forms unofficial, fluid communities of the type falling within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), a type that bears no relation to and is invisible to those falling within the official structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001). Within the insider-outsider social habitus conceptualisation, insiders wield power and outsiders feel disempowered, bullied, cast adrift. Unlike other forms of organisational clique, the email-facilitated insider-outsider

phenomenon is fluid, ever-changing and, to outsiders, its extent and form are unclear and mysterious. This accords with the basic proposition of this thesis. However, in addition to this proposition there emerges an important emotional aspect to email's role in the organisation – one of lasting impressions and souvenirs of virtual encounters, and another of a desire for expansive learning through emotional intelligence, reaching out to individuals' values and sensibilities (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001 and 2010, Vince 2001), which offers a possibility of amelioration – and indeed assimilation – of the subversive effects of email problematised in this research. This identification of a desired "logical pinnacle" to situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991), introducing a new but related concept of emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001, Vince 2001), is a significant contribution to knowledge. It effectively reorganises the conceptual framework in terms of organisational learning into a "layered pyramid" as follows.
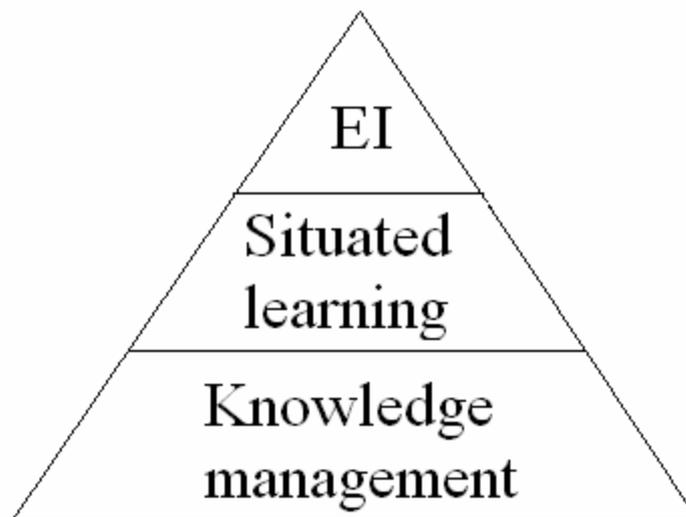
EI's relationship with situated learning is explained under *The situated learning concept with respect to email* in Chapter 3. This layered pyramid is further considered under *Contribution to knowledge – implications for practice* below.

Contribution to knowledge – implications for theory

This research has made a number of contributions in terms of application of methodology, understanding of culture and its application to organisational email, and understanding of subversion as follows.

Methodology

The research was conducted through an evocative ethnographic methodology, within which the researcher and the participants in the research co-participate within a research community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Each participant, including the researcher, contributed their own evocative autoethnography (story, or "confessional tale" (Van Maanen 1988)). Subsequent consideration of discussion points facilitated reflexivity on the part of all participants and has resulted in the deep research outcome that evocative autoethnography sets out to achieve (Ellis and Bochner 2003). This method enabled the participants to express the issues that are important to them and minimise the effect of any researcher *a priori* assumptions or habitus (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). By the same process, the reader of this research becomes participant (Flaherty 2002: 481). Subsequent reflexivity through consideration of discussion points and the draft research contributes validity (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 220; Hine 2000: 52). The confluence in the subject matter of the research and the medium through which the research was conducted in the medium of email has delivered authenticity (Orgad 2005: 52-53), whilst extended inclusion of researcher, researched and reader has provided authenticity in a social context (Christians 1997: 16). The contribution to knowledge in respect of the methodology lies in the depth and authenticity that has been achieved in a cultural context for a topic – email – that is normally approached from a technical or rule-based starting

point. An unexpected discovery was the emotional effect of email; this was not appreciated in the early stages of the research – "It is difficult to see, however, how a life can be constructed around something as tangential to life as, say, organisational email" (see *Autoethnography in its various forms* in Chapter 4) – yet Ruby's experiences with email show that her organisational life became to an appreciable extent constructed around being an individual with a "serious work face" and, bizarrely, being a Womble.

Culture and email use

This research has sought to examine a general concept of "organisational culture" and to apply it to the research of email. In Chapter 2 two distinct threads were drawn out, that of a reified structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001, Deal and Kennedy 1982), and that of a dynamic, insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

Hofstede's (1997, 2001) structural culture concept is, from an organisational management perspective, pragmatic. It is, however, problematic on philosophical and methodological bases (Baskerville 2003, Garsten 1994, McSweeney 2002, Williamson 2002), and the way in which its uncritical acceptance can lead to the sidelining of deep-seated cultural issues (Currie 2008), yet it cannot be set aside due to its influence generally and its influence in informing the conceptualisation of "organisational culture" for participants in this research. Flowing from this model in the context of email is problematisation from the point of view of rules and legislation (Levene 1997, Shea 1996, Spence 2002, Christacopoulos 1999, Stokely 2007), privacy (Australian Federal Privacy Commissioner 2000, Friedman and Reed 2007,

Miller and Weckert 2000, Woodbury 1998), and values and behaviour (Khoo and Senn 2004, Kibby 2005, Alpay 2005).

The insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) provides a rigorous and sustainable base for academic research and hence forms the primary concept within the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1. Within this concept, email is not so much bound by constructed structural culture models or rules as emergent from individuals' experience, values, self-identification and sensibilities – the facets that determine their insider and outsider statuses in relation to it.

In Chapter 2 two concepts were presented, one of which, the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), draws its inspiration from qualitative observation, interpretation and reflection; the other of which, the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) with its adjunct in the form of organisational rules, is based on the outcomes of a quantitative study conducted within a single international company. Given such different origins, it is hardly surprising that the two do concepts do not at first sight intersect or engage with each other. Yet this research shows that both concepts co-exist within organisations and society. The contribution of this research in respect of culture is the identification, through the participants' contributions and the subsequent analysis of them, that both concepts have applicability and provide background to their understanding of the beneficial and subversive power that email has, and how benefit and subversion can apply at one and the same time, and be one or the other depending upon the viewpoint of the participant. It has also been discovered that the

structural culture concept is blind to the activity of the insider-outsider phenomena carrying on in its midst, whilst the insider-outsider phenomena sideline the structural culture concept to varying degrees of irrelevancy.

This research has shown that emergent from the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) is the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998). Like the structural culture concept, knowledge management provides a reified model that is useful for organisations (Serban and Luan 2002) but misses the points concerning individuals. Similarly, this research shows that emergent from the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5) is the situated learning concept. This situated learning concept (Vygotsky 1978, Lave and Wenger 1991, Eraut 2000, 2006) addresses the concerns of individuals and, like the insider-outsider social habitus concept, provides an academically robust and sociologically situated concept upon which this research may be founded. Like the insider-outsider social habitus concept, the situated learning concept shares that concept's qualities in respect of academic rigour, conceptual validity and analytical depth and relevance in a social science context.

However, like the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), the knowledge management concept (Davenport and Prusak 1998) had to be included due to its role in forming the understanding of participants in this research.

The contribution of this research in terms of organisational learning has been to show conceptually the relevance of two conceptual threads linking on the one hand knowledge management (Davenport and Prusak 1998) with the structural culture

concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001), and on the other hand linking situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) with the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5). Within the structural culture/knowledge management vertical thread of the conceptual frame developed in Chapter 1, learning will be pre-prepared, quantified and delivered in response to and aimed at preventing the transgression of rules concerning email usage. Within the insider-outsider social habitus/situated learning vertical thread of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1, learning will be organic and characterised not so much by stated values as emergent from sensibilities and individual histories and, being so individual, is better suited to address individual concerns (Khoo and Senn 2004, Sipior and Ward 1999, Kibby 2005, Skovholt and Svennevig 2006, Clark 1992, Bourhis et al 2005, Wenger and Snyder 2000).

Subversion

Email's effect in subverting the organisation's stated values, or rendering them ineffective or irrelevant, has been shown to be very strong, however this is largely unobserved within the structural culture concept (Hofstede 1997, 2001) favoured by organisations (Baskerville 2003: 2-6) due to its covert nature and location wholly within the organisationally unappreciated insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5).

That such cliques and the alternative hierarchies they represent is damaging to the organisation's stated values is evident where participants' experience such damage as outsiders. Interestingly, however, participants' experiences from the insider perspective indicate that such cliques need not be insidious – indeed they can be

benign and beneficial. This finding necessitates reappraisal of an *a priori* view about the damaging nature of subversion – and the negative connotations of the word "subversion" in the title of the thesis. Maybe in the light of this important finding, "Email and the Subversion of Organisational Culture" should be re-expressed as "Email and its Influence on Organisational Culture".

This research has also shown that email operates as a facilitator of alternative, power-related phenomena that operate within organisations but without the sanction of the organisation's structural hierarchy. The gossip that provides the motor for the operationalisation of the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), however, in its email incarnation, is not deliberately subversive in a structural context; rather it sees structural email and its processes, hierarchies, aims and values as being irrelevant. Operating within the insider-outsider social habitus concept, it is seen as malign to those on the outside and harmless to those on the inside. This harmlessness is evident in Thomas' innocuous email-based relationships with his key[board] friends, and Sophie's course discussion group. Where malignity occurs it may take the form of inappropriate subject matter such as Ruby's "sausages and dongers", the result of which is to overtly exclude. It may take any number of forms with the common denominator being exclusion. Insiders may have only benign intent, but to the outsiders this can look like, to borrow Ruby's term, "top dogs" exercising power that accrues to them through popularity. The top dogs may see themselves as being no more than office wags, but those on the outside can see them as office bullies, as happened to Ruby when confronted with the "Womble" and "serious work face" cartoon episodes. These opposing and irreconcilable constructions of what is going

on render such email communities different from the other communities that form in organisations. In addition to such overt actions this may be, as was the case with Sophie's accidental disclosure incident, the result of outsiders becoming aware of being on the outside due to insider-facilitated overhearing (Skovholt and Svennevig 2006) or, as was the case with the "private" emails described in my story, by being "helpfully" informed (Kibby 2005), but with no clear idea of the status of other people. In other forms of office clique, such as the groups that gather round the watercooler or go to the pub on Friday lunchtime, bullying can be seen and acted upon. In the email community, bullying goes unnoticed except by the outsider, and the outsider is so unsure of his or her status in the context of the email community that he or she cannot think of what, if anything, should be done. Will anyone believe that an email that on the face of it does no more than pass on a joke, or offer some friendly advice, be understood as bullying by the outsider's line manager? Given that users of email are, as has been shown in this research, unclear as to just how private email really is (with the tendency towards "not very private at all" suspected by Emily and Grace, and confirmed by Lily and Ruby), any malign agenda by senders will be made to appear innocuous. The ease with which this may be done is demonstrated in the hypothetical examples in Appendix 9 (see description of these at *Contribution to knowledge – implications for practice* below). This is the nub of the problem: the structural hierarchy of the organisation and the insider-outsider email community, and the concepts through which each may be understood, are separated by a chasm of differing narratives. The insider-outsider email community is aware of the structural hierarchy. The influence of the structural hierarchy on the insider-outsider email community is marginal. The structural hierarchy has little idea of the existence of the insider-outsider email community, and no idea at all about its dynamics or the effects

– which as shown in this research may be malign, benign or both – it has on individuals within organisations and organisations' professed culture and values.

Contribution to knowledge – implications for practice

This research was presented at the University of Leicester Festival of Postgraduate Research in June 2009. For this purpose it was necessary to create some examples of emails to illustrate the research problem quickly, and to a wide audience. For illustrative purposes these hypothetical examples are reproduced in Appendix 9.

These examples show the potential harm that can be done to an organisation's stated values through the operation of email communities. This raises questions of corporate honesty and integrity – can an organisation that claims through its stated values to, for example, respect and include every individual, be said to be acting honestly with respect to its own people, its customers and suppliers when an alternative culture acts so completely independently and antipathetically to it? It is unlikely, to borrow a phrase from the law, that any reasonable person (Lucas 1963: 97-106) would think so. So action is required. The chasm between the organisation's structural hierarchy and its insider-outsider email communities must be bridged, and for this to succeed, organisations must think conceptually. Organisations have to engage with the insider-outsider social habitus concept (Elias 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 5), and accept and understand the emergent situated learning concept (Lave and Wenger 1991) with its logical pinnacle of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001, Vince 2001) as introduced under *Findings* above. Until they do, organisations cannot be confident that their professed cultures and stated values are anything more than meaningless forms of words.

The section entitled *Findings* above introduced the idea of a layered pyramid.
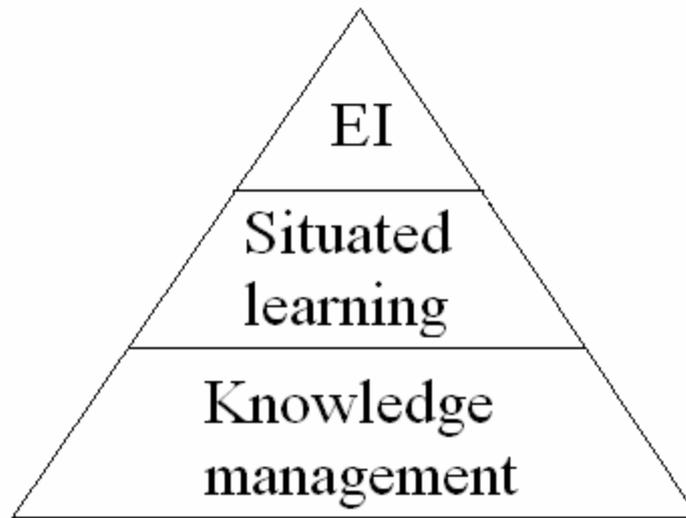
This could be operationalised for organisations as a "virtuous pyramid", with the different organisational learning options open to organisations that can be selected according to needs or built into a continuous learning process as follows.

Organisational learning type	*Practical requirements for organisations*	*Consequences for email usage*
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	Continual commitment; building values that are applicable not only to the organisation but in the wider world; achieving consent and understanding in respect of EI's meanings and manifestations; individual behaviours; continual commitment to situated learning; knowledge management interventions.	No or few rules; email usage in terms of content founded on consensually understood and agreed values. Email usage in terms of distribution firmly based on insider status for all. Subversion is fully assimilated and is not regarded as being necessarily damaging.
Situated Learning	Commitment by core members of the community of practice to guiding and motivating colleagues (i.e. the legitimate peripheral	Email usage aiming for insider status for all; where non-insider status exists, it is of the form of legitimate peripheral participant, not outsider. A situated

	participants). This may be expansive, aiming towards the wider-world values applicable in the EI situation, or restrictive, aiming towards a more local and less transferable applicability.	learning approach engages with the insider-outsider social habitus concept, and so engages with subversion and can work towards its assimilation.
Knowledge Management	Regular knowledge management interventions, setting out in terms of content what is permitted and what is proscribed, and in terms of copying, saving etc the processes to be applied.	Email usage guided by rules; specific to the organisation. Those who obey the rules are insiders, those who do not are outsiders. Whilst a knowledge management-based approach can protect against the effects of subversion, it will not prevent or assimilate it due to the inability of the structural culture concept to engage with the insider-outsider social habitus concept.

By being aware of the cultural aspects of email, the possibility of subversion being not necessarily negative and the ways in which (in the situated learning and emotional intelligence situations) it may be harnessed inclusively, organisations can begin to address the problems highlighted at the head of this section.

Conclusion

This Chapter, the final one of this research, has set out how the research question has been answered. It has set out the achievements of the research in terms of contributions to knowledge, both as these affect theory and practice.

At this point I look back at my research diary and revisit the issues that arose during the doing and writing-up of the research. Authenticity and validity – is this work

defensible on these grounds? I believe so. Looking further, I made a note querying whether I understand Elias correctly – he features throughout, so any errors in this respect will be serious. Then there's the perspective: at one point in the process I was told my perspective was too managerialist – a lot of reflection and rewriting required as a result, and if this is still the case I have nobody to blame but myself. Scanning the diary's pages it startles me just how much material that seemed so important at the time ended up being deleted: the research question and my stated standpoint were influential in excising some of that which was interesting but not strictly relevant, but also – importantly – the process was ultimately guided by the participants and the matters that were important to them, and I hope this work does their contributions justice.

Finally, in the course of conducting the research, a number of opportunities for further research were developed; some being suggested by the research participants. For convenience these are gathered together in the following section.

Opportunities for further research

The following opportunities have been identified for further research.

- Emily identified external workers (i.e. those working alone at remote locations, or working from home) as being of particular interest with regard to their comparatively heavy reliance on email and how this influences their experience of it.

- Lily identified the problem of covert monitoring of email traffic. This raises questions of how much it goes on, and whether it is particularly prevalent in certain sectors or certain sizes of organisations.

- In Chapter 1 the delineation of email for the purposes of this research prompted the question of comparative research into the effects of other electronic communication methods, for example instant messaging.

- An interesting contrast of organisational cultures emerged from Thomas and Sophie's attitude to urgency and the prioritisation of tasks in hand with respect to incoming queries. Thomas' priorities are product focused, whereas Sophie's are service focused. Here arises a question of difference in approach between the manufacturing and service sectors to communication within a cultural context.

APPENDIX 1

CONCEPTS AND MEANINGS

The concepts and meanings which appear throughout the research are indexed alphabetically below.

APPENDIX 2

APPROACH LETTER

<div align="right">

141 College Green
Upper Norwood
London SE19 3PR

Email: davidroy10@aol.com.uk
drf8@le.ac.uk

14th December, 2007

</div>

Peter Baimbridge, Research Officer
Mensa
research@baimbridge.net

Dear Mr Baimbridge

My name is David Freke (Mensa membership number 35705/10). I am a postgraduate student at Leicester University, presently at the beginning of the thesis stage of the Doctorate in Social Sciences.

In my draft thesis proposal I considered the possibility that Mensa could be a source of respondents for my thesis research. I was therefore very interested to read in the October and November editions of Mensa Magazine about the society's interest in participating in research. Not only is this encouraging, but the fact that Mensa unprompted has expressed a general interest in research assists me in resolving methodological and ethical issues concerning approaching Mensa and Mensa's possible response to me.

The subject-matter of the research is informal email and its effect on organisations and people working within organisations. Ideally I will be searching for 12 or so respondents who are willing to tell me about their experiences, and engage in discussion. The only limiting criteria are that respondents should work in an environment that exposes them to English-language email, and that they work in this country.

Mensa members who become respondents will be offered anonymity, although their contribution may be personally recognised if they so wish. All information received will be treated with strict confidentiality and used only for the purposes of this research; publication of the thesis or any parts of it will be subject to respondents giving their permission. The research process will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and subject to academic supervision. Information regarding my academic credentials and those of my research may be obtained from my thesis supervisors, whose names and addresses are given below.

Dr Nalita James	Dr John Goodwin
Centre for Labour Market Studies	Centre for Labour Market Studies
University of Leicester	University of Leicester
7-9 Salisbury Road	7-9 Salisbury Road
Leicester	Leicester
LE1 7QR	LE1 7QR

I sincerely hope that respondents will find their participation intellectually rewarding, and I hope that the project may be of benefit to Mensa. This may be achieved, for example, through advancing Mensa's profile and reputation in academia as a result of participation in this research, and publication in Mensa Magazine of articles about the research that I (or indeed any respondents) may write about the experience. Organisations that offer encouragement and grant access to researchers deserve to be rewarded, and I will do all that is reasonably possible to achieve this for Mensa.

I have attached a copy of my draft thesis proposal here. The parts that I think would be of most concern to Mensa and expand upon the matters mentioned above I have highlighted yellow.

Please let me know your initial view of this and what Mensa's requirements regarding participation of members would be. Also please let me know if you have any comments or questions. I am, of course, happy to meet you to discuss this project at any time convenient to you if you so wish.

Best wishes

David R Freke

APPENDIX 3

APPROACH LETTER – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Problem to be studied

The problem to be studied in the thesis concerns "outsider" written communication within organisations, and its effect on the "insider" aspects of hierarchy and organisational culture. The problems of communication with respect to culture are not new, but technological developments have led to widespread adoption of outsider written communication (typically email) where style and accessibility differ from traditional forms of organisational communication (e.g. notices and memos), and which for these reasons raise new problems.

Email differs from other, more traditional organisational communication forms in that in its public form it does not require the formality of the typical announcement placed on the company or departmental notice board; nor in its private form does it require the formality of the internal memo. Conventions applicable to notices and internal memos do not apply to email, and as email has yet to develop its own conventions, its style can vary widely. Email is both a boon and a curse for organisations: news can be quickly disseminated, but so also can be jokes, personal comment and gossip. Jokes, personal comment and gossip may be entertaining and morale-boosting, but they may also be malicious, mischievous, discriminatory or offensive.

Many organisations set limits regarding what is and what is not acceptable for internal communications (Spence 2002), however due to the volume and essentially private nature of emails, policing is difficult. For the recipient, every email is personal; they know from whom they received each message and may be able to see who else has

received it so far, but they would take exception to someone (even a close friend) reading their messages over their shoulder in a way in which they would not were they reading a notice pinned to a notice board. For the sender, onward distribution of a message relies entirely on the discretion of the initial recipients, governed largely by intuition and rules-of-thumb (Davenport and Prusak 1998). With email, the very private and personal may become unintentionally or inappropriately very public. Similarly, the malicious, mischievous, offensive or discriminatory may remain private when the law and the organisation's regulations and stated values demand it should be reported.

The nature and distribution of email represents a social and cultural pull on organisations that is difficult to monitor and control. Indeed, organisations may be largely unaware of subcultures constructed by "outsider" email* traffic – the groups that meet silently and invisibly around the "virtual watercooler" (Serban and Luan 2002). Such subcultures may reinforce an organisation's culture or militate against it. Such subcultures may make an organisation's stated values look like a sick joke. The nature and distribution of informal email may also lead to the establishment of alternative hierarchies that may reinforce or militate against formal organisational structures.

*	For the purposes of this research "outsider" email means any email that originates from a position other than that of an "insider". An "insider" email is one for which validation can be claimed based on the organisation's stated values, its formal culture and its established processes (Elias and Scotson 1994: xv-lii).

The thesis will seek to examine, within the broad scope of organisational culture and the narrower sub-genre of virtual communities, the nature and extent of the social and cultural pull exerted on, and the effect on the official hierarchies of, organisations by outsider email. On the basis of the resultant findings, human resource development (HRD) needs will be identified and means of addressing these needs from an organisational learning perspective will be suggested.

The research question may be summarised as follows:

"To what extent do virtual communities, as defined by outsider email, affect organisational culture?[41] What can organisations do, through organisational learning initiatives, to promote the positive effects and ameliorate the negative effects of such virtual communities?[42]"

Answering this question is likely to raise issues of

- morale, both its raising and lowering

- informal support networks and intimidation

- confidentiality and whistle-blowing

- organisational culture and values, and the culture and values of individuals, organisational functions and departments; associated with this is cultural drift – the extent to which "outsider" becomes "insider", and new outsiders emerge

- statutorily defined and proscribed discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, age and religious affiliation

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[41] This is the primary question and is to be the main focus, initially, of the research.
[42] This is a secondary question, the treatment of which will depend upon the findings of the primary question and the limitations of the thesis.

- other discrimination, including that based on social class and the social positioning within the organisation of individuals, departments and functions

- learning (individual and organisational), knowledge management and HRD within organisations.

In the context of the organisation, many of the issues noted above are well-rehearsed in academic literature. The contribution of this thesis to existing knowledge lies in its identification and analysis of these issues as they are manifested in the email communication form – one that is as-yet relatively unconstrained by convention and regulation. The conjoining of issues of organisational culture and email – essentially an element of communication – in consideration of the research question offers potential for originality within this contribution. Additional contribution lies in the consideration of how organisations need to address the problems raised by outsider email in their HRD programmes. This will essentially emerge from the above-mentioned analysis, but will most likely take the form of organisation learning-based solutions and ameliorations. For this purpose "solutions" may be described as proactive measures designed to influence and guide the phenomenon as it develops, and "ameliorations" may be described as reactive and protective measures designed to exert control over an existing phenomenon.

In consideration of "contribution" I am mindful of Phillips and Pugh's advice to "apply theory in a difficult setting" as the narrow and appropriate interpretation for the purposes of the doctoral thesis (Phillips and Pugh 2000: 35).

Relevant literature

Directly relevant existing research into the effects of email concerning conflicting organisational hierarchies tends to emerge from an IT-oriented starting point and is fairly sparse in general. Where the social and developmental aspects are primary, work tends to be populist, relatively undeveloped and unashamedly remedial (for example, Shea 1996). There are exceptions, for example, Laura Spence, PN Khoo and C Senn, who respectively address email ethics and discrimination (Spence 2002; Khoo and Senn 2004), but their focus is relatively narrow. This is not to say, however, that organisations have not applied thought to the control of electronic communication. Academic institutions are particularly developed in this respect, for example the University of Bath bases its guidance on courtesy and manners (http://www.bath.ac.uk/bucs/email/emailbasic.shmtl) as does the library of Yale University (http://www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/postscript.hmtl/). Guidance from comparable institutions can, however, take surprisingly contrasting forms, for example Delaware Technical and Community College buries its guidance on what is acceptable practice in a technical document (http://www.dtcc.edu/cs/rfc1855html). Mark Easterby-Smith interestingly discusses the "informating" potential of IT; something that can be aligned to the "enculturating" capacity of IT discussed in this thesis (Easterby-Smith 1997).

In the thesis it will be necessary to take a deeper, philosophically grounded approach than that exhibited in the IT-oriented literature mentioned above. Of course given the respondent-led nature of the research methodology (described in *Analytical framework and methodology* below), the literature reviewed must ultimately be adaptable to meet methodological needs. However, as the thesis concerns personal

values and organisational hierarchies, a logical conceptual starting-point would be organisational culture. In establishing the discourse-based philosophy of the thesis, a consideration of semiotic (Geertz 1966) and semantic (Saussure 1983) perspectives is essential. Culture in operation must also be included to make the link between the philosophy and the research aspects; the work of Geert Hofstede stands high in this regard (Hofstede 2001), but must be considered alongside legitimate criticism such as that of Rachel Baskerville and Brendan McSweeney (Baskerville 2003; McSweeney 2002). From the practitioner viewpoint, the popular work on organisational culture by Terence Deal and Allen Kennedy is also worthy of consideration (Deal and Kennedy 1982). Particularly relevant to consideration of unofficial hierarchies is Hofstede's and Reid Bates, Hsin Chu Chen and Tim Hatcher's consideration of culture with respect to values (Hofstede 2001; Bates et al 2002) and, developing from this, Harry Hui and Candice Yee's consideration of individual cultures and values (Hui and Yee 1999). Connection between structure, strategy and hierarchy is provided by Jacky Hong (Hong 1999), with further development to include IT and learning provided by Hanne Kargaard Thomsen and Viggo Hoest (Thomsen and Hoest 2001) and Robin Stanley Snell's introduction of moral foundation (Snell 2001). Finally for the purposes of conceptualisation, Jason Hughes usefully introduces the emotional intelligence aspect (Hughes 2001).

From an HRD perspective there is a wealth of existing literature offering established bases from which this relatively new problem may be examined. Hitendra Pillay, Gillian Boulton-Lewis, Lynn Wilss and Colin Lankshear examine the personal empowerment and life structuring facets of the workplace conjoined with personal values (Pillay et al 2003), as does Robert Lawy in terms of personal definition (Lawy

2000); similarly relevant is the work of Stephen Billet and Margaret Somerville, Judyth Sachs and Nalita James (Billet and Somerville 2004; Sachs 2001; James 2004). Moving from the personal to the organisational, Yrjö Engeström considers the workplace as a learning situation in terms of cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström 2001). Alongside this must be considered Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's conceptualisation of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991), and supporting case study work by Alison Fuller, Heather Hodkinson, Phil Hodkinson and Lorna Unwin, and Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin (Fuller et al 2005; Fuller and Unwin 2003). Explicit linkage of organisational structures and learning has been made by John Ashton (Ashton 2004), with Michael Eraut and Rod Gerber taking this forward to reflective learning forms (Eraut 2000; Gerber 1998) which are important with regard to the behavioural aspects of email usage, a main concern of this thesis.

Remedies to the problems identified in the thesis are likely to emerge from an HRD basis and, as such, knowledge and the understanding of it is a key consideration. In respect of the research question this raises issues of judgement of significance with respect to context, collectively shared meanings (here conceptualised as understandings of hierarchy and culture) and conversation and anecdote – heuristic knowledge; directly relevant here in respect of communication, and usefully explored by D Bell (Bell 1999 in Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001). Knowledge management should be considered in light of its value as a means of communicating official values (but, according to Mats Alvesson and Dan Kärreman, not as an arm of management power) (Alvesson and Kärreman 2001). Concerning unofficial values, the status of knowledge as capital, as described by Ronald Barnett, should be considered (Barnett

2000). What emerges from the literature is that the insider-equals-good, outsider-equals-bad dichotomy is by no means as clear-cut as it may at first seem (Elias and Scotson 1994: 106-145 (concerning delinquency v social setting) and 146-173 (concerning goodness and badness)). Organisational intranets often offer sounding-boards for disparate views which, if successfully led, can take the steam out of the wholly outsider (Bourhis et al 2005). Similarly, charities have found that virtual communities of like-minded people can not only be cheaply appealed to, but may also be mobilised in a common cause (Cater 2003).

As an adjunct to knowledge management's role in exploring remedies from an HRD perspective, organisational learning can shed light on the conceptual bases for this approach. Linking organisational learning to structures, the work of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön is seminal (Argyris and Schön 1978), with useful conceptualisation and definition provided by Micha Popper and Raanan Lipshitz (Popper and Lipshitz 2000), and Satu Lähteenmäki, Jouko Toivonen and Merja Mattila making the link to individual learning (Lähteenmäki, Toivonen and Mattila 2001). Very relevant consideration in respect of outsider structure comes from Russ Vince, who usefully centralises emotion and politics in contrast to Argyris and Schön, for whom these aspects are peripheral (Vince 2001). Louise Knight's consideration of inter-organisational values offers a view of outsider culture being transmitted beyond the organisation – something potentially damaging to the organisation's reputation (Knight 2002). As a major work in the area of organisational learning and its ideal-state form, the learning organisation, Peter Senge's discussion of the positivity promised by adoption of organisational learning (Senge 1990), which is interesting in the context of the thesis due its promise of realigning competing, unofficial cultures

and hierarchies, must be included for completeness. Conceptual difficulties arising due to the reification of the organisation with respect to the individual must be considered; Thomas Garavan's adaptation of Anthony Giddens' structure-agency dilemma (Giddens 1984) to this purpose (Garavan 1997) offers resolution of this ontological contradiction. By way of contrast with the expectations (as opposed to the philosophy) of Senge's work, Philip Owenby offers a view whereby organisational learning is a potential cause of outsider negative culture (Owenby 2002). In support of Senge, Harald S Harung describes a case study whereby insider and outsider hierarchies and cultures may be reconciled through organisational learning (Harung 1996).

Analytical framework and methodology

The *Problem to be studied* section, especially the research question and bullet points on page 258, and the *Relevant literature* section above contain a number of assumptions regarding the issues that will be raised in the course of researching the thesis. These are, however, only assumptions, and should not in any way be allowed to influence any directions that the research may take or issues that it may raise. The research is to be inductive, finding its own way, guided by respondents, however within the possibilities offered by this approach it is important to establish focus from the outset. This focus is to be organisational culture. This will provide the context and scope for the competing issues of insider culture (represented by insider email) which should accord with stated values, and outsider culture (represented by outsider email) and its values, if any. The primary methodology is to be autoethnography by the researcher and a number of respondents. This method, perhaps the ultimate expression of the profound reappraisal of methodology emergent from the linguistic

turn (Wittgenstein 1958; Saussure 1983), is ideally suited to the doctoral thesis, requiring constant reflection, justification and validation by the researcher throughout every stage of the process.

The autoethnographic approach lends itself well to the consideration of values and behaviours implicit in the study of communication. It involves the researcher taking an active part through personal ethnography, and forming a collegiate system of co-researchers with other respondents (Adler and Adler 1987). As participants need only have the use of email in the workplace in common, there should be no difficulties in finding full insiders, and as long as the direction of the research is carefully reviewed at all stages, problems of cultural relativism (Hofstede 2001; Potter 2000) should be avoidable. This will involve the researcher in two stages of reflection, that relating to the personal ethnography, the second relating to the research and its validity. One of the strengths of autoethnography is its capacity to connect the personal to the cultural, and is better suited to examining meanings relating to discrimination that are lost when emotion is removed, as is the tendency of many social science methodologies (Ellis and Bochner 2003). It also allows the voices of participants to be heard (Ellis and Bochner 2003). This being a project based on autoethnography, the initial data collection (i.e. individuals' stories) will delineate the problem(s) and guide the direction of the thesis. Further data collection (in the form of follow-up interviews) will set the initial data collection within the context and scope explained above.

Autoethnography is commonly considered to be a postmodern approach, but this need not be so. Leon Anderson offers a realist-based analytic autoethnography as a subgenre of the evocative autoethnography of Ellis and Bochner (Anderson 2006:373-

395). This may be a useful and more manageable form, given the time and length limitations placed on the thesis; it may, through adopting the analytical form, be possible to delineate the project whilst remaining methodologically valid, and contributing wider theoretical understanding. Delineation may be practically accomplished by means of a pre-research questionnaire (Peek et al 2007: 183). In realising the analytic subgenre, Anderson offers a form of autoethnography that fits more comfortably within the social science ambit, being inherently less subjective, and more scientific (Anderson 2006: 387).

The solutions and ameliorations element emerges from this. The extent to which this can be explored depends upon the university's thesis requirements and will be regarded as secondary to the primary question. I expect this to be guided by what respondents feel would be useful in this area during the earlier stages of the research. Validation of these can be achieved through seeking respondents' feedback.

The research process will begin with the design stage, in close consultation with the supervisor.

In practical terms the research will begin with the assembly of around 8-12 respondents. 18 respondents is probably the maximum feasible for a study within the constraints of the doctoral thesis (Carolyn Ellis recommends 5 or 6 (Ellis and Bochner 2003)). In order to minimise power relation distortion it is best not to seek respondents in the researcher's workplace, however tempting and convenient this may be; were this a quantitative research project this obstacle may be surmountable, but it is difficult to imagine this being the case in a study of this kind on both

methodological and ethical grounds. It is for this reason that respondents will be sought through a medium within which the researcher holds no hierarchical position – indeed no position at all, other than that of basic membership of the associated organisation; this medium is the Mensa magazine, the journal of Mensa. Mensa is (among other things) an organisation with a high proportion of interested and intelligent people, of diverse origins, many of whom are helpful to other members and readily respond to calls for help of this kind. Contact with Mensa's Research Officer specifying the nature of the study and the kind of help sought should attract a number of respondents, the only qualifying criteria being the use of email in the workplace, and the language of the workplace being English. Each qualifying respondent would then be asked to complete a pre-research questionnaire and to write about their personal experiences with email, how it affects and forms their relationships with colleagues, managers, subordinates and external business contacts. Beyond this it would be unwise to provide further guidance unless this is actively sought by respondents – to do so would compromise the purity of response.

At first sight Mensa may have the appearance of a biased sample, although it is difficult to discern any intersection between the potential bias inherent in a sample chosen by individuals' ability to pass a test – and their inclination to attempt it – and the thesis requirement that respondents communicate with others in the course of their work. There are advantages in using Mensa as a basis for a sample first. It is convenient and accessible, and likely to achieve a good response rate; secondly (as mentioned above) as I hold no office within Mensa (other than basic membership) there will be no *a priori* power relationship issues to consider, although of course

there will be as the research develops, and these may be unpredictable, but this would be the case whatever the sample base.

Having received responses it would then be necessary to amend the skeleton literature review outlined in *Relevant literature* above, based upon the issues raised by respondents. Initial analysis of the respondents' writing would follow, with respect to existing literature.

Having formed a conceptual framework of respondents' reporting within the context of the literature, the respondents will then be re-contacted and asked if they wish to take part in the second stage (for them) – the in-depth interview. The interviews will be conducted as "interactive conversations" (Ellis and Bochner 2003). The purpose of the interview is to clarify the researcher's interpretation of the respondents' words, and to give the respondents the opportunity to add to or elaborate upon the points they made in their writing. Methodologically it will be necessary at this stage for the researcher to examine the values of the respondents and, with the respondents, seek remedies to their identified issues. The assumption at this stage is that remedies will be organisational learning-based, but this need not necessarily be the case. The interview serves another purpose, that of separating the analytic elements from the therapeutic, which not only has value in itself but answers one of the criticisms frequently levelled at autoethnography (Atkinson 1997). In support of this respondents will be asked to keep a diary recording their day-to-day feelings about the research.

The interviews would then be analysed with respect to the literature and each other. Each will be written up within the conceptual framework and individually.

The individual write-ups of the interviews will then be submitted to the respondents for reflection and comment. This also serves as validation of this stage of the research (Kopinak 1999). "By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (Reed-Danahay 1997).

The validated interview material will add to the depth of the conceptual framework of respondents' reporting within the context of the literature described above, enabling a final stage of analysis to be conducted, and identification of the means by which amelioration may be achieved. This will be secondary to the main research and, whilst expected to be within the organisational learning discipline, may raise additional issues which will need to be addressed. In which case, further literature review in respect of this may be necessary, as indeed may a further stage of respondent interviewing and validation.

Respondents will finally be asked to complete a post-research questionnaire which will, together with the pre-research questionnaire and respondents' diaries, provide methodological and ethical validity.

Finally will follow writing-up and submission.

Ethical considerations

For the reasons given in the section entitled *Analytical framework and methodology* given above, the method for gathering respondents is designed so as to minimise as far as possible any power relations issues. As there will be significant contact between researcher and respondent it will be necessary to identify power elements in the researcher-respondent relationships that will inevitably develop. These may develop as self-other dichotomies or, convergent with the insider-outsider terminology of this paper, within a context of those terms as described by Caroline Humphrey and which require conscientious reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Humphrey 2007). These should ideally be minimised but in any event consideration of them must be incorporated into the research analysis. As well as being the subject-matter of the thesis, email will be an important means of communication between researcher and participants. This itself raises ethical issues, for example email is good in that it is convenient and can encourage the participation of less extroverted participants (Peek et al 2007: 169), but may be assumed by recipients to be anything from "absolutely sterile" to "more thoughtful and eloquent" than normal conversation (May 2002: 20). Clearly when communicating by email the thoughtful interpretation must be assumed: emails must be clear as to status (on- or off-the-record), precisely worded, verifiably accurate and backed by background research as to the expectations and character of the recipient (May 2002: 21). The credibility of the research will depend upon this (James and Busher 2006). More generally, researchers should ensure that email recipients are aware of the uses to which their replies will be put, and to whom the content will be shown (May 2002: 46, 49-50). It is also important to carefully consider what will be deleted; no email should ever be deleted or ignored without justification – to do so would be akin to turning one's back on someone in the

middle of a conversation (May 2002: 56). To accurately assess the levels of success for this, offering a pre- and post-research questionnaire and completion by respondents of a research diary, recording their feelings throughout the process, may be helpful.

Respondents and researcher are by the nature of the autoethnographic process rendering themselves emotionally vulnerable; although autoethnography is said to have a therapeutic effect, the calling to mind of unpleasant incidents (such as, for example, receipt of an offensive email) may not be therapeutic in the short-term. The researcher should remain sensitive to this likelihood. For this reason it would be preferable for interviews to be conducted in a quiet public place (e.g. a country pub on a weekday lunchtime) or a private place in which the respondent feels comfortable (e.g. the respondent's home, with a friend present).

Respondents should at the earliest stage be requested not to quote directly from emails they have received or sent, for legal reasons relating to data protection. At no stage am I planning to seek direct quotations from or examples of emails from respondents; to do so without the permission of the other parties to such emails would be unethical and unlawful under Data Protection legislation. Given that the emails in question may be discriminatory, offensive or mischievous, such permission would be unlikely to be forthcoming. It is at least partly for these reasons that the autoethnographic approach has been chosen, so that respondents can write and talk about the effects of outsider email on them rather than about the emails themselves; this seems to be the only feasible entry point into the subject if it is to be studied in depth. For ethical validity it is important that the means by which respondents' views were obtained, e.g. by

email or in a face-to-face context, are recorded and stated in the reporting (May 2002: 52); email can in no way be considered equivalent to a conversation (May 2002: 55), although its undoubted positive elements should not be ignored.

Respondents should be promised total anonymity, but offered the opportunity to have their names included in an "acknowledgements" list at the beginning of the completed thesis, should they wish to be so included. During the research respondents' privacy and ownership of their emails must be respected (May 2002: 59). In all dealings with respondents and in the analysis of what they say, the researcher should remain mindful of the treatment of values, ideas and practices represented by social representation theory (Howarth 2002). This is not only important for the welfare of respondents and the respect due to them, but also for the validity of the research.

Finally but importantly, ethics should be discussed at the beginning and throughout with the supervisor, and university guidelines in this respect should be adhered to at all times. Further useful guidance on ethical research is available online from the British Psychological Society (http://www.bps.org.uk/) and the British Sociological Association (http://www.the-sra.org.uk/).

Bibliography

[The bibliography provided here was substantially the same as that appearing with the thesis to which this Appendix is attached.]

APPENDIX 4

MAGAZINE ARTICLE

This is the article that appeared in the March 2008 edition of Mensa Magazine, inviting participants to take part in the research.

Can you help David's research?

Mensa member David Freke is seeking help from fellow members to conclude a research project. David is a doctoral student at Leicester University, and the topic of his research is e-mail and its effect on organisational culture.

David says: "Each organisation takes great care to ensure that its culture works not only to present the organisation favourably, but to ensure that people within the organisation feel valued, respected and safe.

"Any behaviour that compromises this – for example bullying or discrimination – is usually detected and swiftly dealt with.

"E-mail, however, allows the formation of sub-cultures which may significantly diverge from the culture of the organisation, are difficult to detect and yet may be hugely influential."

David would like to hear from members who use e-mail in their working lives, and are willing to give their personal accounts about organisational e-mail and the effect it has on them, their organisations and other people.

Initially David seeks volunteers who would like to tell their own stories, with levels of involvement to be determined by each participant, Confidentiality for all those helping the project will be assured, David adds

If you are interested then you should contact David at drf8@le.ac.uk for more details and a quick initial questionnaire.

MENSA MAGAZINE · MARCH 2008

APPENDIX 5

PRE-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Email Research Project

Introductory Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in this project. The purpose of this questionnaire is to give you some idea of what to expect and to enable you to say how far you wish to participate.

The programme for participants' involvement is expected to be as follows, occurring over a period of around six months between April and September 2008.

- Completion of <u>introductory questionnaire</u> (this one)
- Writing of <u>email autobiography</u>
- Engaging in <u>discussion</u> of issues arising from email autobiography
- <u>Personal validation</u>
- Completion of <u>post-research questionnaire</u>

In the following part of this Introductory Questionnaire there are some questions relating to the bulleted items above, which I would be grateful if you could complete and return to me now. There are also some explanatory paragraphs which have no questions. These are for information, and the spaces beneath are for comments and queries that you may have now, and that you may wish to make as the research progresses – the spaces will expand to accommodate anything you wish to say. You may change, delete or add any notes/replies you make in these spaces at any time during the process. During the course of the research I will enquire from time to time about any changes you may wish to make, but in any event please email changes to me as they arise. *In order to do this, please save this Introductory Questionnaire on your computer now.*

Please begin by entering your name* (or pseudonym, if you wish) and email address* in the space below.

* Will not appear in the final thesis or any public-domain material.

Please say in the space below what the organisation for which you work does.

Email autobiography
When we reach this stage in the research project, you will be asked to write in your own words about your experience of using email within your organisation. There are no limits to this, other than that the email you write about should be between people within your organisation or professional network. You may have noticed that this questionnaire does not ask you to give personal background information. This is because if these factors were to be an issue, they would emerge in the autobiography that you write, and it is important that the existence and significance of such factors is determined as far as possible solely by you. This autobiography may be written in any way you wish and in any way that is comfortable for you: it is your experience and thoughts that are important, not any preconceptions that I as researcher may have. I will also be writing an email autobiography, which I can make available to you if you wish. You may have some questions about writing your email autobiography; please note any questions in the space below.

Discussion
After consideration of your email autobiography and the email autobiographies of other participants, you will be invited to take part in a discussion. This is primarily to ensure that my interpretation of what you say and my identification of emerging issues are correct. The discussion will begin using the medium of email, but may progress to telephone and/or face-to-face contact. Please say in the space below whether these means of discussion are acceptable to you, specifically stating any that are not.

Personal validation
My interpretation and analysis of the email autobiography and discussion material will be made available to you for comment.

Post-research questionnaire
At the end you will be given the opportunity to say how you feel about the research. In addition to (or in lieu of) successive updating of the spaces above, you may also wish to keep a diary of your feelings about the research as it progresses.

Your personal anonymity is guaranteed to the extent that your identity or any personal information by which could lead to your identification or identification of your organisation will not appear in the final thesis or in any public-domain material. In pursuit of this anything you write or say may be redacted or adjusted as necessary. However, the thesis resulting from this research will be read and used by internal and external examiners and other students in hard-copy and electronic form. It will also, like other theses, be stored at the British Library. It may happen that the thesis or parts of it are published in academic journal or book form. Articles about the research by any participants may also appear in Mensa Magazine – you may wish to write one yourself. If you have any queries regarding anonymity and use/access to/publication of the thesis or materials that emerge from it, please note them below.

Finally, thank you once again for your interest. Like all academic researchers I am anxious that participation should be as interesting and rewarding for you as it will undoubtedly be for me. I am always available to answer queries or discuss any concerns you may have.

Yours sincerely

David R Freke

Address for correspondence and return of questionnaires: drf8@le.ac.uk.

APPENDIX 6

POST-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Email Research Project

Completion Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this project. The purpose of this questionnaire is to enable you to give your views on how you feel you have been represented in the research. This is important in assessing the authenticity and validity of the research.

This questionnaire is accompanied by the thesis, completed as far as is possible at this stage. The parts that concern you most for the purpose of this stage of the research are Chapters 5, 6 and 7, but you may also like to read the other Chapters.

Please type your replies in the blank spaces beneath the questions. The boxes will expand as necessary.

The pseudonym you have been given in the thesis is

Do you think you have been fairly represented in the Stories recorded in Chapter 5? Please give details below.

Do you think you have been fairly represented in *Discussion points 1* recorded in Chapter 6? Please give details below.

Do you think you have been fairly represented in *Discussion points 2* recorded in Chapter 6? Please give details below.

If you have anything to further to add, please do so below.

Finally, thank you once again for your participation.

Yours sincerely

David R Freke

Address for correspondence and return of questionnaires: drf8@le.ac.uk.

APPENDIX 7

DERIVATION OF DISCUSSION POINTS 1

Discussion points 1 were derived from the participants' stories as detailed below.

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
1.	Friendships between remote colleagues can develop by email without the necessity of meeting such friends face-to-face.	Thomas: "I have a couple of quite close workmates at other sites who I have never met… perhaps they are key-friends rather than pen-friends." Oliver: "Most of my business communications are conducted remotely with people I know quite well, but will probably never meet."
2.	Emoticons reduce the need for careful written expression.	Ruby: "… here… emoticons were useful."
3.	Newsletters that are circulated in the workplace by email are less effective than printed ones.	Jack: "When information is important… I prefer to go office-to-office to make sure the information gets across."
4.	Workplace email users have little thought for the etiquette that applies in other means of communication.	Thomas: "There is absolutely no training on etiquette." Me: "In the emails I receive I expect the same level of consideration and obvious time-taken as I try to put into the ones I write."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
5.	Because the delivery of email is so much quicker than "snail mail", recipients of workplace email should feel obliged to respond with more immediacy then they would respond to a letter arriving in the post.	Jack: "… a few of the older academics… are unreliable at email, treating it the same as they would 'snail mail'… On the other hand, the younger members of staff… have a turn-around time of a few minutes on occasion. The former group frustrates me as I see it as inefficient."
6.	Because email is so quick, in the workplace there is no need to observe the conventions that apply to paper-based memos or letters.	Lily: "Email is more direct, to the point and much quicker." Harry: "I guess emails are like post-its. No one expects more than basic information from them." Me: "Professionalism and propriety are so much more important when the email goes from manager to managed than when the direction is reversed."
7.	Workplace email should always be private between sender and recipient(s).	Ruby: "… the Systems Manager tipped me the wink… and it dawned that such organisations… must carefully monitor and analyse incoming traffic."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
8.	Managers are afraid of private email conversations between colleagues.	Grace: "Management… put fuel on the fire by sending an email to everyone saying such issues should be taken up with line managers and not through the email network."
9.	Workplace email facilitates the formation of private cliques.	Ruby: "One could spot the crescendo of a clique… in full swing… It was interesting to observe who seemed to be talking to whom, and when, if not about what." Me: "I immediately rethought my attitude to the emails I'd received and came to the conclusion that they could indeed be classified as bullying on two counts: (1) with respect to me, in trying to secure the enforcement of non-existent rules, and (2) with respect to the people being reported."
10.	It is risky to circulate jokes by email in the workplace, even quite innocuous ones, for fear of who might take offence.	Emily: "I refrain from circulating jokes or similar just to be on the safe side." Alfie: "I receive a lot of funnies and I like most of them, but I wouldn't

	Discussion point	Derivation
		pass any but the most innocent of them on. It's not worth the risk."
11.	Workplace email provides an opportunity for covert bullying.	Sophie: "A lot of nasty things can and did circulate behind people's backs."
12.	Email between colleagues detracts from the organisation's stated values and weakens official hierarchies.	Olivia: "In technical roles such as mine there is always an unofficial pecking-order, based on nothing but competency, among those who want to get things done." Me: "This incident, however, illustrated to me how inappropriate behaviour can be hidden in the medium of the email, and unofficial and invisible hierarchies can develop."
13.	Email stories, jokes and satirical poems are harmless and take some of the stress out of workplace life.	Thomas: "I am more than happy to pass on a good joke, story, internet link etc to a considered number of recipients." Jack: "… an ancient professor… occasionally composes short poems about his particular gripes."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
14.	Email is difficult to manage, is difficult to prioritise and can set the agenda for the working day.	Thomas: "I've not bothered to plan a day for about 15 years… I have no time to manage."
15.	Workplace IT departments are unhelpful and focused on the purely technical aspects.	Thomas: "'fun size' equals 'not-much-fun size' in the same way as the 'help desk' is the 'not-much-help desk'."
16.	Important workplace information should not be disseminated by email as it is difficult to tell how many people actually read it.	Jack: "…it is difficult to tell how many people actually read the emails that I send round."
17.	Some authors of workplace email exhibit, through the style in which they write, inappropriate assumptions about their (or their department's) own importance and position in the organisation.	Jack: "Occasionally people will hijack the larger email lists with inappropriate (personal or irrelevant) comments." Grace: "… someone, somewhat puffed-up by their [own] importance, sent an email saying they would be away for a period of leave…" Me: "Similar are those which begin 'Hi there'… 'Hi there'… in email comes into the category of (in normal speech) 'I say, you fellow'… It's got that easy, informal superiority…"

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
18.	Being a member of an email group, or being copied on emails sent between others, gives one a sense of inclusion in a community that is not immediately obvious but which is painfully brought to light when technical failures lead to disconnection from such groups.	Jack: "I also run a few discussion groups… These groups largely overlap in membership." Me: "… being copied on emails… gives a sense of belonging… which when withdrawn even for a short time leaves one feeling cast adrift."

APPENDIX 8

DERIVATION OF DISCUSSION POINTS 2

Here the development from *Discussion points 1* to *Discussion points 2* can be traced in the numbering; for example, *Discussion points 2* numbers 6a, 6b and 6c flow from the discussions of *Discussion points 1* number 6. The only exceptions to this scheme are Ruby's comments at *Discussion points 2* number 11c, which derive from the discussion at *Discussion points 1* numbers 10 and 4, and Ruby's comments at *Discussion points 2* number 16, which derives from the discussion at *Discussion points 1* number 3. These exceptions arise due to Ruby's "stream of consciousness" style of discussing and reflecting, which makes connections and crosses between the subject matter of the various points.

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
1a.	"Friendly rapport", rather than true friendships, develops via email. Email alone is not enough for true friendships to develop, although email provides a starting point, and can lead to excited anticipation when the time comes to move from email to telephone contact or a meeting.	Ruby: "Only once in my experience has such a relationship extended into friendship outside the professional sphere. It graduated to phone calls, then a meeting. Five years on, we talk every week on the phone. We no longer use email to communicate…" Thomas: "…it is quite exciting when you finally have cause to phone the colleague!" Emily: "I do not think these

	Discussion point	Derivation
		friendships would be very deep or lasting compared to friends you have met in person; but you could definitely build a friendly rapport through email." Sophie: "…at least one face-to-face meeting was necessary at one point, for the friendship to grow stronger." Oliver: "Yes, although only up to a point. I think the email friendships I have would fizzle out if I didn't have other reasons for keeping in touch." Me: "All participants who commented here noted the limitations of email, either pointing out that the development of friendships are dependent on progression to telephone or face-to-face contact… Bourhis et al (2005) note the need for purpose and leadership in order for electronically mediated groups to be sustainable."
1b.	Whilst telephone conversations and face-to-face contact may be more	Lily: "... it can be much better than telephone conversations when you

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	effective in forming friendships, email contact, being written and therefore recorded and readable, can be more intense and memorable.	need to be polite, diplomatic and amiable." Sophie: "… written message seems sometimes to leave a lasting – or longer – impression on the memory."
2a.	Emoticons can add to, but not replace, careful expression.	Thomas: "I realise they can stand in for the body language/tone of voice that is missing in emails." Emily: "Emoticons can be of some help to express ones feelings in informal correspondence but should not be used instead of carefully written expressions. More of an add-on I would think – they should not be relied upon to bring one's point/mood across." Sophie: "I like careful, precise expression, with all the nuances punctuation affords us. I almost never use them, aside from the occasional ☺ or :) ."
2b.	Emoticons can appear childish and flippant and can give the wrong impression, and so should not be	Ruby: "I find emoticons too informal for professional emails. That 'sloppiness factor' and the way they

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	used in a formal context.	look can provoke annoyance… I have used email and the web for a long time yet remain unsure of the exact meaning of some emoticons, so would rather not risk being misinterpreted." Thomas: "Don't use them – perhaps I'm a snob, but they seem childish." Jack: "Never use them."
2c.	Paradoxically, the only context in which emoticons can be safely used is an informal one between people who are well-known to each other, and so their use is not necessary anyway.	Ruby: "I rarely use them anyway and only when I know how the recipient will react." Lily: "I would be extremely careful using these. They do not really have a place in the workplace. If the recipient is a trusted colleague, then maybe. I suppose they could be used to break the ice, but this would be a gamble in my opinion."
3.	Newsletters lose their impact when sent by email (as opposed to hard copy) and may be classified by some as little more than junk mail; this is particularly the case for people who	Ruby: "… newsletters take second-to-junk priority." Emily: "I pay a lot more attention to paper-based newsletters and similar." Sophie: "I pay better attention to

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	spend all day looking at a screen and filter anything that is not essential. The big advantage of the hard copy is that it can be taken to lunch or even taken home.	print material."
4a.	There is still some way to go to achieve a commonsense-based email etiquette.	Thomas: "I frequently tell the IT section and HR that training is required in the etiquette (and common-sense) of email."
4b.	There is a form of email etiquette, but consensus on acceptability is lacking.	Ruby: "Here, I have to wonder if email can bring out the less attractive qualities each sex conceals when observing other workplace etiquettes." Oliver: "I would say I am reasonably careful, but only to the extent that I don't want to cause offence. I don't go out of my way to find out about accepted etiquette for email, if there is any."
5a.	Senders of email tend to have their own priorities, which may not accord with the priorities of the recipient(s). This can lead to senders forming an	Ruby: "I observe that others seem to feel obliged to respond by return – and be responded to. I recently put off replying to an email from a

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	unfavourable opinion of recipients who do not reply as promptly as the sender's priorities demand.	member of HR for what seemed like a couple of days and was surprised at how seriously she took the incident – the word disciplinary was mentioned." Lily: "*As the sender* – Absolutely – and if they don't they cannot use the excuse of 'I never received that!' … *As the recipient* – Nooo – I'll have to reply straight away now!" Emily: "I would agree with this; even though when thinking of why this should be, my reasoning is not flawless. I just feel that one should respond to an email within a day or two, whereas a posted letter response can take longer than that." Sophie: "Yes, very true, especially when the email comes with a red exclamation mark, although it is not always as urgent as the sender would have me believe!"
5b.	An email should not demand a quicker response than a hard-copy	Thomas: "the same amount of consideration and research is needed

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	letter or memo – after all, the response should demand the same amount of research and consideration.	to answer an email as for a written note."
6a.	Email should be just as polite as any other form of communication. People reveal a lot about themselves in the way they write, and this applies whatever the medium.	Thomas: "It depends what is meant. If you mean politeness, you are wrong." Emily: "Wording, style and format in emails should not deviate that much from paper-based correspondence." Sophie: "No, I fully disagree. I am always careful when drafting my messages. I use full words and sentences and a polite address before signing… I am always displeased when I see the lack of care and consideration people convey when replying with half sentences, opaque SmS-type abbreviations or don't sign off. It's basic decency to send a well-written message. I think that people reveal a lot about themselves by their writing and language style, which is increasingly eroding

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
		online." Alfie: "I think it depends on the context. If I am responding to a complaint from a client I would take more care and be more polite than if I was responding to a colleague asking what kind of sandwich I want."
6b.	With email there is no need to conform to the stultifying formal addresses, salutations, sign-offs etc of paper-based communication, and if a mistake is made or a faux pas committed it can more easily be corrected by a follow-up clarification, so people tend to be less concerned with being polite when communicating by email.	Ruby: "now we can make do with a sentence which, if necessary, can be amended immediately." Lily: "This is true in the sense that emails are informal." Jack: "As long as normal conventions concerning politeness are observed, email senders shouldn't be overly concerned about conventions." Harry: "Yes."
6c.	Just because an email does not exist in material form it does not mean that its content is any less important, and so should be saved/filed just as a hard copy note or letter would be.	Thomas: "… it is just as important to keep copies of emails (whether paper or electronic), so that when the shit hits the fan, you have something to shelter behind. However the language can be less formal."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
7a.	Workplace email should always be private between sender and recipient(s), however it is important to remember that, in theory at least, any email can be recovered and read by IT professionals and those who employ them. Whilst not necessarily being afraid or suspicious, people do wonder from time to time whether their private email conversations are being monitored.	Lily: "I was asked as a manager to randomly check everyone's email to ensure they were being used in the correct manner. I personally feel it should be private." Emily: "In principle, yes. But this is wishful thinking on my part. Emails are an incredibly unsecured form of communication (on the same level as postcards in my opinion) and this should be kept in mind when sending/receiving emails. Once an email is sent out, there is no telling where it might end up in the end or on which 700 servers it will be stored for the foreseeable future." Sophie: "Yes, a must!" Grace: "I think individual emails are pretty safe, unless they contain things that get filtered and attract the attention of IT."
7b.	Email is no more or less private than any other form of written communication.	Thomas: "The privacy factor is no different to any other communication."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
8.	Managers do not fear private email communication, but like to be copied into (or at least told about) what people are emailing so that they know what is going on.	Thomas: "My boss likes to be copied in on everything work related, but I think(?) this is just so he knows what is going on." Emily: "I do not think that 'afraid' is the correct term. I would say that they are interested, however…" Grace: "Managers always like to know what's going on…"
9.	Workplace email facilitates the formation of private cliques, but no more so than the groups that form around the watercooler, or in the pub.	Thomas: "No more than the phone, the water fountain, or the pub." Lily: "I don't particularly think email would make it worse."
10a.	In some ways jokes circulated by email are safer than, say, a photocopied cartoon pinned to a notice board – although on the other hand that apparent safety and assumed confidentiality may encourage recklessness on the part of senders, and tension/uneasiness amongst recipients.	Ruby: "The clique appeared to operate according to a set of rules I was not party to and instead of appreciating our workplace being committed to equality, I worried a little that one or more of them might have been offended and storing my email up for a complaint…" Sophie: "[Taking offence] happened once or twice at my work. It can create unease or tensions, so it can be

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
		a slippery slope."
10b.	One must always be aware of the "P(olitical) C(orrectness) Brigade".	Emily: "This is becoming more an issue with the PC-brigade on guard."
11a.	Workplace email provides an opportunity for covert bullying but, being in writing, the evidence is available should anyone wish to take the matter up.	Thomas: "… the victim has the evidence if they want to take this up with the authorities – more so than verbal." Emily: "… email leaves a paper trail which I think bullies tend to avoid?"
11b.	People can feel left out of email cliques – a kind of bullying by exclusion, made all the worse by not knowing who is involved and where the boundaries are.	Ruby: "Yes. But in my experience more by exclusion and examples… rather than direct verbal abuse. … It feels disempowering when one of the Top Dogs is mocking you and other female colleagues behind your backs via email and the clique continues to support itself."
11c.	Circulation of email can reinforce stereotypes, for example ribald jokes may circulate mainly amongst men, "snitch and bitch" amongst mainly women. Where exceptions are made, the people included are only accorded status of "guest" rather than	Ruby: "To stereotype: sexism and herd instinct in men and paranoia and snitching on colleagues to the manager in women." Ruby: "I assumed that certain 'etiquette' barriers had come down. But when I gossiped with the same

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
	"full member" – a status that may be suddenly and inexplicably withdrawn.	clique, sharing an affectionate – true – anecdote… I was instantly stonewalled. The messages stopped arriving. I concluded that I had caused offence to somebody…"
12.	People would rather gather by the watercooler or coffee machine to discuss organisational matters – it is easier to maintain confidentiality this way than putting one's thoughts in writing, and oneself at the mercy of one's recipients.	Ruby: "I saw paranoia at the possibility of messages being monitored or forwarded limiting email's potential for any serious weakening of values or hierarchies."
13a.	The only harm to come from email stories, jokes and satirical poems is the time wasted in the writing and forwarding of them.	Ruby: "They can be pernicious and time wasting."
13b.	Email stories, jokes and satirical poems are frequently childish and sexist.	Emily: "Most (if not all) of these emails are either lame or sexist and an incredible waste of time."
14a.	Email and its administration occupy time that would be much better spent just talking to people.	Sophie: "[Email] is extremely time-consuming, and it seems colleagues and team managers have lost track of the concept of oral communication."

	Discussion point	*Derivation*
14b.	Email can rule one's day, but it saves time when correctly administered.	Ruby: "…[email] made life much easier: I liked having my agenda and tasks visible on screen and saved lots of filing time." Lily: "Email is easy to manage if done correctly. … It can set the agenda for the working day, but the same could be said for internal mail and phonecalls."
15.	Workplace IT departments: anything further to add?	Ruby: "I am always wary to approach IT people with caution as they are often under pressure and abused." Sophie: "… my experience has usually been excellent with IT departments."
16.	Concerning dissemination of important workplace information, email is used for convenience rather than effectiveness.	Ruby: "Impact must depend partly upon workplace culture… and the extent to which the individual enjoys using email." Sophie: "I kept getting important messages at my last job, but I would wait till Friday or spare time to read them."

|	*Discussion point*	*Derivation*
17.	Apart from IT departments, do any organisational functions/departments use email to exert influence or raise their profiles?	Ruby: "… specific authors talk and write like that anyway…" Thomas: "Yes. Particularly the IT dept."
18.	The email that one sends and receives in the workplace gives one a sense of belonging to a community.	Ruby: "… I suspect this is the case for team members who are tele-commuting…" Emily: "… I would be the first to collapse into catatonic schizophrenia should my emails be cut off for any reason."

APPENDIX 9

EMAIL: HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES

The following hypothetical examples were presented in support of this research at the

University of Leicester Festival of Postgraduate Research in June 2009.

[Colleague A], some guidance - Message (Rich Text)

File   Edit   View   Insert   Format   Tools   Actions   Help

Send | Reply | Reply to All | Forward | | | | | | | | | |

From:
To:
Cc:
Subject: [Colleague A], some guidance

Hi [Colleague A]

Far be it from me to act the martinet, but I think you should know a little bit about the way we do things around here. You've probably noticed that [Manager X] is pretty laid back, however I have certain standards which I like to be observed. I've noticed you listening to your iPod while sitting at your desk, which I feel is unacceptable in a professional environment.

As [Manager X] is either unable or unwilling to take these matters of decorum and behaviour seriously, I feel that it falls upon me to do so and I also feel that others in the office are grateful that I do. I therefore hope you will take this matter seriously.

You may always turn to me for any guidance that you, as a relatively new person in the office, may need. I am always willing to guide and help.

Thanks,

[Colleague Z]

Helping – or bullying?

FYEO - Message (Rich Text)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

Send | Reply | Reply to All | Forward | X

From:
To:
Cc:
Subject: FYEO

[Colleague B] - just a note to say thanks for taking the helm so well last week. I'm glad it was you and not you-know-who. You're definitely one of the good guys, and we're getting a bit thin on the ground these days.

[Colleague Y]

Effective team, or exclusive club?

Today's Marketing meeting (yawn) - Message (Rich Text)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

Send | Reply | Reply to All | Forward | X

From:
To:
Cc:
Subject: Today's Marketing meeting (yawn)

Hi All - here are the unofficial minutes! (Minutes? Hours, more like!)

Jargon count

- "Going forward" - way too many - lost count after about 30

- "Synergy" - 17 (what's synergy?)

Babe count

- 2 - with 1 borderline. It's only the scenery that keeps me going to these things ;-)

Content

- Big fat **O !!**

Action points

- None - don't encourage them!

Inter alia, cynical and discriminatory

APPENDIX 10

POST-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE OUTCOMES

Introduction

All participants were offered the opportunity to comment on the completed thesis. This process, suggested by Kopinak (1999: 180-181) allows the project to be satisfactorily closed with respect to participants. The feedback provided by the participants allows the researcher to establish how authentic the research process has been – that participants feel they have been properly represented and interpreted (May 2002: 46, 49-50). The participants' feedback also enables the researcher to assess the validity of the methodology – how the necessary researcher-participant trust-relationship has developed (Howarth 2002: 22) and the extent to which the resultant research community of practice is characterised by insider qualities (Elias and Scotson 1994: 90).

In ethnographic research the reader has a participant role. So that the reader may participate fully, the findings of this final stage of the research are separated from the process led by participants' stories and the subsequent rounds of discussion points and analysis. What the reader reads in Chapters 1 to 7 and Appendices 2 to 9 is that which was presented to the participants in advance of this final stage, the only differences being the cross-references to this Appendix added subsequently. By orienting the reader-as-participant in this way, further validity – "validity in a social context" (Christians 1997: 16) – may be achieved.

Participants' comments

Whilst participants made use of the post-research questionnaire (Appendix 6), none who participated in this final stage confined their feedback to this medium. They all followed a pattern of offering initial thoughts by email, with a promise to reply more fully later, some using the post-research questionnaire and some emailing their further responses using their own format. All offered information about what is going on in their lives, and some closed the research process with further musings and ideas. Thomas, for example, mentioned his forthcoming retirement. Sophie mentioned the death of her grandmother and how this had adversely affected her performance in an examination. On a happier note, Emily mentioned that she was now on maternity leave, and had just given birth to a little boy.

So that the reader may apply some context to these comments, they are separated into initial and considered comments below.

Initial comments

Sophie: "I have already scanned parts of your thesis and read some of 'Sophie's' comments, and I would say that they reflect my comments accurately. I also found it interesting to read some of your analyses. I will take the time to read them entirely and let you know what I think. I am used to reading academic material, so it is interesting to see this style applied to one's personal reflections."

Sophie: "What a pleasure to hear from you as always. I am glad you have finished your thesis, at last. I look forward to reading it and giving you my feedback, though I trust that you have integrated my comments accurately."

Emily: "I do not have time at the moment to read your thesis (though I am planning to do so...) – I searched for the term "Emily" and read those bits. Many thanks for writing up my text so beautifully!"

Thomas: "I really enjoyed taking part in this and reading the comments of the other participants. Perhaps we could start a SIG[43] along the lines of email management, or even a consultancy. I've not yet read the whole paper, but certainly intend to, as the sections I've already read in order to generate this reply were most interesting. I would actually like to print it out, as mentioned in my reply about corporate communications, but at 269 pages the facilities team might notice. As an aside, my checker picked up a couple of spelling mistakes, which are inevitable in a draft document of this length, but I'm sure you'll sort these."

Thomas: "Sincere best of luck with the thesis, (you see, we've almost developed a close relationship on the basis of a few emails) and be sure to let us know how you get on."

Ruby: "Thank you SO MUCH. I can't wait to read it. I know it will be VERY LONG so I can't promise to read every word but it is thrilling to see the product of the hard work and mental grind of someone whose meticulous/rigorous approach one respects."

Ruby: "Just skimming though – already laughing – interesting and delightful intro."

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[43] SIG – Mensa Special Interest Group

Considered comments

Emily commented "Yes" to each part of the post-research questionnaire, with "N/A" in the "Anything further to add" section.

Thomas commented in detail using the post-research questionnaire as follows. The questions appear in italic.

Do you think you have been fairly represented in the Stories recorded in Chapter 5?

"Absolutely. I was also happy that my opinions have not changed in the months since I wrote to you."

Do you think you have been fairly represented in Discussion points 1 recorded in Chapter 6?

"Broadly. But there's always a "But":

In paragraph 15, where I replied "Absolutely", you thought my reply equivocal. At the time I referred to both parts, but "unhelpful" in this context can mean different things. On reflection our IT department is helpful when something goes wrong – a system crashes perhaps – but they are very restrictive in how we can set up our PCs. For example the icons on my word package have to conform to the corporate ideal. If I amend them, they revert next time I open Word. Why am I not allowed to have a "Save As …" icon?. Whenever I've discussed this type of point, they have been unhelpful.

It was very interesting to see a disinterested opinion/commentary on my behaviour, and apart from this single clarification, I am very happy with your analysis."

Do you think you have been fairly represented in Discussion points 2 recorded in Chapter 6?

"Yes, I am broadly happy with what you have written, but see comments here: I didn't really understand the sentence in para 4b "Expectation of this situates Thomas within an emotionally intelligent understanding which incorporates self-awareness and openness (Goleman 1999, Hughes 2001) and a valuable personal cultural hinterland (Eraut 2000)."

In 6c I mentioned the protective reasoning behind keeping emails. You seemed to have taken this as negativity on my part, but this was only one example. It is also very useful (and very much more common) to be able to refer to mails later in a positive context: to refresh my memory, or forward them to others who require data, minutes etc. This will probably happen daily, whereas the negative side extremely rarely. I must have been in a flippant mood during this reply. As you comment several times, I see email in many respects exactly the same as paper communication, where I might photocopy a letter for someone. Email is just more convenient in this respect."

Do you think you have been fairly represented in the Summary and Conclusions recorded in Chapter 7?

"I am happy with what you have said. Again, it was interesting to see a discussion of my thoughts. At the time, these were dashed off rather quickly,

and with more time I would have been more thoughtful and perhaps less flippant, but you have broadly grasped my intentions and motives. In fact in some points you have indicated a deeper knowledge of 'how I tick' than I have."

Sophie did not use the post-research questionnaire, but offered the following feedback and reflection using her own choice of format. The following are Sophie's words except where cross-references and guidance notes are added in square brackets.

[*Discussion points 1* number 4]

Although basic email etiquette is usually taught in the workplace, I have noticed that some colleagues stick to that style mostly when corresponding with clients. Employees tend to be much less formal between themselves (i.e., they use emails as a form of written dialogue). I don't make this distinction, and usually greet my reader, write complete sentences and sign off. I think more and more, people view email as a convenient means of communicating, and thus equate convenient (and cheap) with slack.

[*Discussion points 1* number 8]

Please note the added precision to my reply:

I'm not sure about the manager being *afraid*. I did notice in one of my jobs that my supervisor seemed a little annoyed when my two colleagues and I were talking joyously and laughing after having exchanged jokes by emails, but I think the impression was we were doing so at the expense of working. Also, we might have given the impression of an inside joke.

[*Discussion points 1* number 9]

Would it be possible to tie that reply to the former one? [Here Sophie is wishing to associate her precision-added reply of *Discussion points 1* number 8 above to this discussion point.]

[*Discussion points 2* number 2b]

I may have replied to statement 13 a little too fast:

True, but not in all cases. Some jokes can be quite offensive, racist, sexist, or simply reflect poor taste or judgment on the part of the sender. The best jokes are the 'neutral' ones, that convey gentle humour and are devoid of any undertones that can lead to various interpretations. Also, such emails create an urge to read and reply, and are an excellent procrastination tool.

[*Discussion points 2* number 2b]

 I just wanted to say that I appreciate your reflection here! It was interesting to read this academic point of view about culture.

[*Discussion points 2* number 4a]

 Learning-as-a-commodity – I don't know if this precision is necessary, but I will add it nonetheless and let you decide of its relevance:

I see the learning of email etiquette as a commodity mainly in the professional context – i.e. if a serious candidate wants to land a position requiring solid mastery of communication skills. In other contexts, such etiquette would be used simply out of consideration for the email recipient.

[*Discussion points 2* number 12]

Excellent point, David, because the two remaining students had not been privy to the email, and actually told us in class that they felt left out. My two other classmates and I could have replied that that email had been written <u>precisely</u> to help the teacher navigate the verbal disagreements, but finally I decided such explanation would be superfluous, notwithstanding their justified irritation at being excluded. So, the intention was benign, but I think I ended up, unintentionally, offending somewhat.

Analysis of this feedback follows in the *Conclusion* below.

Conclusion

The participants' final contributions indicate that they are broadly happy with the way in which their personal truths have been reported and interpreted. Thomas and Sophie offer further important explanation and reflection, which readers should take into account when reading their comments in *Discussion points 1* and *2* in Chapter 6. Based on these final contributions, authenticity can be said to have been achieved.

Running through participants' final contributions are demonstrations that a researcher-participant community of practice based on trust has developed. The methodology has, according to these final contributions, operated in the way it should in order to achieve validity.

Participation levels varied throughout from a maximum of eleven at the *Pre-research questionnaire*, *Email autobiography* and *Discussion points 1* stages[44] to a minimum of four at the *Post-research questionnaire* stage. The participation level of five in *Discussion points 2* was disappointing. It is observable that those that did not participate in *Discussion points 2* had not been very reflective participants in *Discussion points 1*, with the exception of Emily who had taken time out of her work to have a baby (see *Introduction*). The only participant for whom there is no discernible explanation for non-participation in *Discussion points 2* is Lily. Thomas, Ruby and Sophie's participation at every stage is unsurprising, given their clear interest in the research and the deep reflection evident in their contributions. Participation levels throughout the data gathering stages (*Pre-research questionnaire* to *Review*), however, do not fall below Ellis's recommended minimum of five for emotive ethnographic research (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 238). That only four participants contributed to the *Post-research questionnaire* is disappointing, however it is probably not safe to attempt to draw conclusions from this. The thoughtful and reflexive contributions of those that did participate in the *Post-research questionnaire*, and the way in which this corrected and nuanced the research, lends authenticity to the way it was finally presented.

Final assessment of the authenticity and validity of ethnographic research, however, lies with the thoughtful, critical and participative reader.

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[44] For descriptions of the stages referred to here, please see the section entitled Research design in Chapter 4.

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