# THE ROLE, STATUS AND STYLE OF WORKPLACE EMAIL:
# A STUDY OF TWO NEW ZEALAND WORKPLACES

by

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# Abstract

This thesis discusses ethnographic research carried out in two very different workplaces, one a manufacturing plant, the other an educational organisation, to explore the relationship between the organisational or workplace culture and the role, status and style of email. The research was concerned with looking at the specific functions of email alongside other means of communicating at work and how it was perceived by its users and receivers compared to these other means of communication. It also investigated when and why email was the preferred medium of workplace communication and some of its distinctive stylistic features. In addition to relating these latter to the workplace culture, the effect on email style of sociolinguistic variables was also explored. Pragmatic theories provided the framework for analysing the data which was interpreted from a social interactionist, social constructionist perspective.

A combined corpora of 515 email messages provided the primary linguistic data. This was supplemented by quantitative survey data and qualitative data from observations, two diaries of reflective practice, interviews, and recordings of four people's communicative interactions over one workday. The messages were coded initially for communicative function and then, in order to explore the affective aspect of email communication, for mitigational and boosting elements. In addition to the above, a qualitative analysis of a thread of email messages was undertaken to demonstrate how email communication is used in knowledge creation.

The study found that there was little difference between the two organisations in the communicative functions for which email is used. In both, the transmission and seeking of information is its predominant use followed by the making of requests. However, the two workplaces differed considerably in the use made of email which is shown to be essentially a white-collar mode of communication. But even in the educational organisation where email is used extensively, face-to-face remains the preferred form of communication and dominates communication time.

The type of organisation also seems to affect the way in which email messages are written. Email messages from the manufacturing plant displayed more features of solidarity than those from the

educational organisation. There was a much higher use of greetings in these messages and more direct language forms. The messages were also longer. There was also a difference between the two workplaces in male and female style. Women in the educational organisation wrote longer messages and used more affective features in their emails than their male counterparts. The converse was true in the manufacturing plant.

Stylistically, email directives were seen, in general, to lie midway between the mainly direct forms of spoken communication and the mainly indirect forms of other types of written communication.

The study also found that as part of its communicative functions, email plays an important role in organisational knowledge creation, and that in addition to being a useful communication tool assisting in the functional work of an organisation, it does considerable relational work. This has implications for the way in which email messages are written.

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# Chapter ONE

## *Introduction*

## 1.1    Email in workplace communication

The closing years of the twentieth century saw the introduction and widespread adoption of email as a means of workplace communication. Email is now a fact of life in many workplaces where it has largely replaced written memos and much telephone and face-to-face interaction. In some workplaces in the corporate world email has become the pervasive communication medium, to the extent that at Microsoft for example, where probably 99% of communication takes place via email, it is said that the phone never rings (Kinsley 1996).

In those workplaces where it has been adopted email has had a major, but not always positive impact, on many aspects of workplace life and organisation.  It is not surprising therefore, that a considerable body of literature is building up related to various aspects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in general, and email in particular, in workplace communication. Linguists have also turned their attention to this relatively new medium of communication, (e.g. Ferrara, Brunner and Whitemore 1991; Hall 1996; Harrison 1998; Herring 1996a and b, 2000; Murray 2000; Crystal 2001; Danet 2001)  and as workplace communication has become a recognized field within linguistics,  studies of email in workplace communication with a linguistic perspective are now beginning to appear (Mulholland 1999; Nickerson 1999; Pogner and Soderberg 2003; Abdullah 2003).  The field, however, is a vast one and the above mentioned and other studies have just begun to scratch the surface.  The purpose of the research described in this thesis is to approach workplace email communication from a more discursive and socio-pragmatic perspective and make a further contribution.

## 1.2    Aims and general approach of research

No medium exists in isolation. The way in which the members of any particular workplace use email and the way in which they write their emails is, in part, a reflection of the culture of that

workplace. This research thus examines the relationship between organisational culture and the role, status and style of workplace email. It looks at the specific functions of email alongside other means of communicating at work and explores how email is perceived by its users compared to other means of communicating. It also investigates when and why email is the preferred medium of workplace communication and some of the distinctive stylistic features of workplace email. The broad research question it addresses is:

**What is the relationship between organisational or workplace culture and the role, status and style of workplace email?**

To answer this question, the way in which email is used, as opposed to and alongside other means of communication, was examined in two contrasting workplaces, one a large manufacturing plant (Revelinu) and the other an even larger educational organisation (SCT). The research focussed on a particular team manager in each workplace as the 'core' informant. Each manager provided a corpus of all their work-related emails gathered over a one-week period and reflections on their communication practices. Another team manager in each workplace saved emails related to a particular issue so that an examination could also be made of how email is used, alongside other means of communication, in dealing with a particular issue. In addition, four people recorded onto mini-disk, all their face-to-face and telephone communications for one working day and kept a record of their written communications.

A first step was to describe the workplace in which the communication took place, its social organisation and the relevant aspects of its culture. Definitions of workplace culture tend to focus on the shared understandings and meanings expressed and constructed by a group of people working together. However, while writers in this field such as Schein (1990), who hold an integration perspective, see organisational culture as being shared by all members of the culture, the symbolic interpretivists provide another perspective. They argue that organisational cultures are complicated, socially constructed through the interactions of organisational actors and not unitary. Organisations have a plethora of sub-cultures. The research described here espouses this latter view but uses a model provided by Raymond Williams (1980) to view the organisational culture. This sees the dominant culture as dynamic. It comprises some meanings and practices which it has chosen to emphasize from the past while at the same time being constantly remade by incorporating

new forms. While remaining cognisant of the 'plethora of sub-cultures' and the ongoing tug of war between existing and emergent forms, the workplace cultures described are those of the dominant culture.

The research is positioned within the broad theoretical frameworks of interactional sociolinguistics (IS) and social constructionism. IS gives primacy to the context in which interactions occur; social constructionism views social reality as jointly constructed by those involved with and against the bounds of established practices. A social constructionist approach focuses on people's behaviour and their interactions with others and emphasises the dynamic aspects of interaction. In the process of interaction people respond to others and actively perform and construct their own and other's identities through the linguistic choices they make. "Meanings and intentions are jointly and progressively negotiated between the individuals involved in a given interaction." (Holmes: 11:2003a) Thus, language plays a major role. In making their choices, however, people follow certain rules laid down by their culture. Society also constructs identities for people with language being the vehicle through which this identity is conveyed. For examples, labels such as 'gay', 'feminist' conjure up certain socially constructed identities in people's minds. The context of the interaction is also very important. A person who constructs himself as a loving father in the home may construct the identity of an autocratic boss in the workplace.

Ethnographic and discourse analysis methods are used. Ethnography provides the framework and tools for describing the setting which impacts on the interactions. It enables email to be viewed within the context of social practice as one component of overall workplace interaction and provides a means of comparing the two workplaces. The underlying idea is that language and how it is used cannot be divorced from its social context, hence the emphasis on the workplace culture. Discourse analysis and pragmatics provide tools to analyse the nature, structure and style of the emails and achieve the research objectives. This approach sits easily with social constructionism since examining interactions at a micro-level makes it possible to see the dynamic of identity construction in discourse in a given social context.

To explore what people use email for at work, and how they negotiate power and social relationships to get things done using this medium, the corpus of emails collected was analysed in

terms of discursive functions: greetings and closings, how politeness is expressed and the nature of directives. Greetings and closings and directives have been chosen as particular items of study as, in email messages, they most prominently instantiate solidarity and status, two sociolinguistic variables which have been a major focus of politeness theory.

## 1.3    Organisation of thesis

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One is general background. It includes a literature review, which describes the literature on computer-mediated communication (CMC) in general, and email in particular, which has relevance for the research topic, namely that related to the role, status and style of workplace email. The theoretical frameworks and methodological tools, which have been used for the data collection, are then outlined. Part Two consists of the findings. As the relationship between the organisational culture and the role, status and style of workplace email forms the core of the thesis, the cultures of the two workplaces are first described in some detail to provide contextual background. The focus then shifts to email and how it is used in each organisation. A case study of the use by four individuals of the different communication media shows how email fits into their working day and helps interpret the place of email in the wider communication nexus. The linguistic features of the emails are then described and related to the sociolinguistic variables of status, in particular, and gender and social distance. Comparisons between the two workplaces are made. Finally the analysis addresses a hitherto unexplored aspect of workplace email, namely its role in knowledge creation. It does this through a micro-level qualitative analysis of a thread of email messages. By illustrating the transactional and affective functions of email in action as an issue is worked through and a problem solved, this chapter brings together the contents of the previous chapters and shows the important cognitive role that email plays in workplace communication.

# Chapter TWO

## *Literature review*

There is a growing body of literature on computer-mediated communication (CMC) including email. This chapter focuses on relevant research which is workplace related or which, while not specifically workplace related, has relevance for the aspects of workplace email which are being explored in this thesis, namely the role email plays in workplace communication, its status and role, and the extent to which emails reflect the workplace culture and the sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance, gender and task imposition. Literature pertinent to the study of organisational culture is considered separately in the methodological discussion of workplace culture. (See 3.1.4.)

The review indicates that the adoption of email has had an effect on organisational communication and behaviour patterns. It also shows that email's image as a 'lean' medium of communication is increasingly being challenged and that email language, like other language, is not an isolated aspect of human behaviour. The meanings expressed in emails can only be analysed and interpreted in the social context of the dynamic interactions within which they are constructed. Similarly, the organisational context means that as a communication medium email often takes on political dimensions.

## 2.1    The status and role of email in the workplace

Managers have generally been quick to see the possibilities offered by this new communication medium. Email has now become almost indispensable in many workplaces where it has largely replaced written memos and much telephone and face-to-face interaction. The literature, however, supports the perception of many that while email has many advantages it is not an unquestionably positive influence.

## 2.1.1 CMC viewed from social and psychological perspectives

Research investigating the social and psychological aspects of CMC was underway as early as the 1980s (e.g. Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire 1987; Rice and Love 1987). The technological nature of the medium has been seen as the main cause of many negative outcomes such as depersonalisation, impoliteness and 'flaming'.   This is because email filters out certain personal, social and behavioural cues used by people when they engage in face-to-face communication, e.g. intonation and body language cues. However, there are also positive effects.  The cultural conventions that normally guide social interaction are frequently missing in CMC and this has significant effects on people's behaviour.  For example, clues to the social status of participants are often missing altering normal patterns of dominance, sometimes with beneficial outcomes.  In one study, for example, use of CMC meant that group dynamics changed: members participated more equally and high status members did not dominate the interaction to the same extent as in face-to face meetings (Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire 1987). CMC has also been shown to have noticeable effects on communication efficiency, but not necessarily in the direction one might predict.  Computer-mediated groups took longer to reach consensus than face-to-face groups, for example, although they were just as task-oriented (Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire 1987.). The writers provide three possible explanations for this:

- the lack of informational feedback so participants do not know exactly when their arguments are understood or agreed to
- the lack of leadership
- the depersonalised media which means that group members are less bound by the usual norms of how groups should reach consensus

Following up these findings, Sproull and Kiesler (1992) introduced a two-level framework for thinking about technology changes in organisations.  They use the term  "first-level effects" for the anticipated technical changes email offers, i.e. the possibility for improved communications, greater efficiencies and productivity gains. The "second-level" or social system effects, are those that come about mainly because "new communication technology leads people to pay attention to different things, have contact with different people and depend on one another differently…Patterns of information exchange are changed.  So are working and social

relationships. Thus social [and organizational] structure is changed." (Sproull and Kiesler 1992:3) Two behavioural changes likely to occur in a networked organisation are:

- new connections among peripheral workers and
- different patterns of control.

By increasing organisational participation and personal ties, CMC can reduce the isolation of socially and physically peripheral workers and lead to greater commitment: but increased information exchange can pose problems of authority, control and influence.

Other researchers have also addressed the social effects of email. "Managers focussing only on the productivity benefits of email may fail to anticipate the larger social consequences." (Weisband and Reinig 1995: 43) As two examples of this, these writers mention unwanted or inappropriate forms of communication and information overload. This latter, plus the expectation that email messages require a quick response, creates worker stress, an effect identified in my own research into one Wellington workplace (Waldvogel 1999).  Nearly half of those surveyed also felt that email had brought about a reduction in personal contact.  Another stress-creating factor identified in the literature is what Markus (1994a:142) terms the CYA (cover your a..) syndrome. Aggressive accountability with its 'documentation' mania, creates the tendency for even simple verbal requests to be put in writing. Brown and Lightfoot (2002) also comment on this. "Through its rapid dissemination, email in effect opens up the archive by making the exchange and storing of information everybody's business." The hermeneutics of suspicion or 'ass covering' creates the need to archive everything.

Two theoretical perspectives, other than technological determinism, have been used to explain the observed negative social effects of email. These are emergent process theory and rational actor theory.  The emergent process perspective argues that negative outcomes may originate in the actions people take to achieve or prevent negative effects and ensure positive outcomes (Douglas 1986, cited in Markus 1994a:124). As an example, people may deliberately choose to use email to avoid face-to-face interaction with disliked or feared colleagues. The rational actor perspective suggests that even if people are aware of a downside to what they are doing, they will continue to act in this way because they believe the pluses of their action outweigh the minuses. At the same time, however, they will actively try to minimize the negative consequences of their actions

(Markus 1994a). Markus found users selected email deliberately when they wanted to avoid unwanted social interactions but they also took steps to avoid negative outcomes. She uses the example of managers who carefully worded their email messages and also used the telephone from time to time to maintain personal relationships. Her results imply that negative social effects from using CMC may not be easy to eradicate. How a manager in one of the organisations I studied deals with the issue of maintaining personal relationships in a heavy email culture, is discussed in Chapter 6.

The supposed absence of the afore-mentioned personal, social and behavioural cues is the reason why email has been considered a 'lean' medium.

### 2.1.2    Email – a lean medium?

Because email was seen to lack the intonational and body language cues present in oral communication modes which carry relational messages, it was claimed to be a 'lean' medium by Daft and Lengel (1984), the proponents of Media Richness, a theory advanced to explain media choice. The theory proposes that the greater the likelihood of a message being misinterpreted, the greater the need for rich media and suggests that choosing a medium which matches the task is likely to lead to the most effective outcome. Inherent media characteristics are regarded as making a particular medium more or less appropriate to a task. Effective managers are those who use the most appropriate medium for the task. Email was seen as being unable to communicate rich information and suitable only for unequivocal or single meaning, task-based informational messages.

This status that email has had of being a 'lean' medium has been brought into serious question by researchers such as Markus (1994) cited above, Ngweyana and Lee (1997), Huang, Watson and Wei (1998), Williams (1999), Zmud and Carlsson (1999) and Abdullah (2003). It is also brought into question by work that looks at the role of email in knowledge creation  (Fletcher 2002,Waldvogel – this thesis Chapter 9). These studies show how a 'lean' medium, email, can nonetheless produce rich information.  Markus found that managers perceived various media in ways that were relatively consistent with information richness theory, but that they used email

more and differently than the theory predicted.  "In particular, effective senior managers were found to use email heavily and even for equivocal tasks." (Markus 1994b: 502ff) The results suggested to her that "the adoption, use and consequences of media in organisations can be powerfully shaped by social processes such as sponsorship, socialisation and social control which require social perspectives to understand them." (Markus 1994b: 502ff.)

The idea that social as well as rational factors influence media choice is also supported by Schmitz & Fulk (1991), Webster and Trevino (1995), and Ziv (1996).

Huang, Watson and Wei, (1998) show how email conveys 'rich' information by emphasising the role of the message recipient as an active constructor of meaning and pointing to the cognitive processes of pattern matching, anchoring and adjustment. Rich communication is possible because people interpret an email message by using their own knowledge of the issue and the people relationships involved. Ngwenyama and Lee (1997) applied Critical Social Theory to investigate the managerial use of email in a company. This theory holds that human beings are not mere receptacles of the meanings transported to them via a medium, but rather actors who create the meanings they come to hold.  They found that the people or actors concerned tried to understand a message by contextualising it within the institutional arrangements in which they found themselves. They also critically assessed its validity or rightness, and checked back if there were areas of uncertainty.

Using a phenomenological approach, Williams (1999) examined how 10 email recipients constructed meaning from an electronic text within an organisation.  He concluded that messages were interpreted by integrating email with other knowledge: threads of conversations, knowledge of organisational processes and procedures, the message type, the recipient sender-relationship, message header information and the organisational role of the recipient.

 "A rich repository of relational communication" is how Abdullah (2003) described email, which, she said, allows writers the flexibility to personalise their messages.  Using its technology and their own linguistic resources, they are able to convey relational information in task-based messages.

Zmud and Carlson (1999) use channel expansion theory and the results of their own research to argue that the more experience and knowledge people have in using a medium of communication, the richer they consider it to be and the more effectively they are able to communicate in it. The theory identifies certain experiences as being important in shaping how an individual develops 'richness perceptions' for a given channel. These include people's prior experiences with:

- the relevant medium (in this case email)

- communication partners

- messaging topics

- their organisational context.

According to the writers, gaining more relevant experience and knowledge in each of these areas, particularly the first two, may enable communication participants to both encode and decode messages in a channel more effectively. People who are able to participate in increasingly rich communication via the channel will correspondingly perceive the channel as becoming increasingly rich.

The research is increasingly showing that far from being a 'lean' medium, email is, in fact, capable of conveying rich information. The extent to which it is able to do this though is dependent in large measure on the communication participants knowing each other and the organisation well so that they are able to actively construct meaning.  Abdullah's research also shows that workplace emails do much affective as well as transactional work, a finding that is supported by this thesis. However, as Brown and Lightfoot (2002) comment, email has its limitations as a communication medium. It cannot replace face-to-face interaction – meetings are now held to discuss problems that emerge in email. This  raises a question which is explored in this thesis, namely the extent to which email is used as opposed to and alongside other means of communication.

The role of email in promoting democracy in organisations and in organisational politics has also been examined. It has been claimed that email gives a voice to the voiceless and reduces status imbalance (Sproull and Kiesler 1992; Bishop and Levine 1999). However, experimental studies show that status differences persisted in both face-to-face and electronic groups (Weisband, Schneider and Connolly (1995). That computer-mediated communication is inherently apt to support democracy in organisations is a view that has also been challenged by Mantovani (1994).

He argues that email is best viewed as neutral in terms of its organisational consequences; it is the social context in which it is applied that determines whether or not it fosters democracy.

Giving a voice to the voiceless does not always produce positive effects, from the point of view of an organisation. Email can and has been used to support disruptive organisational politics. Romm and Pliskin (1997: 95) used the term "virtual politicking" to describe this use. Their virtual politicking model brings together data from a series of real-life incidents in which email was used for political manipulation within and between organisations. Their data suggests the following four features of email are particularly relevant to its political potency:

- speed - email messages can reach their destination in a relatively short time enabling, for example, meetings to be set up quickly and without the knowledge of all interested parties
- multiple addressability - one individual can contact large groups of individuals within and outside the organisation
- processing - the ability that a receiver has to store and manipulate a message before sending it on. Comments can be added or deleted thus turning neutral messages into politically explosive ones
- routing - the ability the sender has to control where the message is sent. This feature enables senders to send slightly, but significantly, modified messages to different groups of email users.

The more insidious and far-reaching impact of email on organisational power relations, knowledge and employee behaviour has been demonstrated by Brigham and Corbett (1997), who conducted an in-depth case study of a large UK company. IT applications were adopted to develop a different management culture. While structural changes brought about considerable decentralisation, which appears more democratic, central power was in fact strengthened as the new technologies enabled the centre to access information immediately. At the same time, the filtering and transformation processes that occurred as information was transmitted from one centre to another meant that management was now basing its key decisions on simplified information. Employees were affected too. Email had a disciplinary effect as managers were able to monitor work more easily, thus increasing accountability, while human interaction became an option rather than a necessity.

Bishop and Levine (1999) describe how employees in one large company used CMC with the aim of changing management policies. In their view networked companies are facing the trade-off "between the power of the computer to facilitate communication and raise productivity, and the shifts in group cohesiveness brought on by CMC." (1999: 215) CMC has made it easier in large organisations for different groups of employees with common interests to find each other and to communicate. This may have the effect of increasing workers' commitment to their company, thereby making them more effective in achieving management's goals, an effect also noticed by Sproull and Kiesler (1992). Bishop and Levine (1999) show that CMC also raises effectiveness in achieving goals chosen by the employees themselves. Having a voice however, does not guarantee that it is listened to. Where management gives only the illusion of listening, conflicts and tensions are more likely than any efficiency gains. Mulholland (1999) details the opportunity that email offers for the circulation of documents beyond the authorised committee membership thus compromising the authority of the chair and the committee.

Pogner and Soderberg's (2003) study of 'All Department' emails within a Danish university department shows that the email discourse of a workplace both expresses and constructs the organisational world. The way managers used it as a tool for fast and efficient transmission of information reconstituted monologic top down power structures. They were the 'active senders' who took the initiatives and made the decisions whereas the department's other employees were constructed as a group of 'passive recipients' who had to subordinate themselves and carry out the decisions made. No deliberate efforts were made in these emails to construct a uniting organisational or corporate identity.

In terms of organisational politics, the research shows that in this area too, email has both negative and positive effects. It enables information to be sent very quickly to large groups of people and, if necessary, galvanise them into action. It can also make people on the periphery of the organisation feel included. On the other hand the centralisation of information and its dilution and transformation as it goes up the hierarchical chain can create a dangerous distance between the information providers, the decision makers, and the people on whom the decisions will impact. Email discourse can also help reinforce and cement in power and status structures in the organisational context.

### 2.1.3    Gaps in the literature on the role and status of email

Research related to the role of email in workplace communication has tended to focus on its suitabilility or otherwise for conveying different kinds of information and on its political role with some more recent research addressing its interpersonal role. However, email as a mode of workplace communication, performs a number of varied roles, some of which have not yet attracted the attention of researchers.

The functions email actually performs in workplace communication have been addressed and noted only incidentally in studies in the literature which have had as their primary focus other aspects of email use.  For example in their study of the social relationships expressed by email, Pogner and Soderberg (2003) noted that most of the 'All Department' messages found in their corpus were primarily for information transmission. Similarly, when drawing on empirical findings from two organisations to discuss the implications that result from email being increasingly treated as a formal business record, Brown and Lightfoot (2002) comment that two distinct uses made of email were informing and relating, or interpersonal activities.  What is lacking however, is detailed quantitative data showing the different communicative functions for which email is used and the relative importance of each in email communication as a whole within studied organisations. An attempt is made here to address this lack as the communicative functions of email are investigated using discourse analysis.

One of the current buzzwords in organisational literature is knowledge creation. While the writer knows of research in progress related to this, no published research has yet been sighted which addresses the role of email in organisational knowledge creation. Applied linguists have a special contribution to make in this area as, using discourse analysis methodology, they have the means to do a micro-level analysis of email message text. Given the topicality and importance of knowledge creation and its relevance to one of the objectives of this research, namely to explore email's role in workplace communication, Chapter 8 of this study is devoted to examining the cognitive and affective role email plays in knowledge creation.

The relational information conveyed by email messages has only recently begun to attract the

interest of researchers (Pogner and Soderberg 2003, Abdullah 2003). There is a need for more research to substantiate, validate and expand on the findings to date of this very important role of email.

In terms of its status as a form of workplace communication, the literature acknowledges both the positive and negative effects of email and offers explanations for these. It has also largely debunked the idea that email is a 'lean' medium. However, as with studies related to the role of email, email's standing in relation to other forms of communication has only been touched on incidentally. Email use is shown as being shaped by the organisational culture but there has not been any focus on how the culture of the workplace affects the status of different communication media including email, and the extent to which this and other factors such as the role and status of an individual in an organisation affect the use they make of email compared to other media. The research described here addresses these issues. Based on the premise that communication cannot be viewed outside of the cultural context in which it occurs, it takes an in-depth look at the workplace culture of the two organisations studied and does case study analyses of individuals' communication behaviour. The latter is then related to both their role and status in the organisation and to the workplace culture.

## 2.2    The style of CMC including email

 Is email speech or is it writing? Linguists have made contributions to the analysis of the style of computer-mediated communications. Email has been compared to spoken and written databases (e.g. Collot and Belmore 1996; Yates 1996). Collot and Belmore concluded that "the genres which [electronic language] most closely resembles are public interviews and letters, personal as well as professional." (1998: 149) Emphasising the heterogeneous character of electronic messages, Yates (1996:46) noted that CMC is affected by "the numerous social structural and social situational factors which surround and define the communication taking place." This speaking-writing dichotomy was also noted by Rice (1997) in the 200 emails from four individuals occupying mid-level positions in American organisations which he studied. Most of these messages were brief and compact. His data suggested that the convenience and rapidity of the electronic medium encourage a style that blends both formal and informal discourse features. While email is essentially interactive there is also a reluctance to abandon more traditional elements of business

communication.

A model of email as a type of Creole has been proposed by Baron (1998: 164).

> When the linguistic profile of email is compared with those of other evolving communicative systems, it becomes clear that the seemingly schizophrenic character of email reflects ongoing creolization. …The creolizing character of email is further defined by its changing scope of uses and usership.

Email has also been described as a hybrid language that has arisen as an amalgam of components taken from other language varieties, namely postcardese, headlinese and telegraphese (Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore 1991:12). Because minimalism seems to be developing as the preferred style, Mulholland (1999) has warned that this could damage interpersonal relations. One result of minimalism is that politeness data is placed in final rather than initial or medial position which means that it can be read as an afterthought rather than as an integral part of the message.

Danet (2001) sees email as allowing for different text-types and its language as being in a state of transition. She concludes that the new technology is strengthening, or converging with, a general cultural trend which was already in place to a more informal and personal voice in writing.

My own research at one Wellington workplace demonstrated the 'speech or writing' ambivalence that people have towards email(Waldvogel 1999). Approximately half of a sample of 50 emails studied were carefully composed. The other half had typos, punctuation and spelling errors, missing capitals, split lines, a mix of upper and lower case letters, and faults in construction. This split in stylistic approach was also reflected in people's comments. Some lamented the sloppiness and lack of clarity of many email messages, while others commented positively on its simpler, more informal, more abbreviated and more direct language. A number stated that they were careful in writing their emails or felt that that it made them more thoughtful about their use of language. A few felt it was a showcase of their ability to communicate. As well as reflecting the personality of the writer, an email message may also reflect the different contexts and purposes for which it is used.

In her study of listserv email messages, Harrison (1998) found a fascinating and complex discourse. She notes that while email exhibits features of written and spoken discourse, it also contains features such as the incorporation of quotations which are the result of the software and so not normally found outside of email. She asks whether participants are deliberately imitating spoken discourse and emphasising its interactional aspects. She notes too that while the main aim of the discussion group she studied was to exchange information, a significant element of the discussions was the affective or interpersonal function. Her findings lend further weight to the argument that email is not a 'lean' medium.

In a study of email messages he received supplemented by messages sent to a younger generation, the academic linguist, Crystal (2001) found that most messages contained greetings and pre-closes. Two-thirds of his interpersonal messages had a greeting the most common of which was *Dear +name*. Eighty percent of his interpersonal messages ended with a pre-close, the majority of which were informal e.g. *See you soon*. Both messages and paragraphs, particularly the institutionalised emails, were short. A feature unique to email that he noted was intercalation or the insertion in the text of a response to an original message. He lists the following features as making email identifiable as a linguistic variety:

- screen structure
- message openings and closings
- message length
- dialogic strategies
- intercalation or framing.

Other features he notes but which he states need to be supported by more study are:

- more intensity of questioning
- greater use of rhetorical questions and
- self-answering of questions.

## 2.2.1   Politeness and email style

Like social politeness, linguistic politeness is generally viewed as consisting of mutually shared

forms of consideration for the feelings of others aimed at avoiding conflict and promoting rapport. In any given interaction whether or not a person uses politeness strategies, and if so the particular strategies that they use, depends on a number of factors including their status in relationship to the other person, how socially close or distant they are, how significant what they want is to them and the other person and the particular context of their interaction. The issue of how email writers express concern for and interest in others (positive politeness) and take account of the need of others not to be imposed upon (negative politeness), has only been addressed very incidentally in the literature sighted. Mulholland (1999) touches on it briefly. She cites Murray (1995) who noted that several studies had found an increase in politeness markers which she attributed to the transactional forms of many computer-mediated communications. Her own data also showed the presence of many politeness markers. Sherblom (1988) looked at signature use in email in relation to status. Since the sender is identified at the top of the email, signatures are, strictly speaking, redundant. He studied the email files of a large organisation and found that relative social position in the organisational hierarchy influenced their use. None of the messages sent down the organisational chain were signed, while a third of those sent up had signatures. My own findings in a small pilot sample of 50 emails showed quite a different pattern (Waldvogel 1999). Nearly all the women (97%) and most of the men (87%) who sent messages up the hierarchical chain used some sort of sign-off. Five of the six people who sent emails down the chain signed them off with their name. The greater use of signatures in this workplace may be the reflection of a more collegial atmosphere there or of the more egalitarian New Zealand attitude. Pogner and Soderberg (2003.) commented that there was insufficient consistency in the use of salutations and greetings in the emails they studied to indicate any specific social relations. In the Malaysian context, Abdullah (2003) found that writers were particularly sensitive to the relative status of the recipients of their messages as well as to the 'weight of the imposition' they wished to convey.

### 2.2.2    The workplace culture and email style

The effect of the workplace culture on the way in which email messages are written does not appear to have been the object of study by linguists. Only one reference related to this has been found, a study by Gains (1999) cited in Murray (2000). Gains examined 116 randomly selected email messages exchanged within an insurance company and within and between universities. He

found standard written business English in the insurance company data but conversational features in the academic data. The insurance company messages used a semi-formal style, did not incorporate features from conversational discourse, tended not to include an opening greeting and used few features of simplified register. On the other hand, there was a range of styles in the university emails. These latter adopted features from conversational discourse, (e.g., *well, you see*) included some form of greeting, and referred often to the medium itself.

Most studies of the style of computer-mediated communication have had universities as their data source and have either addressed the 'is it speech or is it writing' debate or focussed on micro-level features such as the use of greetings. The email corpora used as the data source for this study comes from two very different workplaces and the analysis extends to looking at how people actually write workplace messages. It addresses the following questions:

- Is the same pattern of signature use and greetings and closings repeated in different workplace contexts and in different cultural contexts?

- Given that email lacks intonational and body language cues, do email writers compensate for this and if so how?

- How do they to make their messages more reader friendly and reduce the effect of face-threatening acts such as directives?

- Do the sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance and the rating of an imposition have any effect on the way messages are written?

- What effect does the workplace culture have on the style of messages?

Because email lacks many of the cues present in other communicative forms and is open to wide interpretation, research along these lines  has practical applications. Where email is used indiscriminately and without the discipline and thought that goes into other forms of written messages, it can generate bad feeling or result in ineffective communication as a number of British firms have been finding. While they are doing more and more business online, they are not able to get their message over as well as when they used the telephone or face-to-face interaction.   Some are now spending thousands of pounds teaching staff how to write (*Guardian TEFL Supplement* August 2000). A better understanding of the medium and how messages are written may provide insights that would enable email to be used more effectively.

## 2.3    Gender in computer-mediated communication

Linguists have shown that many of the gender differences found in face-to-face interaction carry over into CMC and, if anything, are accentuated ( e.g.Herring 1996a, Talbot 1998). This research largely undermines the view that email is a democratic medium enabling people to be judged on the basis of what they say rather than who they are.  There is evidence that women and men communicate in different ways on the net.  A study of two academic listserv groups conducted by Herring (1996b: 82) suggested that:

> both men and women structure their messages in an interactive way, and that for both, the pure exchange of information takes second place to the exchange of views**.** Significant gender differences are found in how electronic messages are oriented……Although messages posted by women contain somewhat more interactional features they are also more informative, in contrast with male messages which most often express (critical) views.

Herring reported that while women value politeness, men operate in accordance with competitive values which result in violations, including flaming, of conventional politeness norms. Men dominated the 'talking' time.  They participated at a higher rate than their numerical representation justified, and their messages were considerably longer.  They took little interest in what women had to say, which seems to have resulted in a decline of female participation. In this supposedly liberal academic environment, CMC was found to be male-dominated, power-based and hierarchical.

Herring's findings were supported by Hall (1996) who found that the electronic medium intensified rather than neutralised evidence of gender differences in the style of the message. Other research suggests that, assuming you do not know the gender of the person who has sent you an email, a close look at its style will enable you to predict with a reasonable degree of accuracy the gender of its author (Thomson and Murachver 1999).

Research related to CMC and gender has not supported the claim that email is a democratising medium (See 2.1.2). Rather, some of the differences that have been noted in male and female

discourse patterns in research on other communication media, e.g. face-to-face meetings, are also prevalent in CMC communication and reflect the wider social and cultural context in which the communication takes place. As these different discourse patterns seem to have a certain universality, it is likely that they will be found too in workplace messages but an analysis of a workplace corpus is needed to test this hypothesis and, if validated, find out what the implications are.

## 2.4    Research questions

The aim of the research described in this thesis is to address some of the areas identified in the literature on workplace email as still awaiting attention or requiring further research. The research focuses specifically on workplace email. It looks at how it is used in two very different workplaces and how the message writers attend to both the transactional or business and interpersonal or relational dimensions of their communication by the way in which they write their messages.

As communication within an organisation takes place within the context of its workplace culture, this cannot be ignored. Hence the research looks at where email fits into the overall communication pattern of an organisation and the extent to which its role and status in an organisation and the way in which email messages are written, reflect the differences in workplace culture.  It considers the effect of sociolinguistic variables, in particular status, on the use made of email, and email style. As greetings, closings and directives carry relational information, it is these linguistic features that have been selected for study. By relating email style and use to a person's status and role in the organisation and the organisational culture, the research aims to show how these factors affect communication and discourse practices. It adopts a broad social constructionist approach to show that the way in which email is used is a function of the workplace context and culture and that in their email communication, people are negotiating relationships and meaning and constructing new realities.

The specific questions it seeks to answer are thus these:

**XII.**    ***What role is played by email in workplace communication?***
XIII.    What communicative functions does email serve?

XIV.   Do managers make a conscious choice about what particular means to use for communicating information to their team?

XV.    How often do managers choose email as opposed to other forms of communication to convey messages to their team?

XVI.   Do they select different means of communication for different recipients?

XVII.  What role is played by email in organisational knowledge creation?

*2. What is the status of email in each organisation?*

XVIII. What status is email accorded in each organisation compared to other communication media?

*XIX.    How does the style and form of email communication vary within each organisation?*

a)   What use is made of greetings and closings**?**

XX.    What strategies do email writers use to

●negotiate workplace relationships

●make their messages less face-threatening?

c) To what extent are a and b above affected by

●status

●social distance

●gender

●the workplace culture

*4. How does email enable one organisation to be distinguished from another?*

a)   How does the type of organisation affect the use made of email?

# Chapter THREE

## *Theoretical frameworks and methodology*

Because it seeks to uncover the reasons for the channel and language choices people make in workplace communication, the research described in this thesis has a lot to do with communication. The theoretical perspective from which this communication is observed is that of social constructionism. This perspective emphasizes the relationship between communication and culture. It sees communication as "a process whereby people in groups, using the tools provided by their culture, create collective representations of reality." (Trenholm1999:31). Language along with cognitive customs, our cultural traditions and shared roles and rules make up these tools. Social constructionism maintains that we do not experience the world directly but as our culture reveals it to us. Discourse is a very important part of this process as it is primarily through discourse that we acquire our world views or conceptual filters. To accomplish our goals, we choose certain lines of action and follow certain rules laid down by our culture.

The research has drawn on conceptual and analytic tools from several frameworks in order to best describe and illuminate the data. An ethnographic social-interactionist approach has grounded the research. Social constructionism is rooted in an interactionist view. The discourse analysis aspects of the research have been informed by pragmatic theories. Speech act theory has been employed to analyse what it is that people are doing in their email messages while Politeness theory has formed the basis for looking at the relational aspects of how people use language to do the things they are doing and in particular to issue directives.

## 3.1    Theoretical frameworks

### 3.1.1    Ethnography and interactional sociolinguistics

Ethnography provided the observational techniques and methodological approach to gathering the data, interactional sociolinguistics and social constructionism provided the lens through which to view it.

Ethnographic research is based on fieldwork. It uses direct observation and extended field research to look at people in their own setting to produce rich data of the people and their culture. Its goals are to "discover and disclose the socially acquired and shared understandings necessary to be a member of a specified social unit." (Van Maanen, cited in Frey et al: 230). "Ethnography emphasizes studying subjective reality over objective fact-finding." (Frey et al: 231). Ethnographic research has been described as pre-suppositionless research as it is only when data has been gathered that patterns and theories are sought to explain it. It views communicative acts as being jointly constructed by the individuals interacting.

The ethnography of communication, an approach to discourse first developed by the sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1974) and further developed by Muriel Saville-Troike (2002), seeks to analyse patterns of communication as part of cultural knowledge and behaviour. It recognises the diversity of communicative practices which exist in human societies, and that these are an integral part of what the members of a particular culture or sub-culture know and do. It examines speech events or identifiable sequences of speech e.g. a conversation, a lecture, a marriage proposal, within the context in which they occur and "examines patterns of language use in specific groups communities, institutions and societies." (Paltridge 2000:62) An analysis of these speech or communicative events includes such categories as the participants involved with attention to their age, sex, ethnicity, social status or other relevant categories; the purpose or function of the event; its form or the sequence of acts that make it up and including not only what is said or done but also how it is done; the channels or media of interaction; the setting and scene of the interaction and the rules regulating it. Discourse analysis using an ethnographic approach focuses on these. Proponents of this approach argue that there are social norms or conventions of use which a member of a community needs to know and use if they are to be communicatively competent.

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) is a valuable framework for examining discourse and especially the processes of interpretation and inferencing that lead to either successful or not so successful communication.

Developed largely by Erving Goffman (1981) and John Gumperz (1982, 1999), IS has been informed by sociology, research in anthropology and the work of linguists and language

philosophers. Two of these are Austin (1962),who laid the ground for Speech act theory, and Grice (1975), whose theory of implicatures and maxims of conversation made a major contribution to Pragmatics.  IS shares the concerns of all three fields with the interaction of culture, society and language. Its focus is the social and linguistic meanings created during interactions. Central to IS, is the idea that language use cannot be isolated from the social and cultural context in which it occurs. In order for people to make sense of each other's communication they need to share certain linguistic and sociocultural knowledge so that they can make the correct inferences about each other's communicative intentions and goals from the variety of contextualisation cues used. Contextualisation cues are the culturally determined verbal and non-verbal indicators that signal meaning. The interlocutors also need to be aware of the contextual frame for the interaction so that they understand what is likely to occur, what role relationships and attitudes are involved and what the required verbal strategies are.  A job interview, for example, requires different verbal strategies from a first date. This knowledge is essential for communicative competence, without which a person cannot be an involved and fully functioning member of a group. Collecting and analysing naturally occurring data is an important part of the methodology of interactional sociolinguistics.

### 3.1.2    Speech act theory

Communicative events can be broken down into speech acts which are individual, purposeful acts of communication. The central ideas underlying Speech act theory, as developed by Austin and Searle (1969), are that we use language to perform acts such as giving orders or advice, that more than one kind of meaning can be conveyed by a speech act and that speech acts are rule-governed behaviour. Speech acts have both a literal meaning and a particular illocutionary force, which is the speaker's intention in uttering the speech act. As the speaker is attempting to produce some effect on the hearer, speech acts are intentional actions. Reiss (1985: 26) defines them in this way. "Speech acts are tools used to 'awaken' a person (illocutionary effect) in order to activate him as an instrument for, or object of, an extralinguistic goal."

Email messages are communicative events and thus express speech acts.

**Speech act taxonomies**

Searle (1969) was the first to provide a theoretical base to the classification of speech acts.

He uses three main criteria as bases of classification:

•the illocutionary point of the utterance or what we want the other person to do

•the direction of fit between the words we use and what we want the other person to do, for example do they describe things as they are (a words to world fit) or how the Speaker wants them to be (a world to words fit)

•the Speaker's psychological state 'the sincerity condition'- or the amount of belief the speaker has in what they say, for example belief (in Assertives), desire (in Directives).

•In his taxonomy Searle has the following five categories:

•*Representatives* have a truth value in that they can be said to be either true or false. They state how things are. They show a words to world fit and commit the speaker to the truth of a particular proposition. The psychological state they express is belief. Their extra-linguistic function is to convey information.

•*Directives* are attempts to get the Hearer to do something so they show a world to words fit. They express the Speaker's wish that Hearer do A. The psychological state they express is desire. Their extra-linguistic function is to get people to do things.

•*Commissives* commit the speaker to some future course of action so they show a world to words fit. The psychological state they express is obligation. Their extra-linguistic function is to create stable expectations about the speaker's behaviour.

•*Expressives* express speaker's attitude to a certain state of affairs. There is no direction of fit and they can express a variety of different psychological states. Their extra-linguistic function is to convey the feelings and attitudes of speakers towards hearers.

•*Declarations*, for example, resigning, excommunicating, bring about immediate changes in the world so the direction of fit is both words to world and world to words. They express no psychological state.

For a critique of Speech act theory and how it has been used for this study, see 5.2.1

### 3.1.3    Politeness theory

Politeness theory has been used to analyse how email text carries relational or interpersonal meaning.

Politeness theory postulates that a speaker uses a range of strategies to achieve goals such as promoting or maintaining harmonious relationships. At the core of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness is the concept of face or "an individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image: this image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others." (Thomas 1995: 169). Face consists of " two specific kinds of desires ('face wants') attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)." (Brown and Levinson 1987:13)  Politeness is related to threat to face. Certain illocutionary acts, such as directives, are face-threatening as they impose on an individual's autonomy and freedom of action. Brown and Levinson argue that the weightiness or degree of threat of an illocutionary act can be calculated using a formula which takes into consideration the following determining factors: power, social distance, and the rating of the imposition. They suggest that this is done subconsciously by a speaker and influences the strategy that they use. There are several possible super-strategies:

XXI.    The 'say nothing' strategy. The speaker may decide the intended illocutionary act is too face-threatening to perform and hence let the matter drop or hope to achieve the effect of the speech act by saying nothing.

XXII.    the bald-on record strategy. This is stating the speech act in the most direct way and without attention to the interpersonal aspect of what is said. This is likely to be the strategy employed when making a trivial request of someone the speaker knows well and who has no power over them or where there is a considerable power differential. It may however also be the strategy used by someone wishing to be offensive.

XXIII.   The 'positive politeness' strategy. This is the strategy used when an appeal is made to the hearer's desire to be liked and approved of, e.g. expressing an interest in him/her or using an in-group identity marker.

XXIV.   The 'negative politeness' strategy, This strategy, which takes account of the hearer's desire

not to be imposed on, manifests itself through linguistic devices which minimize the imposition, and through the use of deference markers.

XXV.   The 'off record' politeness strategy. Brown and Levinson list fifteen further strategies for this including using hints, being ambiguous or vague and using metaphor.

Politeness theories and the theoretical frameworks based on them, have been criticised recently by Eelen (2001) on the basis that they involve a conceptual bias towards the polite end of the polite-impolite distinction, that they view politeness and impoliteness as opposites and that they focus too closely on the speaker at the expense of the hearer. Watts (2003) also takes issue with Politeness theory on the basis that it elevates a lay concept to the status of a technical term. He argues that what is (im)polite is very context dependent and that what is (im)polite can only be assessed as such by analysing social interaction in context. As it is the lay concept of politeness that is the 'real' object of study in a theory of politeness it is not therefore possible to define a scientific concept of (im)politeness which can be applied to all human societies. However, the theoretical frameworks based on politeness theory still offer the most useful workable models for an analysis of verbal and written linguistic behaviour. Morand and Ocker (2003: 5) advocating the use of politeness theory to analyze relational messages in CMC comment thus: "By its specification of discrete linguistic indices that carry relational meaning politeness provides an empirically grounded phenomenologically rich picture of just how words function to carry relational meaning. The tactics of politeness can be reliably observed, and thus quantitatively measured."

### 3.1.4   Workplace culture

Communication in an organisation takes place within the context of its workplace culture. In order to describe the cultural context in which the emails were written, workplace culture has been given some prominence in this thesis.

At its simplest, workplace culture is how things are done in a workplace and what really matters and why. Most definitions of culture refer to the shared assumptions, beliefs, values, actions, artifacts and language of a group of people which are passed on to the new members. It is the collective mindset that shapes the group's behaviour.

Hofstede (1991:180) defines organisational culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organisation from another" and talks of it as the software of the mind.

Hagner  whose work with the disabled has led him to focus more on the social interactions and activities of a workplace and its receptivity and support for new members, defines it as:  "a set of group expectations, behavioral norms, and social customs that governs what goes on and how it is interpreted. Some aspects of the culture develop among the workforce and are not directly associated with management. Some aspects of a culture may be written down, while others are informal.  They evolve informally, unofficially and even to some extent unconsciously." (introductory page to culture survey) Hagner introduces the concept of inclusion to measure the strength of a workplace culture. In his view stronger cultures offer more possibilities for inclusion.

Schein (1990: 110) offers the following definition:
> a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.  A "given group" must be a set of people

- who have been together long enough to share significant problems,
- who have had opportunities to solve these problems and to observe the effects of their solutions and
- who have taken in new members.

Schein  argues that culture has three levels:

- the artifacts: These are the outward manifestations of the underlying values, beliefs and assumptions. They include the physical objects created by the members of a culture such as the logo and the physical layout of the buildings, the language both written and spoken and the behaviour such as the traditions and communication patterns.
- the behavioral norms and values which underlie the artifacts: "Values are the social principles, goals and standards held within a culture to have intrinsic worth." whereas the norms are "the

unwritten rules that allow members of a culture to know what is expected of them in a wide variety of situations." (Hatch 1997: 214ff)

• the beliefs and assumptions: These lie at the deepest level and are the essence of an organisation's culture.

•

The terms climate and culture are often used interchangeably but climate is only one aspect of culture.  While culture refers to the patterns of beliefs and expectations shared by the organisation's members, climate refers to whether or not expectations are being met or how satisfied its members feel about its practices and procedures. It has been defined as: "The prevailing atmosphere surrounding the organisation…the level of morale..and the strength of feelings or belonging, care and goodwill, among members.." (Mullins, 1993).

There are two main approaches to workplace culture. The first sees culture as something an organisation *is*, the second as something an organisation *has*

In line with its ethnographic social constructionist framework, this research allies itself most closely with the approach of the Symbolic  Interpretivists, who see culture as something an organisation *is*: "the emerging and sometimes fragmented values, practices and narratives and artifacts that make an organisation what it is." (Hatch 1997: 111). Based on the ideas of the American cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, the Symbolic Intepretivists believe that cultural meaning can only be understood from within. Culture is seen as a process of meaning making through symbols, negotiating and organising.  Symbols and interpretation define their approach. They believe that ethnographic qualitative methods are the most appropriate methods to study culture and that culture is 'a text to be read' from which a 'cultural tale' can be told. These methods involve observation, as the researcher tries to uncover the underlying values and assumptions, informal conversations with people who work in the organisation, and a study of the written material produced by the organisation. Qualitative data usually means case studies. Qualitative researchers then let the data speak for itself. Theory (grounded theory) is derived from the data rather than the other way around. While examining individual interpretations of artifacts qualitative researchers try to see and formulate patterns of meaning interpretation. Unlike the Modernists (see below) they see culture as being complicated and emergent. As culture is socially created through the

interactions of its members it is very complex, continually evolving and not unitary. As organisations grow and individuals communicate with a restricted group of people within the organisation, they tend to develop sub-cultures, each of which has a different meaning system. These can develop along vertical (a division) or horizontal (a particular hierarchical level) levels or be work group focussed.

This approach has been criticised on the grounds of reliability (would another observer have noticed the same phenomena?) and that the findings are so context sensitive that they have no practical use outside the settings in which they are developed. Other criticisms are that it is time-consuming as true penetration of a culture means spending months or even years as a participant observer and, as such, economically impractical and that it provides intangibles. "We cannot build a useful concept if we cannot agree on how to define it, measure it, study it and apply it in the real world or organisations." (Schein 1991:243)

The second approach, represented by the Modernists and such people as Schein, sees the culture as something an organisation *has* and therefore as something that can be managed and changed. According to the Modernists, having the right kind of culture can make or break an organisation. Because the culture is something an organisation has, it can be studied with scientific detachment from the outside and described in terms of attributes. The information thus gathered can then be used to compare organisations and as a management tool to help change cultures. The Modernists' method of data collection is essentially quantitative. They look at statistical relationships between variables representing culture and performance. To quantify variables requires choosing dimensions of the culture construct to measure. Their main method is the survey questionnaire. Geert Hofstede (1991, 2001) for example, examined the idea of organisations as manifestations of larger cultural systems. His work identified specific cultural differences between nations and showed how society influences organisations. His dimensions of cultural difference (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity) are designed to supply information about some of the core beliefs and assumptions that pervade organisational cultures.

This approach enables cross-organisational comparisons to be made but has a number of disadvantages. These are summarised by Martin and Frost (1996) as follows:

XXVI. It often focuses on only one kind of cultural manifestation but it cannot be assumed that one kind of manifestation represents the culture as a whole.

XXVII. Respondents may not be aware that their espoused values are not being consistently enacted.

XXVIII. For various reasons, e.g. fear for their jobs, respondents may give misleading answers that reflect top management's preference rather than actual behaviour thus creating the illusion of organisational consensus. Or they may give answers that seem socially desirable or that reflect current levels of job satisfaction.

XXIX. Because the researcher has generated the alternatives that the respondents are evaluating, this kind of measure may give a misleading interpretation of a culture.

XXX. These approaches lack the rich context-specific understandings of qualitative methods especially those with a longitudinal focus. People want to present themselves in a favourable light.

Both approaches and methodologies clearly have their protractors and detractors and their advantages and disadvantages. While aligned primarily with the Symbolic Interpretivists, the approach to workplace culture adopted in this thesis is not strictly sectarian. Instead, to gain the best of both worlds, some quantitative methodology has been used. Saville-Troike (2002:119) acknowledges that quantitative methods may prove useful and even essential in some aspects of data collection.

> Quantitative methods are essentially techniques for measuring degree of consistency in behaviour, and the amount and nature of variation under different circumstances, but if quantitative methods are to be used, they must first be developed and validated by qualitative procedures. Quantitative procedures may in turn serve to determine the reliablility of qualitative observation, which is apt to be casual and uncontrolled, and the validity of generalisations which may be made on the basis of a very limited sample.

Initially a quantitative/ qualitative approach to the data collection was envisaged for each workplace. In the case of the manufacturing plant, time and safety considerations imposed limits on the amount of qualitative data that was able to be collected, while in the case of the educational

organisation, management asked that the survey questionnaire not be completed as it would have coincided with a climate survey that they were conducting. Quantitative data provided a very useful complement to the limited amount of qualitative data obtainable from the manufacturing plant while, as a long term employee of the educational organisation, I had the advantage of institutional memory and was able to collect a considerable amount of qualitative data from this workplace and also make use of the findings of the climate survey.

The methodological tools used and which are detailed below, aimed to uncover the three levels of culture as defined by Schein (1990) and to interpret these in the light of Williams' model which is consistent with a social constructionist framework.  Williams (1980) views culture as a dynamic, constantly negotiated phenomenon which he theorises as a struggle between the dominant, residual and emergent forms.  He sees the dominant culture as a dynamic. It comprises some meanings and practices which it has chosen to emphasize from the past and the present while excluding others, (selective tradition) and is constantly being remade by incorporating alternative and oppositional forms of social life and culture. The alternative are non-evangelistic forms, the oppositional are evangelistic and as such more overtly challenging to the dominant culture. Williams (1980:42) distinguishes between these two forms by characterising alternative as 'someone who finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it' and oppositional as 'someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change society in its light.' The alternative and oppositional forms also have residual and emergent elements. Williams explains the residual elements as being the still practised residue of previous social formations, for example, ideas and values from the past which are often retained to make sense of the dominant culture. The emergent culture is the new meanings, values, practices and experiences which are constantly being created, some of which are incorporated into the dominant culture. The dominant culture that emerges is thus a complex negotiated and renegotiated form of the emergent and residual cultures relative to the dominant culture or may lead to a new dominant culture.

In each workplace, it is the dominant culture that is being described.

The reason for adopting an ethnographic approach was so that the pattern of email use and the email messages themselves could be examined within the social and cultural context in which they occurred. Once the communities to be studied had been defined and an attempt made to discover

and describe the salient aspects of their social organisation and culture, a first step in the analysis of any communicative event, pragmatic theories provided the basis for an analysis of the email messages. How this approach and these theories were applied in practice is described in the following section.

## 3.2    Methodology – general

In order to answer the research questions, a case study approach was adopted using two very different workplaces, an educational organisation and a manufacturing plant.

### 3.2.1    The workplaces

The educational organisation is a government funded distance education provider with a teaching and administrative staff of over 500 who are predominantly middle-class, tertiary educated and mono-cultural European New Zealanders.

The manufacturing plant is part of a multi-national organisation which produces a wide range of personal care and other products. It has a staff of some 300 people approximately a third of whom work in the administrative areas and are predominantly European New Zealanders. The remainder are found on the factory floor. A high percentage of these workers are Maori or from Polynesian and other non-English speaking backgrounds. About a quarter of the total staff are tertiary educated.

At the time of the data collection both workplaces were being restructured. This restructuring had some effect on staff morale, particularly in the educational organisation and generated certain anxieties. It also meant that here, because a climate survey was being carried out as part of the restructuring, management asked that the workplace culture survey not be carried out. The other implication of restructuring was that that the role of two or three people changed during the course of the data collection.

### 3.2.2 Research participants

In order to answer the research questions, it was decided to work through key people in each organisation who would be prepared to participate in the research by providing a body of emails for analysis, reflecting on and being interviewed about their communication practices and recording a day's communication. The Chief Executive Officer (hence forward CEO) of my workplace gave permission to carry out the research. Quite fortuitously, one of the senior managers, who was involved in an email issue at the time, volunteered to be a research participant. Eighteen months later, his successor was approached and agreed to record all her communication for one day. This was because it was decided after the initial data collection that such a recording would provide very useful additional material.

At the manufacturing plant the Human Resources (hence forward HR) Manager was approached for permission to do the research. As the plant had already been involved in doing research for the university-based Language in the Workplace project (Holmes, 2000c) of which this was a part, good working relationships had been established. The HR Manager agreed to participate and nominated another person in a position of seniority who also agreed to participate.

Once the research was underway, several other people, not initially factored in, also became involved and made valuable contributions to the data collection.

### 3.2.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were discussed with key people in each organisation before any data was collected. In the educational organisation a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon and signed by myself and the senior manager involved. It covered the nature and length of the research, the storage of the data, the protection of the organisation and people's identities and how informed consent would be gained. In an email message, the CEO notified all staff about the research and that some emails would be saved. In addition, individuals involved in the data collection were given an information sheet which outlined the aims of the research, how and where the data was to be stored and what was being done to protect confidentiality. Before giving their written consent

those involved were given the opportunity to ask questions.

In the manufacturing plant the key people involved in the research were fully briefed and information and consent sheets left with them to distribute to staff who were participating in the survey.

Before any of the emails could be used the permission of the writers had to be gained. Because the educational organisation was my own workplace I was able to do this by approaching people individually; in the manufacturing plant, where access was limited, I did this by emailing the writers.

## 3.3    Data collection

The aim was to collect the following data from each workplace:

- A week's corpus of sent and received emails from a key person to see the amount of email traffic managers in each organisation have, the purposes for which they use email and their email networks.
- A corpus of emails related to a particular issue so that an examination could also be made of how email is used, alongside other means of communication, in dealing with a particular issue. These emails were also to be used for the stylistic analysis.
- Survey questionnaires relating to:

XXXI.   people's use of emails, their attitudes to it and their email practices. Data from this questionnaire was to provide further information about usage patterns and the role and status accorded email. The same questionnaire was used in both workplaces.

XXXII.  workplace culture. The aim of this questionnaire was to obtain some objective data to complement the qualitative data.

The aim of both questionnaires was to tap more people about a wider range of topics than the interviews alone could do, to provide some statistical data as a basis for comparing the organisations, and to supplement the material obtained qualitatively, i.e. by corpus data and interviews.

•Interview material relating to people's use of the various communication media, the rationale behind their media choices, and the workplace culture. The interviews were intended to follow up the questionnaires and explore in greater depth some of the questions they asked. The intention behind the questions related to the workplace culture was to uncover the interpretations people gave to the artifacts.

•A diary of reflective practice kept by the key people providing the email corpuses. The aim of this was to get people to reflect on their communicative practices and the reasons for their media choices, to provide more data for this aspect of the study.

•A day's communication record from at least one key person in each organisation to provide statistical data for the purposes of comparing the amount of communication a manager in each organisation does. A further purpose was to investigate when and for what functions these managers used email.

•Observation notes related to the artifacts, behaviour patterns and symbols and how these are used. My own workplace was initially intended to be used as a pilot study to test the questionnaires and other instruments used in the data collection, but it provided so much valuable data that it became one of the case-studies.

The methodological approach has thus involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

### 3.3.1    Quantitative data

**The email questionnaire (Appendix 1)**

This pen and paper questionnaire contained forty-five questions designed to find out how people used email, their attitudes to it and their email practices.

In the educational organisation the selection of who was to answer the questionnaire was made partly on the basis of convenience. Staff, approached for permission to use their emails, were asked at the same time if they were prepared to complete the questionnaire.  As these were all people who had sent emails to the senior manager, who was the key participant and so not representative of the whole staff, some other members of staff outside this group were approached as well to get a

more representative mix. As a result the twenty-eight people who returned the questionnaire cover most sections of the teaching and administrative staff of which they make up some five per cent of the total. The following completed the questionnaire.

| | |
|---|---|
| Manager or departmental head | 4 |
| Senior student support staff | 2 |
| Teaching staff | 13 |
| Administration support person | 5 |
| Media Services | 2 |
| ICT | 2 |
| Total | 28 |

In the manufacturing plant the HR Manager distributed some sixty questionnaires on a random basis to those staff who had email access with an accompanying note explaining the purpose of the research. Twenty-four questionnaires were returned from people who gave the following job or work areas:

| | |
|---|---|
| Technical support | 1 |
| Internal audit controller | 1 |
| Supervisor | 1 |
| Packaging engineer | 1 |
| Microbiologist | 1 |
| Factory support | 1 |
| Manufacturing | 1 |
| Team coordinator | 1 |
| Personal assistant | 1 |
| Laboratory technician | 2 |
| QA chemistry technician | 1 |
| Production team support officer | 1 |
| TPM coordinator | 1 |
| Factory hand | 1 |
| Sales | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Facilitator | 1 |
| Laboratory | 1 |
| Process engineer | 1 |
| Industrial chemist | 1 |
| Computer support | 1 |
| Unstated | 3 |
| *Total* | *24* |

**The email corpus**

Two separate corpora of emails were collected from each organisation. One of these was all the work-related emails sent and received by a key person in the organisation over a one-week period, the other was emails related to a specific issue. Tables 3.1a and 3.1b show the number of male and female message writers and the percentage of messages written by each gender.

*Table 3.1a*
*Number of email message **writers** by corpus and gender*

| Corpus | Male | Female | Total | # of messages |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educational organisation (SCT corpus) | | | | |
|   Issue-related (IPS corpus) | 5 | 17 | 22 | 120 |
|   One person (AC corpus) | 25 | 29 | 54 | 274 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All SCT coprpus | 26 | 42 | 68 | 394 |
| Manufacturing plant (Revelinu corpus) | 26 | 23 | 49 | 121 |

\*There are some messages by the same writer in both corpora. The figures in this column are for the total number of different message writers .

*Table 3.1b*

*Percentage of email messages by corpus and gender*

| Corpus | Male | Female | Total\*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational org. | | | |
| IPS | 68 | 32 | 100 (121) |
| AC | 57 | 43 | 100 (273) |
| All | 58 | 42 | 100 (394) |
| Revelinu/UL | 63 | 37 | 100 (121) |

\*) Numbers between brackets

A total of three hundred and ninety-four email messages make up the combined educaitonal organisation or SCT corpus. Apart from a few messages of a confidential or personal nature which were deleted, two hundred and seventy four of these are all the internal work-related messages received and sent by the key person over a one week period. This is the AC corpus. The other one hundred and twenty-one were emails written over a two and a half month period related to one issue, the restructuring of a section, the IPS corpus. This corpus is not complete but does contain most of the email communication related to this issue. The contribution of the key people to the message writing needs to be noted. In the 274 message corpus the key person wrote 66% of the male messages and 39% of the total number of messages. The key person in the issue-related corpus contributed half of the total number of messages and nearly three-quarters (74%) of the male messages. One of the other key people wrote 14 (17 percent) of the male messages, one person wrote 4 (5%) and the other three males wrote one message each. Seventeen or 44% of the female messages were written by one person. The other thirteen women each wrote between one and three messages.

One hundred and twenty-one messages were collected from the manufacturing plant, the UL corpus. These came from two main sources. The largest group are from an acting manager who

saved his inward and outward emails for five days. A smaller group came from a senior person in the organisation who saved all the emails he received and sent related to an issue to do with a product item. In addition there are a few emails from two people who recorded all their communications for one day. This included saving their emails of that day. Twenty-nine of the messages were written by the male acting manager, and nine by the male senior person. The other authors each wrote between one and four messages.

In terms of style, therefore, the overall findings could be influenced by the personal styles of the key people but see 7.2.1.

**The workplace culture survey** (manufacturing plant only)

As indicated above, for the purposes of this research, it was decided to combine some elements of both a quantitative and a qualitative approach in the study of the manufacturing plant. Because of time and other constraints such as safety issues, a longitudinal qualitative approach involving lengthy periods of observation was not feasible, but there also seemed to be merit in gathering both quantitative type data, by means of a pen and paper survey questionnaire, and qualitative data. This latter was done through a limited amount of observation and a number of relatively extensive interviews. Although it has limitations, a questionnaire is an economical way of gathering a lot of data from a wide range of people and can throw up issues that can then be explored in more depth in the interviews. In addition, the questions provide a vocabulary for talking about the culture. In this case the questionnaire was viewed as providing a useful supplement and complement to the more ethnographic data collection. Combining the two approaches offers some built in validation: the results from the survey can be compared against what is found in the interviews and through observation. This allows the possibility for further exploration of any inconsistencies found. Furthermore, as the research involved comparing two workplaces, it was felt that having quantitative as well as qualitative data would provide a more useful basis for comparison. For reasons mentioned above, a purely qualitative approach had to be adopted in my own workplace.

The workplace culture questionnaires (Appendix 11) were sent with the email questionnaire. Twenty-three were returned, fifteen from women and eight from men. The questionnaire comprised three parts:

XXXIII. Eighteen statements covering six practice dimensions (see below). For each statement, participants were asked to rate their workplace on a one to five scale. These practice dimensions give a feel for the big picture, the organisational culture. Three of the dimensions, 1, 4, and 5 below, focus particularly on the organisational culture.

XXXIV. Thirty mainly yes/no type questions which asked about elements of the culture related to social relationships, support for workers and inclusion. These complement the practice dimensions as, to some extent, they look at how the practices of the organisational culture are manifested in the actual work setting.

XXXV. Five statements of an agree /disagree nature and seven open-ended questions covering aspects of a general nature such as communication within the organisation, and organisational symbols and values.

As both A and B of the survey were based on statements and questions used by Geert Hofstede and David Hagner respectively, the items they included had been developed and validated by extensive qualitative research. Hagner's Workplace Culture Survey was developed from a comprehensive review of business and sociology literature related to organisational and workplace culture and from existing instruments that assess organisational culture and workplace culture. The development and field testing of the survey included consideration of the reliability and validity of workplace culture scores. (Hagner 2000:103). Hofstede's practice dimensions are based on qualitative data collected from 180 exhaustive interviews carried out in ten different organisations in Denmark and the Netherlands. (Hofstede 184: 1991).

**Part A:** The practice dimensions and statements were based on those used by Geert Hofstede in his study of international workplace cultures. These measure people's perceptions of the practices in their work place. For this study, six practice dimensions were selected on the basis of relevancy. Each three items in the questionnaire looks at one of these practice dimensions. In order these are:

*1 process oriented vs results oriented*
Is there a greater concern with the means or the goals?

*2 employee oriented vs job oriented*
This opposes a concern for people with a concern for completing the job.

*3 open system vs closed system*

In an open system staff consider the organisation to be open to newcomers and outsiders; almost anyone would fit in and new staff only need a few days to feel at home. In a closed system the organisation and its people are felt to be closed and secretive, only very special people fit in and new staff need a year or so to feel at home.

*4 loose control vs tight control*

Where there is loose control the atmosphere is relaxed, people feel free to joke about the organisation, meeting times are not rigidly adhered to and no one thinks of cost. The opposite holds for organisations where there is tight control.

*5 pragmatic vs normative*

Pragmatic means market driven with a major emphasis on customer needs, results are more important than correct procedures and, in terms of business ethics, a pragmatic rather than dogmatic approach is adopted. In a normative organisation, following correct procedures is more important than results and business ethics and honesty are highly valued.

*6. masculine oriented vs feminine oriented*

In masculine cultures there is a feeling that conflicts should be resolved by a good competition - 'let the best man win'. In feminine cultures there is a preference for resolving conflicts by compromise and negotiation. A masculine culture values assertiveness, ambition, and competition. Results are emphasised and people rewarded according to their performance. In a female culture, solidarity and modesty are valued and people are more likely to be rewarded on the basis of equality.

There was some deviation from Hofstede's practice dimensions. Hofstede included parochialism vs professionalism as one of his practice dimensions. Parochial refers to employees deriving their identity largely from the organisation as opposed to professional where people identify largely with their jobs. As parochialism, as defined by Hofstede, was felt not to be a defining feature in these two New Zealand workplaces, it was decided not to include this dimension. It was replaced as a practice dimension by masculine vs feminine orientation. Hofstede used this as a dimension of a societal as opposed to an organisational culture. In the New Zealand context where there is a high percentage of female employees and a certain number of women managers, there seemed to be

some value in including it as an organisational practice dimension.

**Part B** of the questionnaire was based on David Hagner's Workplace Culture Survey. His survey is designed to evaluate the strength of a workplace culture. Unlike the modernists who define a strong culture as being a unitary culture, a 'strong' culture in Hagner's terms is one that involves employees more fully and offers more support than others. Hagner has identified some thirty elements of workplace culture. His survey is designed to analyze and assess how these elements work together in a given work setting and the degree to which an individual is included in a workplace culture. It looks at different elements of a culture than does the Hofstede practice dimensions. Used with these and personal observation, a fuller picture of a workplace culture can be drawn. The Hagner survey focuses more on the culture of the particular work section or department of the employee rather than the organisational or corporate culture as a whole. For my purposes it was important to have a feel for both, as a large organisation is likely to have different sub-cultures.

Six questions were asked; each gave respondents a choice of three options. The questions related to the length of time the employee had been working in their particular section and how often they interacted with their colleagues or boss. There were also 37 yes/no questions related to the inclusive elements in a workplaces. In a workplace incorporating all these elements, the maximum possible score is eighty-six.

**Part C** included five statements related to support for career development and Te Reo (the Maori Language) in the organisation, and communication with the CEO, people's immediate manager, and within the organisation generally. For each, respondents were asked to state whether they agreed, partly agreed, disagreed a little or disagreed. They were also invited to comment if they wished with space being provided on the form for comments.

**Treatment of quantitative data**

The research described in this thesis is essentially qualitative. Qualitative research involves exploring the data to see if hypotheses can be developed from it and possible explanations provided. The data that has been collected and analysed for this research comes from two organisations which

were used as case studies for comparative purposes. There are thus two reasons why the quantitative data presented here does not lend itself to statistical testing.

XXXVI. Statistical tests can only be interpreted in a useful way if random samples have been taken from well-defined populations. In that case the objective is to find out if the samples are correct representations of the populations or can be attributed to chance. As the two organisations are case studies they do not represent clearly defined populations.

XXXVII. Statistical tests are only justifiable when the researcher has stated hypotheses to be tested before carrying out the data collection. By first looking at the data and then carrying out statistical tests, the assumption of statistical significance at, for example, the 5% level is invalidated and misleading.

I realise that because of the way I have analysed the data, usually in cross tabulations of limited dimension due to a moderate sample size within each organisation, spurious relationships might have been used. It should be emphasised, however, that the results found make sense and do not seem to be based on spurious relationships, or relationships that are not real because other variables which may have changed the pattern have not been taken into account.

### 3.3.2 Qualitative data

**The interviews**

Twelve interviews were conducted in the educational organisation, and fourteen in the manufacturing plant. In each organisation, apart from the key people, the interviewees self-selected themselves by volunteering on the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted on site and lasted between thirty and ninety minutes. In the educational organisation, only email and people's communication practices were discussed. In the manufacturing plant, most of those interviewed were also asked questions relating to the workplace culture. The purpose of the interviews was to pick up on points that arose from people's questionnaire answers and also to explore more fully their attitudes to email and their email and other communication media practices. A written interview protocol had been worked out in advance to provide a structure and direction for the interview and to ensure that the information sought was obtained. It was however sufficiently flexible to enable the exploration of any other relevant issues that came up in the course of the

interview.  All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. This transcription  provided a body of qualitative data to enrich and inform the quantitative data that emerged from the collation of the questionnaires.

**Diary of reflective practice**

The aim of this was to gather information related to people's media choices**.** It had been intended that the key person in each organisation would keep a diary of reflective practice in which they would record all their communication use over a one-week period. For each separate communication they made they would record the purpose of the communication, the communication medium chosen and their reason for choosing that particular medium. However, because of time pressures, this proved impractical for the key person in the educational organisation. For each of his outward emails, however, he did code his reason for choosing email and the purpose of the communication. This proved valuable later in determining the speech act functions of some of the messages.

In the manufacturing plant, one of the key people kept a diary of reflective practice for a different hour each day over a five-day period. The other key person kept this diary in relation to the communication he had over a two-week period related to a specific issue.

A follow-up interview was held with each of the diarists later to explore in more depth, their media choices.

**The record of communications**

Four volunteers provided the data for this detailed study of the way people use communication at work. The aim of this study was to supplement the diary of reflective practice and provide more detailed information about the role of email in relation to a person's total daily communication pattern, and reasons for their communication choices. The three volunteers from the manufacturing plant were a senior planner, a team coordinator and a person who worked in the staff store. One of the senior managers did the recording in the educational organisation. Each participant carried around a mini-disc recorder with a lapel microphone, onto which they recorded all their face-to-face and telephone interactions for one workday. They also saved all their inward

and outward emails, and noted any other communications they were involved in.

As an integral component of the data collection methodology, the participants were asked to reflect on the communication choices they made. After a summarised tape script of the recordings had been prepared, a debriefing session was held with each of the participants. This entailed going through the tape script, discussing the contextual background where necessary and clarifying areas of uncertainty.

## 3.4 Coding the emails

In order to extract from the email messages the information needed to answer the research questions, a coding system was developed to show the communicative functions of each message, the role, social distance and status relationship of the writer and reader, the types of greetings and closing if used, and the amount of mitigation or boosting in the messages.

### 3.4.1 Communicative functions of email

In attempting to classify emails according to their communicative functions, and social distance and power relationships, email poses problems that other forms of discourse do not in that an email can have multiple addressees who may be in different power and social relationships to the sender. Because of this it was decided to look at messages sent to groups separately. It was also decided not to distinguish between commands and requests for two reasons:

XXXVIII.   the purpose was to see what functions email is used for

XXXIX.   in the case of multiple addressees the distinction between requests and commands is a difficult one to make because, depending on power relationships, what may be a command to one addressee may be just a request to another.

The system developed to code the emails for their function, after reviewing the data, is described in 5.2.1.

### 3.4.2    Sociolinguistic variables

**Power and status**

French and Raven's taxonomy of power (1960) includes the following five bases of power:

•Reward power

•Coercive power

•Legitimate power

•Referent power

•Expert or informational power

In her summary of Helen Spencer-Oatey's (1992) discussion of the different types and components of power, Jenny Thomas (1995) defines some of these different kinds of power in the following way.

> *Legitimate power*: One person has the right to prescribe or request certain things by virtue of role, age or status.
> *Referent power*:  "One person has power over another because the other admires and wants to be like him/her in some respect.
> *Expert power*:  In this case one person has some special knowledge or expertise which the other person needs.

To these can be added *connection power*, who knows whom, and *information power*.

"These are both more related to 'power to' than 'power over' and are the sources of power that women find more appropriate and comfortable to work with." (Lane1996: 278). Post structuralists see also *systemic power*, i.e. "the systems of shared meaning that reinforce mainstream ideas and silence alternatives." (Fletcher 1999 cited in Holmes 2001: 2).

In the workplace setting legitimate power is prescribed by the person's role. A person's role in the organisation prescribes their inherent or relative status, and role relationships determine each person's obligations and responsibilities. These two kinds of status are discussed by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996: 637). *Inherent status* is that which results from holding a powerful position that is acknowledged both within and outside a company while *relative status* results from

the power that an individual exercises in an inter-personal relationship, for example, in a department. Unlike inherent status it does not operate outside the organisation's boundaries and so has less power and clout than inherent status. Inherent and relative status can co-exist in the same individual or group e.g. in the case of a CEO, and, depending on contextual factors, they can be activated simultaneously or be mutually exclusive.

> Within an organisation, relative status is directly related to the hierarchical distance between two interactants, so that a shopfloor worker will attribute higher relative status to a company director than to this or her immediate supervisor. The perspective changes in intra- and inter-departmental communication, where recognition of relative status depends on a web of social and psychological factors, such as personality, experience, knowledge etc. (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1996: 638).

The directives studied in these corpora all involve relative status, as they are all internal ones. While some directives from the CEO of the educational organisation are included, and his position is acknowledged outside the organisation, he is here dealing with people within the organisation who relate to him purely as their CEO.

As legitimate power, based on an individual's legitimate right to hold an office, is the main power base in the workplace, this has been used as the basis for the categorisation of the power distance separating sender and receiver, especially as the other kinds of power are likely to be closely allied to legitimate power. Using legitimate power as a base, there are three main directions of communication: to someone who is of equal power status in the workplace or to someone of superior or subordinate status. These then are the three power categories used:

● message to an equal or nearly equal

●message to a superior

●message to a subordinate.

In the case of the manufacturing plant the three key people, who provided most of the emails, were asked to state themselves what they saw as being their legitimate power relationship to their reader. For other emails the organisation's staffing charts were used. One of the members of the Human Relations team also provided valuable help. Where it was not possible to determine what the

power relationship was, a <u>no value</u> was given. As a participant observer in the educational organisation I was in a position to be able to make these judgements with the help of the organisation's staffing charts.

There are however, limitations to this categorisation, as it makes no allowance for the degree of power difference. Having more degrees of gradation was considered but decided against when it became apparent that numbers in a greater power differential category would be too small for any meaningful conclusions to be drawn. Moreover, power relationships are often not clear-cut. One problem that arises is the power differential between people who are not in each other's direct reporting line and who may have no role responsibilities to each other. While their position gives a manager legitimate power over a lower ranking person, he/she does not have the same coercive power as that person's reporting officer. Another issue arises if one of the communication partners comes from another organisation and or, if the particular context puts them in a special power relationship. For example who is the superior and who the subordinate when the senior manager in an organisation is negotiating with a union official? In these and similar cases subjective decisions, based on personal knowledge of the people involved and the context, has had to be applied, and in a few cases, a <u>no value</u> assigned. These, however, constituted only a small number of messages.

A group category has been added. This notes all instances where there is more than one main addressee (cc's and bc's are not included). It is a wide-ranging category as it may include emails sent to everyone in the organisation's address book or an email sent to just one other person. Messages sent to groups are discussed separately in the relevant chapters describing the findings. If there was just a straightforward power relationship between members of the group, this is indicated e.g. an email sent by one department head to all other department heads was shown as going to a group but also to people of equal power.

**Social distance**

Like status, social distance is also concerned with the social relationship between participants. Brown has used the term vertical and horizontal to describe these relationships. "If status is the vertical of social relationships, solidarity is the horizontal." (1965:57 cited in Spencer-Oatey 1996:2). Social distance has been variously interpreted to comprise such things as degree of social

similarity or difference, frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, how well people know each other, a sense of like-mindedness or how well people like each other ( Spencer-Oatey 1996:7). For the purposes of this study, the components that would seem to have most effect on the way people interact with each other at work are frequency of contact and familiarity. Colleagues in a workplace are likely to be either friends (defined as colleagues who meet each other socially outside of work) close colleagues (defined as colleagues who have a lot of interaction in the workplace regardless of the degree of conflict or harmony that may be involved in the relationship) or distant colleagues. The following scale was thus used to code the messages for social distance.

Friend – a colleague you engage with socially outside of work

Close colleague – a colleague you know well

Distant colleague – a colleague you do not know well.

To validate the categorisation the main participants were asked to use this scale in stating their relationship to each of their communication partners. At the manufacturing plant, one of the members of the HR team also provided assistance with this and the power relationships. There were a few instances, however, mainly involving communication with offshore colleagues, where a no value had to be assigned.

Relationships among people in a workplace, however, may not remain static. New projects, restructuring or reorganisation may bring together colleagues who previously just knew each other as a name and result in a change in the social distance scale. If there is considerable interaction these changes can happen quite quickly and outpace the period of data collection. There is an example of this in the IPS corpus where people who started as distant colleagues moved to becoming friends as a result of their interaction in working through an issue. Much of this was by email. In this case, the social distance code used is for the relationship as it was at the end of the data collection period. There are limitations to what any classification system can show. One that tried to account for everything would soon become unworkable and unhelpful in trying to generalise information.

The group category used here includes emails sent to two or more people. As with power relationships, if the members of the group are in a similar social relationship, this is also indicated, e.g. people in one section would all be close colleagues.

**Gender**

As gender has been shown to be one of the key factors accounting for differences in communication style, (Tannen 1990, James and Drakich 1993, Holmes 1992,1995) the coding system for gender was developed to allow for all possible permutations. Does it make a difference to the style, for instance, if a male sends an email to another male as opposed to sending one to a female, to an all male group or to a mixed group? The information gathered from this enables us to see if the same patterns are found in this workplace email communication, as have been found in listserv. groups (Herring 2000).

### 3.4.3 Style

**Greetings and closings**

These set the tone and do a lot of the relationship building work of an email and so it is important to see who uses what to whom. The coding system used allowed for all possible combinations so that a detailed analysis could be undertaken. Where a ritual *Thanks* has been made at the start of an email message, this has been included as part of the greeting when it seems to serve no other purpose than to open the communication in the same way that it often seems to be used as part of a ritual sign-off, e.g. *Thanks X.* There are a number of examples in the corpus of the addressee's name embedded in the text. Where it seems to be a substitute for not putting the name in the greeting, it is counted as part of the greeting as it "counts as courteous recognition of the H (receiver) by the S (sender)" which Searle gives as an essential condition of a greeting. This is particularly the case when it appears in the first line of the text.

**e.g. AC101b**
 Yes Allen 8.30 will be fine

 **Word count**
In counting the number of words the subject line is counted as part of the message for the following reasons:

•In a number of emails the subject line was the message.

**e.g. AC17**
Subject: Can I have a word?

- The subject line alerts the receiver to the content of the email and, in this sense, has a transactional function of giving information.

- Among the corpora there were instances of the subject line giving information not included elsewhere in the message.

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**e.g. AC 6b**
Subject:  this is how it looked when it left me – maybe changed?
Dear HODS,
Here is the DRAFT criteria that X and I have been working to..we have foyund(sic) ir very useful but have added a couple of little things. More on Thursday hopefully
Alan

- There were sometimes referential markers in the message, which related to the subject line.

**e.g. UL 18**
Subject: Health & Fitness Questionnaire
This will be rolled out tomorrow

The title of attached documents is not included amongst the message word count as the attachment is seen as being a separate document. As greetings and closes do much of the interactional work of an email they are treated as part of the message.

**Paragraph count**

Only the body text was included in the paragraph count. The subject line, and greetings were not included nor a person's name at the end.  However, a close such as *Kind regards* or *thanks* was counted.

## 3.5    Conclusion

This chapter concludes the preparatory section of this thesis, which has introduced the research. The aim of these first three chapters has been to present the rationale for and aims of the research. In the course of this, literature pertinent to the research topic has been reviewed and some as yet

unexplored aspects of workplace email communication, which have prompted this research, have been indicated. This present chapter has described the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research and outlined how these frameworks have been applied to the data collection and analysis. Part Two details the research findings. To set the scene for the findings described in the later chapters, it first provides the social and contextual background in which the emails were written. The two organisations, which provided the email data are described and the findings of the workplace culture studies reported on. The remaining chapters are devoted to answering the research questions.

# Chapter FOUR

## *Workplace culture*

As the aim of this research is to look at the role, status and style of workplace email and relate this to the workplace culture, in this chapter the culture of each workplace is discussed at some length. The culture of the workplace assumes prominence because communication cannot be sensibly viewed outside of the cultural context in which it occurs. People's language and behaviour both construct and are constructed by the workplace culture.

After some general introductory remarks, the culture of each workplace is discussed. Schein's three levels of culture have provided a useful framework for describing the workplace cultures. (See 3.1.4) These look at the culture holistically in terms of its cultural artifacts and its norms and values. A study of the three levels of culture helps to uncover what the underlying beliefs and assumptions of the culture are. The culture described for each organisation is what Williams (see Chapter Three) refers to as the dominant culture. Reference is made in the description to sub-cultures and new emerging values where these were in evidence.

Language plays an important role in the construction of an organisation's identity. It is through the linguistic choices that the senior management of an organisation makes when it articulates its vision, its aims and its slogans that it projects the image it wants to portray and the values, that in theory anyway, lie at the base of its dominant culture, a culture that has been constructed and negotiated over time.

For the purpose of comparison an attempt has been made to use the same sub-headings when describing each culture. However, this was not always appropriate. As different methodologies were used to uncover the features of the cultures, some information about the culture made available by the surveys used in the manufacturing plant, was not available for the educational organisation, e.g. how it is perceived by the staff using the Hofstede practice dimensions (see 3.3.1). On the other hand, because of the limited amount of time spent in the manufacturing plant,

it was not possible to gather much information about the sub-cultures.

The order of presentation of cultural features is, however, different for each organisation. In the discussion of the manufacturing plant culture the cultural artifacts are discussed first; in the discussion of the educational organisation, norms and values are discussed before the cultural artifacts. The reason for this reflects my own position in relation to the two organisations. In the case of the manufacturing plant, I was an outsider coming in so the most appropriate way of accessing the culture seemed to be via its artifacts or what could be seen on the surface. It was through these outward manifestations of the culture, the questionnaires and conversations I had with people over time that the underlying norms, values, beliefs and assumptions began to reveal themselves. The description thus follows my journey of discovery of the culture. However, as an insider of long standing at SCT, the white collar-organisation, I realised that I needed a more dynamic and qualitative approach, particularly as the culture here was being renegotiated at an accelerated rate and radically reconstructed. Without an understanding of the dynamics behind this change, which as an insider I was privy to, I did not feel that the cultural artifacts could be understood particularly as many of these were also being reconstructed as the new emergent values began to manifest themselves. Hence, for this organisation, I start by discussing the struggle between the residual and emergent forms and then go on to discuss the artifacts.

Tenses have presented something of a problem in this description of the culture of the organisations as I am aware of some changes in the educational organisation that have taken place in the intervening period. However, the present tense is used to describe the situation as it was at the time the research was carried out in 2001-2003.

## 4.1    The culture of the manufacturing plant

The large manufacturing plant, which stands on a twelve-acre site at one end of the main street, is an integral part of the town in which it is located and of its economic well being. It provides full-time employment to some three hundred of the town's inhabitants, two-thirds of whom are blue collar or waged workers and 70 per cent of whom are male.  The plant has been part of the townscape since 1919 and many of its employees have spent all of their working lives there. The

composition of the staff, with a large non-European component, reflects the ethnic mix of the town. Many of the workers on the factory floor are Pacific Islanders, while the staff also uincludes a number of people from Asian and other non-European backgrounds. The manufacturing plant is not an isolate unit but part of a major multinational. This means that major decisions are made elsewhere. Consequently some of these decisions do not match local conditions or needs. A number of the local managers report to seniors in Auckland or Australia while most of the IT messages come through from Singapore. In the interests of the global organisation, operations can be transferred from one plant to another if it makes economic sense to do so. In today's economic conditions, operations are being constantly monitored and restructuring has become the norm. The local plant has not escaped and just recently its soaps division was closed down with a consequent loss of jobs. Because it is just a small part of the global operation, the New Zealand branch feels itself to be particularly vulnerable. However, rather than leading to a loss of morale, this vulnerability in the face of global competition seems to have created a resolve amongst the staff to survive by working harder and smarter and coming up with innovative solutions.

This description of the workplace culture is based on the qualitative data gathered from personal observation and interviews and from the results of the Workplace Culture Survey.

### 4.1.1 Artifacts

**The physical layout**

The site is divided into two sections – fronting the road is the glass-windowed three-storey high administration block. This is separated off from the factory behind it by a wide driveway which provides for the transport of goods in and out. Internal access is provided between the two sections. The quiet of the administration block contrasts sharply with the noise of the machines in the factory some of which run twenty-four hours a day.

**Company image and manifestations of the organisational culture**

In front of the building, two flags, the New Zealand one and the Revelinu one with its logo, fly from flagpoles on either side of the entrance symbolising the presence in New Zealand of this multi-national. Through the main entrance in the reception area, a glass cabinet, full of personal

care and laundry products such as soaps and soap powders, body washes, deodorants and toothpaste, announces the organisation's raison d'être – the production under a variety of brand names of many of these products which line our nation's supermarket shelves.

First impressions on entering through the reception doors are that this is a friendly and welcoming workplace. You are greeted with a warm smile by the people at the reception desk who display a willingness to be as helpful as possible. These attitudes are not just confined to the reception area but seem to reflect the nature of this workplace. People greet each other when they arrive at work in the morning and in passing. The working atmosphere appears to be good-natured and relatively relaxed.

The style of dress is casual but tidy. A suit and tie would arouse curiosity. Apart from tidiness, the main concern in the way people dress is safety and staff are issued with safety boots and glasses. Overalls are the required dress in the factory and these are put on and taken off as people enter and leave the factory. People do not go home in their overalls.

As well as friendliness, the image projected as you look around the reception area is that of a socially responsible, forward-looking, innovative and dynamic organisation. Almost the first thing you see is the large framed certificate on the wall which announces that this is a TPM Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) company and that it aspires to an Enterprise Culture. Walking through the plant other reminders of this are visible as TPM logos are scattered throughout. TPM, which is an outgrowth of Total Quality Management or TQM, aims for zero defects, zero breakdowns and zero lost time. In each of the team areas, there are notice boards where performance defects, etc are graphed. There are also START cards where people indicate hazards and suggest how they can be remedied.

The company also projects an image of environmental consciousness and concern for the safety of its workers. Environmental Policy and OSH (Occupational Safety and Health) certificates stand alongside the TPM and Enterprise Culture certificates on the wall of the main reception area.  On the other side of the reception area, a notice board has been set up, displaying in a light-hearted way, the photos of staff who have made a special contribution in promoting the company's values

or in helping the company achieve its goals by coming up with an innovative improvement, particularly a cost neutral one. These are the organisation's present day heroes and the people who are most likely to get promoted.

**Workplace interactions**

Responses to the individual questions of the Hagner survey support the findings from the qualitative data that this is a friendly, supportive and inclusive workplace and indicated that there is a high degree of social and work-related interaction between employees.

On the factory floor some of the staff have grown up together and many have worked alongside each other for a long time. This, plus the fact that there are twenty couples on the staff and that this is a relatively small organisation where most people know each other, may give rise to the familial atmosphere which appears to prevail. People feel able to discuss work and personal problems with their colleagues and to engage in jocular abuse. They know the names of their colleague's husbands and wives or partners and they are also very supportive of each other in times of trouble, such as during the recent bout of redundancies or when someone gets sick.

Good facilities are provided for the staff. There is a sizeable and well-stocked canteen, which opens out into a large social room containing a piano and easy chairs. A small house on site has had its walls removed and is used now as a bar. After 4pm staff can have a drink there at very reasonable cost. Outside, an area has been set up with tables, chairs and a barbecue. Some areas, such as the laboratory, have their own tables and chairs around which members can and do meet at break and lunch times. There are also a number of tea and coffee stations which provide another meeting place for staff. An active social club hosts a number of activities such as quizzes.

Considerable socialising occurs at morning tea and lunch breaks. Only four of the twenty-three respondents said that they did not have lunch with their work-mates. For those people who work shifts, however, having lunch with a colleague is not a possibility. All but one said that they knew the names of some of their work-mate's partners. The only person who did not greet their colleagues when they arrived at work in the morning added the rider that they were not a morning person. Sixteen of the respondents said that they socialised with their colleagues outside of work.

There is also considerable work-related interaction. Eighteen respondents said that they occasionally or often helped each other with work. When asked if they had received help from a colleague in the preceding week, nineteen said they had help to remember something, twelve had had help to finish a task, fourteen had talked over a personal problem with a colleague and eighteen had had help to sort out a work problem. Shared equipment often provides an interaction point where there can be considerable exchange of small talk. The most commonly cited items of shared equipment were the printer, the photocopier, and the fax machine.

**Celebrations**

In most of the work groups, birthdays and other milestone events in people's lives are celebrated. The birthday person may bring a cake to share with their colleagues or the group go out for lunch or morning tea. Some workgroups also organise sports events, "monthly knees ups" or enter teams in the Dragon Boat Race. The staff Christmas party is an established and valued ritual. The company puts on a luncheon at which the factory manager delivers a short annual report. People retiring and award recipients are named. The company pays for people in each section to go out to a restaurant together. It is not just the present staff who are treated in this way. The organisation has a Christmas party for former staff, and many ex-staff in their late seventies and eighties file through the doors, some on sticks and walkers, for this annual, much looked forward to event. There is also a children's Christmas party for the children of currently employed staff at which presents are given to the young children.  Grandparents can bring along two of their grandchildren. These traditions are an important part of the organisational culture. The organisation also sponsors other events for its staff.  Important historical milestones are celebrated. For example an on-site function was held when the manufacturing plant achieved two years without a 'loss of time' accident. Achievements, such as maintaining excellent safety standards and meeting production targets, are celebrated and rewarded. Within teams, there are celebrations, such as the team being taken out for a breakfast, if achievement targets are exceeded. The whole staff also comes together for such things as product promotions.

**Workspaces and workplace inclusion**

Being able to bring a bit of their wider selves into their workplace and personalize their workspace is important in making people feel at home. Twenty-one of the respondents said that people in

their work area personalized their workspace with personal items such as photos, pot plants and flowers, pictures, coffee mugs and even teddy bears.

A sense of belonging or inclusion is created if workers see their name publicly listed. In the manufacturing plant, people's names may appear on telephone and email lists, on department lists and noticeboards where it may be accompanied by a photo and personal profile, on desks, coat boards, in and out boards and on pigeon holes. Having a uniform also creates a sense of belonging. The organisation provides the staff with clothes, some of which bear the company logo. In addition staff are provided with safety shoes and glasses. Also helping create the feeling of inclusion is the issue of such items as security cards, keys and lockers.

**Language**

The organisation has its own 'language' or in-house jargon, much of it TLAs (three letter acronyms) meaningless to an outsider. NSDs are non-soapy detergents, a BOM is a bill of material, a FIG is not a fruit but means Fit for Growth as in FIG related activities, an SCA is a special cash award, a TCO a team co-ordinator, PDP is performance development planning, START stands for see, think, act, report, train, and so the list goes on. For a newcomer, becoming familiar with the 'plant speak' takes time. In addition there are terms such as backflushing, and project and machine names such as Bikini and Melody, which can throw someone not in the know. This shared language, which Wenger (1998) has identified as one of the features of a Community of Practice (CofP), which this organisation undoubtedly is, also helps create feelings of belonging.

High status people do not stand on formality here and first names are the term of address used throughout New Zealand and Australia regardless of the status of the addressee and the addressed. Similarly, greetings are informal with the most common form of email greeting being *Hi* + first name. (See Chapter Seven.)

**Communication**

The lines of communication were perceived by the majority (87%) of the respondents to be good and, apart from one, all agreed or partly agreed that their immediate manager was easy to approach. This was in spite of a couple of people commenting that their managers were very busy

and others having their managers based in Australia. Responses to the Hagner survey support the qualitative data findings that suggest good communication between workers and their supervisors. Nearly half of the respondents said that they went to their supervisors more than once a week to discuss work-related problems. At the same time most of the staff reported that they are also consulted by their supervisors. The healthy lines of communication that exist may be in part due to the fact that supervisors have come up from the factory floor themselves. The Factory Manager, who has also come off the factory floor, operates an open door policy and is very much respected by the staff for his caring attitude and astuteness.

While more agreed than disagreed with the statement that the CEO was easy to approach, opinion was more divided here. This may be because the CEO is less visible. One person added the rider, "if he's here," another that they hardly see him.

**Style of leadership**

The perception of a large number of staff is that the style of management is consultative. When asked to circle the word which best described the leadership of the organisation from the five following words: consultative, charismatic, authoritarian or bureaucratic, 'hands off' democratic, consultative was the most popular choice appearing nine times on its own in the  twenty-one responses to this question. Charismatic and authoritarian or bureaucratic were cited three times, democratic twice and 'hands off' once'.

The TPM and Enterprise culture espouses a team approach and a team ethos certainly prevails in this workplace. The production staff have targets to meet but how they meet them is the responsibility of the team itself. This attitude appears to be motivating and to create a good team spirit.

**Training**

Newcomers may learn their job through a formal company training programme, but more often it seems to be from a co-worker or mentor. There is however, a one-day orientation session for newcomers. On this day, they are given a tour of the plant, a run down on the company's history and an introduction to the company philosophy and values.

### 4.1.2 Norms and values

**Findings from the Hofstede based survey**

This survey was useful to provide a fuller picture of staff perceptions of some of the company's norms. As discussed in Chapter Three, six practice dimensions were surveyed. Table 4.1 shows these and the number of staff who gave each rating. The lower the rating the more support is given to the left-hand descriptor and vice-versa.

*Table 4.1*
*Ratings for Hofstede's practice dimensions*

| | Practice Dimension | Rating | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *N* | |
| | **Process oriented** | | | | | | | **Results oriented** |
| 1 | People do only what's necessary. | *1* | *6* | *4* | *8* | *4* | | People work extra hours without pay. |
| 2 | Every day is the same. | *1* | *2* | *8* | *8* | *4* | | Every day is different. |
| 3 | People don't like change. | *2* | *7* | *6* | *7* | *1* | | People are flexible and adapt readily to change. |
| | **Employee Oriented** | | | | | | | **Job Oriented** |
| 4 | Management has a sincere interest in the satisfaction and well being of employees. | *3* | *5* | *9* | *4* | *2* | | Management is only interested in outputs and results |
| 5 | Management takes into account people's personal problems | *1* | *10* | *8* | *3* | *1* | | You are expected to complete the job regardless |
| 6 | A group or team makes important decisions. | *4* | *12* | *5* | *2* | *0* | | Important decisions are made by individuals |
| | **Closed** | | | | | | | **Open** |
| 7 | Outsiders find the organisation closed and secretive. | *0* | *2* | *8* | *6* | *7* | | Outsiders are made to feel welcome. |
| 8 | Only certain kind of people fit in. | *0* | *2* | *6* | *11* | *4* | | Everybody fits in. |
| 9 | It takes a long time for newcomers to feel at home. | *0* | *2* | *7* | *8* | *6* | | Newcomers quickly feel at home |
| | **Tight** | | | | | | | **Loose** |
| 10 | Meeting times are kept very punctually. | *6* | *5* | *3* | *5* | *4* | | Meeting times are only kept approximately |
| 11 | People are very concerned about cost. | *7* | *7* | *4* | *4* | *1* | | Cost is not considered important. |
| 12 | People are uptight and do not joke about the organisation. | | *2* | *8* | *9* | *4* | | People are relaxed and frequently joke about the organisation. |
| | **Normative** | | | | | | | **Pragmatic** |
| 13 | Following correct procedures is more important than meeting the client's needs | *2* | *4* | *7* | *6* | *4* | | The customer/client has first priority |
| 14 | Quality is more important than quantity | *8* | *4* | *4* | *6* | *1* | | Quantity is more important than quality |
| 15 | It's very important to act ethically at all times | *7* | *7* | *5* | *4* | *1* | | The ends may sometimes justify slightly unethical means. |
| | **Masculine** | | | | | | | **Feminine** |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | Managers are decisive, and autocratic. | 0 | 3 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 2 | Managers are intuitive rather than decisive and strive for consensus. |
| 17 | Meetings are opportunities for participants to assert themselves and show how good they are. | 1 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 9 | 1 | Meetings are places where problems are discussed and solutions sought |
| 18 | Men are the main decision makers | 2 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 1 | | Women are the main decision-makers. |

N = non response

No detailed analysis of the results has been undertaken as the relatively small number of responses (23) meant that no meaningful statistical analysis could be done. The main purpose of the survey was to get a feel for the way employees perceived the organisation in terms of these dimensions. By comparing the figures in the two right hand columns with those in the two left-hand columns it is possible to get some indication of staff perceptions. Assuming that the statements do assess the given practice dimensions, they suggest the following about this workplace:

●It tends to be results rather than process oriented with about half those responding feeling that staff work extra hours without pay and that each day brings new challenges. In his work Hofstede found that labour-intensive units were more results-oriented while material or capital-intensive units were more process-oriented. In a labour-intensive unit, the effort of people plays an important role in its results and is more likely to breed a results-oriented culture (Hofstede 1991:194). The manufacturing plant depends very much on the work of the teams on the workshop floor for its productivity results. Hofstede also found a significant correlation between results-orientation and low absenteeism. The rates at the manufacturing plant were 2.34%. This would seem to be a very low rate. For example, in 2003 Germany recorded a rate of 3.6%, its lowest rate for 30 years. The most recent survey of Australian businesses conducted by the Department of Workplace Relations and Small Businesses found an absenteeism rate of 2.7%. Possible additional factors that contribute to this low rate are:

●a stable and generally happy and content staff

●strong team loyalties amongst the factory staff

●the safety record of the workplace.

Hofstede found three significant correlations between results orientation and the structure of organisations. These were a flatter organisation, a top management team with a lower education level which has been promoted from the ranks, doers rather than figureheads, and lower union membership amongst employees (Hofstede 1991:195). Some of these correlations would seem to apply at the manufacturing plant. It has a relatively flat organisation, and at least one of the top management people, the Factory Manager, started work on the factory floor. Union membership at

the manufacturing plant is, however, relatively high so there is no correlation here.  At the beginning of 2003, one hundred and sixty employees, or just slightly more than half of the plant's workforce were represented by one of the following three unions: the Engineers, the Printing and Manufacturing and the Service and Food Workers. This compares with the New Zealand average of 22% of wage and salary earners. However, this last correlation is a rather dubious one as union membership is affected by a number of factors not necessarily related to results orientation, such as the number of part-time and temporary employees – they are less likely to join unions - and the number of jobs in the manufacturing area, as is the case here, where membership is traditionally high.

- On the employee versus job oriented scale, there was a bias in favour of employee oriented. Nearly half (11) of the respondents rated management as taking into account people's personal problems as opposed to those who responded neutrally (8) or four who felt that they were expected to complete the job regardless.  A relatively high proportion of staff feel that a team ethos exists and that important decisions are made by a group or team rather than by individuals. Hofstede did not present any correlations for this dimension.

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- The majority of staff feel that theirs is an open organisation which is friendly and welcoming to outsiders. Hofstede found a strong relationship between the percentage of women among the employees and the openness of the communication climate. There was no correlation here as 70% of the staff at Revelinu are male. Hofstede also noted a correlation between the percentage of women among managers and the presence of at least one woman in the top management team. About a third of the managers in the Australasian branch of the organisation are women and there is at least one woman in the top management team. In Hofstede's study formalisation was correlated with a more closed culture and a higher average seniority. A more open culture admits controversial issues in the employee journal. (Hofstede 1991:197). Informality in dress and relationships between people is part of the manufacturing plant's culture. However, no information was obtained about the other two factors to be able to make comparisons here.

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- Most staff perceived the organisation as being cost conscious. Tight budgetary control is often

associated with restructuring and layoffs and this has occurred at the manufacturing plant. However this appeared to be the only element of this practice dimension that indicated tight rather than loose control as only two of those surveyed felt that people were uptight while over half felt the opposite, namely that it was relaxed and that people were able to joke about the organisation. This perception may also be relative as what most struck one of the staff who moved from the manufacturing plant to The educational organisation were the strict budgetary constraints in the latter compared to the former. Hofstede found that as well as budget squeezes, tight control was also correlated with the percentage of female managers and employees and with lower educational levels of staff at both the employee and top management levels. When staff were asked what was most likely to lead to people being promoted, being highly qualified came out very strongly. Staff at all levels are encouraged to upskill and rewards are there for those who improve their qualifications and skill levels. Approximately a quarter of the staff have tertiary qualifications. Hofstede also noted a lower level of absenteeism where control was perceived to be less tight. (Hofstede 1991:197) The low absentee rates at the plant further suggest loose rather than tight control.

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- On the normative v pragmatic dimension there was a weighting towards the normative. Meeting customer needs came out marginally stronger than following correct procedures at the expense of client needs, but the perception of a majority of the staff surveyed, is that, in the organisation, ethical behaviour and quality as opposed to quantity are seen as being important. The only meaningful correlation with external data that Hofstede found here was that privately owned units in the sample were more pragmatic, public units more normative. (Hofstede 1991:197). Because no real definition is provided of what constitutes a private as opposed to a public company, a comparison is hard to make.

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- Meetings are quite definitely seen as being places where problems are discussed and solutions sought rather than places for individuals to go on ego trips, but more people felt that men rather than women were the main decision makers. This is not surprising given that the ratio of male to female managers is approximately 3:1. While most people remained neutral on the question of management style, of those who did express a leaning one way or the other, the weighting was towards a consensual rather than autocratic style.

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The Hofstede based survey thus suggests that the culture of the manufacturing plant is more results and employee than process and job oriented, midway between tightly and loosely controlled and slightly more normative, open and feminine than pragmatic, closed and masculine.

Comparing the findings of this part of the survey with the correlations Hofstede found provides some validation of the results, as, where information is available, most are consistent with these correlations.

**Staff perceptions of the company's values**

The culture of an organisation is very much to do with values as these manifest themselves in its practices. Respondents were asked to identify what they saw as being the organisational values. The question was an open-ended one so the values cited were self-selected. Of the twenty-one responses, eleven mentioned people; three of these responses specified employees. Closely related to people, and getting four mentions, was safety. This vied with a 'winning attitude and enterprise culture' in the number of mentions. Responses relating to outputs, market share, money profitability, growth, etc. received six mentions, customers received two and the following received one each: stability, commitment, upskilling and prestige.

**The Enterprise Culture**

The three characteristics of The Enterprise Culture, which is the driver of the organisation and the mindset that the organisation is trying to inculcate, are framed on the walls. In the Company's literature these are elaborated as:

- passion to win which is about wanting to achieve the incentive targets
- liberating rigour which is about removing barriers to development, and team development and ownership of the production and skills development
- connective creativity which is to do with sharing ideas and includes innovation in methods and marketing

The acronym of the Enterprise Culture is FMCG, Fast Moving Consumer Goods.

Not surprisingly the people most likely to get rewarded are those who most manifestly perform

well in terms of the Enterprise Culture. Seventeen people responded positively to the question which asked if there were people known for what they had done for the organisation but two of these did not elaborate. Of those who did, four mentioned people who were innovative and /or had improved systems especially if these were at no extra cost. In a similar vein three mentioned TPM specifically and another three mentioned people who had exceeded expectations. People who had achieved well in environmental matters were mentioned twice, and the following each received one mention: closing down production areas, people making extra effort, graduates, company leaders, extroverts, and long service.

## The company logo

The nature of the responses to the question asking what the logo of the organisation meant tended to indicate that the company's logo is not greatly promoted and that no great value is attached to it. This question drew many non-responses, which possibly reflected what one person wrote which was, "nothing to me." The term 'logo' and what it refers to may also not be generally understood. Of the thirteen other people who did respond, five mentioned that it stood for the name of the company, five that it had to do with the enterprise culture, while one mention was made of each of the following:

•Australasia

•producing quality products as the consumer requires them

•making bigger profits by meeting consumer needs better.

## Attitude to staff and staff training

Although some staff feel that management's main concern is with outputs and results, this does not appear to be the majority feeling. Most respondents feel that management has a genuine interest in them and that their contribution is a valued one.

The relaxed dress code was part of a deliberate policy to break down the divisions between the blue and white-collar workers. Because they actually produce the goods, the blue-collar workers are seen to be very important and many earn more than some of the white-collar workers in the administration block.

Salary rates compare favourably with those for work of a comparable nature elsewhere. As already mentioned, staff are actively encouraged to upskill, (the comments below, however, indicate that this may not be universal) and on-site educational opportunities are provided while assistance is given to those doing university and other study courses. Three full-time staff are employed in the training department organising and creating courses in conjunction with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and there is an Open Learning Centre on site equipped with computers that staff can use. Staff attend courses in work time. Extra qualifications are rewarded and successes publicly celebrated.

Far more of the respondents (78%) agreed with the statement that there was support for advancement and career development within the organisation than disagreed. Five people commented. These ranged from one person stating that training was available to everyone who wants it, to another saying it was only provided for certain teams with those not on the training matrix being left out. One person commented that the statement only held true for people with degrees, another that it only held true for males, while a third stated that there was a very set career path plan with few options with the result that good people left.

The fact that there is a special Christmas party for ex-staff and that they have buying rights at the on-site store would also seem to indicate that management is appreciative of the contribution ex-employees have made and of the value it places on its staff. The on-site store stocks the full range of the company's New Zealand and overseas products.  Each staff member is entitled to NZ$30 worth of these subsidised goods a week. Former staff members have an entitlement to NZ$60 worth of goods a month.

**Levels of staff satisfaction**

The company's attitudes to its staff are reflected in the quantitative data.  The left hand column in table 4. 2 shows the scores achieved using Hagner's culture survey. The frequency column shows the number of respondents whose response to the survey gave that score. According to Hagner, the higher the workplace culture score, the more supportive and inclusive the workplace.

*Table 4.2*
*Relationship between worker satisfaction and workplace culture score*

| Workplace culture score/86 | Frequency | Satisfaction ratings* |
|---|---|---|
| Under 35 | 1 | 6 |
| 36-45 | 1 | 8 |
| 46-50 | 3 | 8,6,6 |
| 51-55 | 6 | 8,5,8,6,6,9 |
| 56-60 | 6 | 7,9,8,6,6,5 |
| 61-65 | 3 | 7,9,9 |
| 66-70 | 0 | |
| 71-75 | 0 | |
| 76-80 | 3 | 8,10,4 |
| 80+ | 0 | |

* This is the rating given by each of the employees whose workplace culture score is shown in the left-hand column.

N =23
Range of scores: 31-77
Median: 55.5
Mean: 56.6

Hagner does not state what score indicates a high degree of inclusion. His scores are used more as the basis of comparison between workplaces. However, the fact that there were very few scores under fifty would seem to support the findings from the qualitative data that this workplace is a friendly and supportive one.

The table also relates these scores to another question which asked those surveyed to rate their current level of satisfaction with working for the organisation on a 1-10 scale with 1 representing low satisfaction and 10 high satisfaction. In general people seem to have very positive attitudes towards their employer. Over half of those surveyed recorded levels of satisfaction of 8 or higher. Only one person gave a negative (less than five) satisfaction rating. The mean rating was 7.5, the average rating 6.9.

The workplace culture scores were also looked at in relation to the degree of satisfaction workers felt in working for the organisation and in their length of service. For the latter, each person was given a weighting of one to five depending on his or her length of service. These weightings were as follows:

*Length of service*

| Years | Weighting |
|-------|-----------|
| 0-1   | 1         |
| 1-2   | 2         |
| 5-9   | 3         |
| 10-19 | 4         |
| 20    | 5         |

No correlation was found. The length of time people had been employed by the organisation seems to be unrelated to their feelings of satisfaction. Interestingly of the two people who scored 77, one recorded the highest level of satisfaction (10) and the other recorded the lowest (4). This tends to suggest that a self-directed, task-focussed individual may get a great deal of satisfaction from their job without needing a high degree of social interaction with their colleagues. However, it also suggests that for those other workers, the organisation is welcoming and supportive of newcomers and that it values its staff, both old and new. This may explain in large measure why the staff is a relatively stable one. Half of the respondents have been on the staff for more than 10 years.

**Attitude to the environment**

While the aim is for ever better production outcomes and cost consciousness is very much to the fore, the organisation is also sensitive to environmental issues. Staff who make suggestions which help to make the plant more environmentally friendly, e.g. improving the quality of waste water so that it better meets council requirements, are given a green award and rewarded monetarily. They are also acknowledged publicly in newsletters and at the Christmas function.

**Health and safety**

Great store is put on health and safety at work. There are two OSH nurses on site and a part- time company doctor. An OSH Certificate on the wall of the reception area proclaims the organisation's commitment to industrial health and safety. The local plant is justifiably proud of having the best safety record of the Australasian factories. The company also encourages its staff to keep fit and the Human Resources Department organises programmes such as Tai Chi and lunchtime walks.

**Commitment to The Treaty of Waitangi**

Since coming into office in 1999, the Clarke-led Labour government has actively worked to promote the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and Te Reo (the Maori language) and a commitment to these principles is now a requirement of government departments. This

commitment is, however, not in evidence in the manufacturing plant. It would appear that not even lip service is paid to Te Reo which is perhaps not surprising given that a large percentage of the staff are non-New Zealanders and Pacific Islanders and that this is a multi-national organisation with a European base. The following comments were made:

*"It's not appropriate – probably no time for it."*
*"Not practised at al.l"*
*"Not relevant."*
*"A multi-cultural site."*
*"Euro company not interested at all in Maori culture or any other."*

Possibly reflecting this lack of interest, the question relating to Te Reo was also the question that had the largest number of non-responses.

### 4.1.3   Underlying values and assumptions

To further probe the underlying values and assumptions of the culture, employees were asked how they saw the culture of the organisation, what its main goal was and who were the people most likely to get promoted. Generally the staff view their workplace in very positive terms. The following were the words they used to describe it:

- people-focussed – upskills staff, employees first
- enterprising, passionate, motivated, committed, creative, risk-taking, opportunistic, passion for winning, successful, competitive, striving, connected, money oriented productive, leading edge, global
- changeable, evolving, continuously improving
- multicultural, happy/content, fun, rewarding, proud, supportive, friendly, a cooperative group of people
- proactive, liberating, open-minded, out-going, trusting, multi-skilled, diverse, team
- safety conscious

Only one person mentioned what could be considered as negative features: rigid, conflicting, narrowly-focussed but the same person also mentioned friendly and divergent.

While there was some variation in the way people expressed what they saw as being the main goal

of the organisation, there was unanimity about what the main goal was and all of the answers of the twenty-one people who answered this question had to do with growth, production, profitability and global competitiveness. One third of the respondents said it was to be the fastest moving consumer goods company in Australia. One person who saw it as being to make a profit added also "without compromising safety and environmental standards." Creating a safe workplace and being environmentally friendly do seem to be genuine concerns of the organisation and part of the image it wants to project, as these values came up in other contexts as well.

According to the twenty-one people who responded, the most likely candidates for promotion are enthusiastic, motivated, committed, innovative extroverts who are team players with good people skills, ambitious, qualified and male. Being qualified received the greatest number of mentions.

The manifestations of the organisational culture and the workplace practices tend to suggest that productivity, efficiency, profitability and on-going improvement underlie what the company is about. Behind this is the assumption that the company's very survival depends on this as it operates in a global market and is not only competing with other organisations but also with other branches within its own multi-national organisation. People who actively work to promote these goals are the ones who will be rewarded with promotion. An underlying belief is that the best way of achieving the company's goals is to devolve some responsibility and have the staff on the factory floor work as teams with each team responsible for achieving its production targets. Also very evident is the belief that these goals cannot be achieved without a motivated, committed and well-qualified workforce. To this end the company invests a lot in its staff, rewarding them well monetarily, providing them with good facilities and giving them every encouragement to improve their qualifications in line with the underlying assumption that there will be less downtime on the production lines if staff understand what they are doing. Underpinning this also seems to be the assumption that a happy and healthy staff will be a more productive staff. Apart from this however, the company believes in being a good employer and a good member of the urban community of which it forms a very major part. Part of this is reflected in its attitude to the environment and the way it treats former staff members.

The responses to these open-ended questions are consistent with those in both the Hofstede and

Hagner part of the questionnaire which were to do with similar or related issues. Like these they indicate that Revelinu is an open rather than closed workplace where every support is given to staff to upskill and advance themselves in the organisation. Management is seen by most as being consultative rather than autocratic and this goes along with the open communication lines and the informal dress code that applies in all parts of the organisation.

### 4.1.4   Critique of the methodology

The rationale for including the survey questionnaire was to build up a more complete picture of the workplace culture than observation and talking to people alone would do and provide a method of cross-checking information found in one way with information found in another. Because any researcher brings to their research their own frame of reference in terms of their own values and perceptions, by providing some more consistent measures, quantitative data can help to provide a form of validation and get a broader spectrum of perceptions because more people can be tapped than by purely qualitative methodology. The surveys used also help to provide a set of descriptive terms for describing the workplace culture and the basis for comparing one workplace with another.

A question that arises is to what extent the items Hagner used to show inclusion are valid. Individuals in the organisation might well see other variables as being more important. If this is the case then the criticism that the questionnaire reflects the culture of the academic research writer could be levelled with some justification.  For example one of the questions Hagner asks is if it is usual to play tricks on a new employee as a kind of initiation. A *"yes"* answer scores, but it could be debated whether playing tricks on a newcomer shows inclusion.  Two of the other questions ask about whether the organisation assists with car-pooling and transport or whether it offers flexi-time work schedules and job sharing. In some organisations these things may not be appropriate or appropriate only for some of the staff. While the validity of some items is questionable, in fairness, Hagner intended his survey to be used differently to the way I have used it. His intention was that it was to be used as an observational tool with the researcher completing the questionnaire after conducting four to five hours of observation in a workplace. The focus was the general rather than the individual. It was also designed to be used as the basis for placing people with disabilities in

suitable workplaces and from this point of view it probably serves as a very good tool. As a measure of an individual's feeling of inclusion, it probably works less well as there will be all sorts of reasons why an individual might score *"no"* on a question that an observer, getting a general impression, would score with a *"yes."* An additional difficulty is that the researcher knows what he/she understands by a question, whereas respondents may interpret it differently.  For example one question asks whether you greet your fellow workers when arriving at work. One individual answered *"no"* commenting that they were not a morning person. However, the general observation would be that people do greet each other. A number of questions for instance relate to the amount of socialising that goes on amongst staff. Highly independent task-focussed individuals may not involve themselves in socialising so much, so their score would tend to be lower on questions asking about this. While the average individual score tends to be relatively high, I also had the feeling that had this survey been used in the way Hagner intended it, the manufacturing plant would have scored even higher as a supportive, inclusive workplace.

While from this data the culture seems to be fairly strong both in Hagner's sense of involving employees more fully and offering some support and in Hofstede's correlation of culture strength and results orientation, there is evidence that subcultures exist. However, because those surveyed were drawn from the group of people who had access to email, and time safety and operational issues meant that widespread observation could not be carried out, it has not been possible to gather much information about the different subcultures or tap the perceptions of people working on the factory floor. As some of the production lines operate for sixteen and twenty-four hours, there is also a group of night shift workers. Several of the laboratory staff also work at night. One interviewee's comments suggested that, as they do not have the same lines of communication available to them as the day workers, they feel less included.  Anecdotal evidence suggests though that safety consciousness and elements of the TPM and Enterprise culture pervade all areas of the factory and management areas.

The results of the survey do appear to confirm what the ethnographic data has shown and support most of the correlations Hofsteede found where it has been possible to relate the findings to these. The results also provide material additional to the ethnographic data.

### 4.1.5 Conclusions

In summary, the multi-national organisation, of which this plant is a branch, is constructing a new culture with new values summed up by the terms Enterprise and TPM Culture. As in many other organisations, some people feel that they are under more pressure to produce and that there is more focus today on making money and cutting costs than there was in the past.  One example of this is the cutting down on overpacking or the extra grams or millilitres that used to go into a packet or bottle. Now everything has to be accounted for. Backflushing means that inputs must match outputs. However, while staff may feel unhappy about some of the decisions made by their overseas bosses, the great majority feel that this is a good organisation to work for, that they are valued and rewarded for their achievements and that their workplace is a friendly and supportive one.  Communication lines are generally good and the management style consultative rather than autocratic with the individual teams having a considerable degree of autonomy. These are the residual values which remain as part of the dominant branch culture. The plant's successes both locally and nationally have helped create a feeling of pride.

The impression gained is that the redundancies and uncertainty that inevitably accompany restructuring do not seem to have greatly shaken people's morale but rather to have created amongst all staff, the resolve to survive by doing the best they can. This resolve is assisted on the factory floor anyway by a very capable and respected factory manager, and by some very dedicated team coordinators and leaders.

## 4.2    The culture of the educational organisation

As it was not possible for the reasons mentioned in Chapter Three to conduct a quantitative survey in this workplace, qualitative methods have mainly been used in this cultural study which also draws on the findings of a Workplace Climate Survey conducted in the workplace in June 2001 when the research was being carried out, and a trial survey done in one section of the organisation in 2000.

After some introductory remarks locating this workplace in the New Zealand education system and describing its governance and the composition of the staff, its changing culture is discussed. A

description of its cultural artifacts and its norms and values follows on from this.

### 4.2.1    The organisation, its governance and its staff

SCT is a well-established feature of the New Zealand education system. Started in 1922 in response to parents living in country areas and isolated parts of New Zealand seeking assistance from the government in the education of their children, it has become a New Zealand icon and developed into a very large distance education organisation. Most New Zealanders have come into contact with it in some way, either as students, or as parents or guardians of students.

Today the School provides New Zealand curriculum education and education support services for students studying at

•early childhood

•primary and

•secondary levels.

On 1 May 2001 the School's roll comprised 18,648 students the vast majority of whom were engaged in secondary level education.

**Governance**

SCT has always been beholden to its political masters who provide the funding and decide enrolment eligibility. At the time the research was conducted (2001), it had received the stern message from government that it had to adapt itself to the changed environment, and quickly. Thus it was in the process of a major restructuring.

Previously SCT and its community had appointed its own Board of Trustees comprising several parents' representatives, the CEO, a staff representative and three co-opted members including a Maori representative. The relatively high number of parents' representatives, most of whom were from the South Island, reflected the disproportionate influence the parents of the traditional full-time student population had had on the direction of the School. The School's roll however, had greatly changed and was increasingly being filled by young people who had rejected, or been rejected by conventional schools. Early in 2001 the Minister of Education, defined a new model for

the Board which would make the School more like a state-owned enterprise and bring in new types of expertise. This new Board comprised five ministerial appointments, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and three elected members representing staff, students and parents. In addition the Board was about to co-opt two Maori members to help it fulfil its responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi.

**Staff**

As of June 2001, there was a full-time staff of 554 of whom approximately 80% were teachers. The other 20% comprised administrative, ICT and media services personnel. A similar 80:20 ratio applied to the distribution of full-time and part-time staff. These ratios included non-permanent staff. The staff was predominantly Pakeha /European and female (73%). Six out of the top seven management positions were, however, occupied by men although in the teaching area, three of the four principals were women. While figures showing the ethnic mix and age distribution were not available, teaching staff were observably older than those in other areas of the School. The youngest members of staff, aged roughly in the twenties and thirties, were mainly to be found in the media services and ICT areas.

### 4.2.2 Norms and values

**Mission Statement**

The School's Mission statement is "To provide quality learning outcomes for students whose learning needs cannot be met by a local provider alone and to provide leadership and support to the education sector by building on our expertise in distance education."

**Vision**

The School aims to be a recognised centre of excellence in education. Its Mission Statement asserts this aim: "We will be the leading provider of high quality student centred education at early childhood and school levels through innovative multimedia delivery and strategic partnerships." The assumption is that the adoption of an ICT approach will ensure this high quality. There is a feeling amongst many of the teaching staff that some of the systems developed in the past to promote this quality, such as teachers having more time to focus on the pastoral care needs of their

students, have been lost in the restructuring process.

**Values**

In its value statement the School states its commitment to:

•a belief in the importance of teaching and learning

•equity of access for all students

•a commitment to students and their supervisors

•responsiveness to change

•a continuous improvement culture

•accountability for individual and corporate actions

•trust and respect for each other

•enhanced educational achievement by Maori students

A Staff Climate Survey carried out by Workplace Support in June found "some lack of knowledge and lack of commitment to the vision and the values." However, the dedication of the staff to their teaching and their commitment to their students was very clearly identified.

### 4.2.3   A culture in change

After successfully delivering a predominantly paper-based distance education service for some eighty years to eligible students, SCT today finds itself at something of a crossroads as it tries to meet the challenges of a changed and changing external environment. Serving the needs of the New Zealand education sector, the School has always been government funded.  However, while it once operated in a non-competitive environment, it now finds itself subject to market forces and having to operate in a highly competitive market place. At the same time the student body has changed and the School now has, on its roll, a growing percentage of students from the lower socio-economic groups, many of them unmotivated. This student group is placing many more demands on the teaching staff.  Yet, while SCT is being asked to do more, its funding has remained virtually static. In addition, the internet revolution has created new expectations about the way education and distance education can and should be delivered. Both the Ministry of Education and those who have traditionally been the recipients of the School's services are wanting change.

At the time of the study the School was in the midst of a massive restructuring as it sought to adapt and reposition itself to meet these changed expectations and needs, and find new and better ways of doing business. These included becoming an ICT-focussed organisation, becoming more accountable and cost efficient, and increasing non-government sources of revenue. All management levels had been affected and the new management structures were still in the process of bedding down. A major culture change was underway. In the past the School had been somewhat cushioned from change: it had an established reputation, an assured source of funding, a powerful political lobby group in the Parents Association, a captive market and a large teaching staff protected by strong educational unions which assured them similar conditions to classroom teachers. While management has tried over the years to bring in an on-site contract, the unions support the staff who are determined to remain part of their union's collective contract fearing that if they leave this, their conditions will be further eroded. One new manager described it as a very unionised workplace.

The new culture demands meeting the needs of the consumer, becoming a more business-like, cost-efficient and accountable organisation, and being responsive to change. This culture change is reflected in the new hierarchical structure and new position titles. Formerly SCT was essentially a school organised along the lines of a traditional school. Its value system focussed primarily on achieving sound educational outcomes and its hierarchical structure was similar to that found in a large school. Now, it is reconstructing itself as a State Owned Enterprise. The new positions and job titles are helping to construct this new identity. The Principal, later Director, has been replaced by a CEO, the Executive Officer by the Manager of Corporate Services. There are no longer any senior masters. New positions, the realm of the corporate rather than the school world, have appeared, e.g. Chief Information Manager, Manager Organisational Management, Marketing and Communications Manager, Media Services Manager, Contract Management Manager. Another level of management, that of Faculty Heads, has been imposed between the heads of subject teaching departments and the CEO. Many of the new managers are non-educationalists. Naturally the upheaval created by restructuring has created a lot of uncertainty for existing staff many of whom have had long service in the organisation. They have seen a new breed of managers with different imperatives come in and a new intake of young staff into the technology and multi-media areas. Many of these new appointments are on individual contracts and likely to be transients using

the School as a career move to somewhere else. A former Principal of the School, much maligned in his time for being something of an autocrat, has now become something of a cultural hero by those who remember him. With his passionate dedication to the cause of education and distance education, the School and the School's community, combined with his long service and institutional memory, he encapsulated the old values of the School.

The Staff Climate Survey found that staff had experienced confusion and chaos during the change process. While online teaching is welcomed, this is with caution, as they want to see the School continue to offer a variety of tools to its students.

The cultural change in process epitomises the classic struggle between residual and emergent forms as the dominant culture evolves and is renegotiated and reconstructed.

### 4.2.4 Cultural artifacts

### The physical layout and workspaces

The reconstruction of the School's identity is being reflected too in the reorganisation of the physical space. The School occupies four buildings: a main building close to the centre of the city, two outlying buildings within ten minutes walking distance from each other and the main building, and the Student Resource Centre which operates from a building several kilometres away. All the top managers have their offices in the main building. The restructuring has been accompanied by a movement of all the ICT and media services into the relatively spacious surroundings in this building. The newly established e-section also operates from here. To make way for these groups, some of the secondary teaching departments have been moved to more crowded physical conditions in the outlying buildings. A walk through the second floor of the main building now creates the impression of an organisation well launched into the technological age – this is the new image the School wants to portray in the building visitors come to.

Before the change, a refurbishment of the main building saw what had been large open plan areas closed off into different sections. This 'closing off' has continued with the building of new offices to house the new managers. Most heads of subject teaching departments now also have their own

offices, but some operate in open plan areas. While the stated values still emphasize teaching as the core enterprise, it is hard to reconcile this with the rearrangement of space and introduction of new corporate style management which has diluted the role of the heads of teaching departments.

There has also been a reallocation of space in the car parking area of the main building. Restructuring has seen more car parks allocated for managers so the old egalitarian philosophy of first come first served seems to be being lost.

The move into the ICT age is also reflected in the furniture. Computer workstations have replaced the desks the teachers had.

**Organisational image and manifestations of the organisational culture**
With the move to a more corporate style culture, has come also the move to brand the School and give it an image more befitting of this culture. The logo is now being used as a brand on all official publications and on the outside name plates, which have been given a more professional look. Similarly, what had been an uninviting reception area has been given a corporate makeover. A new position of Communications Adviser had been created to enable the School to portray its new culture and achievements to the world outside.

However, some symbols of the traditional SCT remain, for example, the green plastic and canvas bags used for the delivery of student lessons. They are one of the enduring memories of former students. The photo of a green bag sticking out of a letter-box on a dusty metal road is symbolic of the role played by the School in providing education to those in isolated areas. While today's typical student is more likely to live in an urban area, the symbol remains.

Dominating the wall outside the entrance to the main building is a large satellite disc, an outward symbol of the School's commitment to the use of modern technology for lesson delivery and also perhaps to the government's involvement and use of the School in the past for its own political ends and educational experiments. The disc was installed some years ago to deliver educational TV lessons to schools, a project later abandoned.

There is no written dress code but there is a tendency for people, both male and female to dress up to their position. Most of the male managers and particularly the senior male managers wear ties. Amongst the senior managers there seems be a trend to a more business style of dress possibly reflecting the new image the School is trying to create. Styles of dress tend to be more casual further down the hierarchy.

**Technology**

Symbolic of the new culture is the big increase in the information technology hardware to support this culture.

Email was first introduced to the School in 1997 and has had a rapid pick-up. With its facilities of speed and multiple addressability it has led to better and more efficient communication between staff working in the different buildings, and in this way alone has been a great advantage to this workplace.

Today, nearly all the staff have their own computer with email and internet access and their own telephone. While staff welcome the greater contact that the phone and email have made it possible to have with their students, no allowance has been made in teaching loads for the extra time this takes. Managers, teaching staff and those working in media services also have internet links. The School's policy on internet access and use is a four page document which gives general information and some guidelines for use, including net etiquette. At the time the research was carried out, some sixty members of the staff had voice mail and a number also had answer-phones. However, it can still be quite difficult for people ringing in from the outside to get through to departments, especially in the middle of the day or when staff are tied up in meetings. Conscious of the need to provide a better service in this area, some departments now operate a help line which is staffed during normal working hours. Each section also has its own fax machine.

**Workplace interaction**

Being part of a work group means also being part of a social group. Because work is such an important part of life, the social interactions that occur in a workplace contribute largely to an individual's sense of belonging and mental well-being. They are also important in helping to get the

work of the organisation done.

**Gathering places:** Before the refurbishment there was one large centrally located staff social area in the main building where all staff in this building came for morning tea and to socialise. This social area flows into an outdoors area set up with tables and chairs which is also the site for occasional barbecues. The main social area provides a venue for general staff get-togethers, such as drinks after work on Melbourne Cup Day or quizzes organised by the social club.

As part of the refurbishment this area was reduced and several tea and coffee stations set up at convenient locations. These encourage a culture of taking your drink back to your desk and working on, rather than socialising. In the other buildings, small rooms have been set aside as small cafeterias and some staff take time out to have tea and coffee breaks and eat their lunch here. These are not always occupied during the lunch hour partly because they are not overly inviting. Other gathering places are the small round tables, found in some sections, or nearby cafes. Staff may also meet briefly around the printers and photocopiers. Over the last few years there has been a diminution in the number of staff taking a full one-hour lunch break. Many now continue to work on. The lunchtime bridge sessions held in two or three parts of the building are also now a thing of the past. This is in part due to work pressure and in part to groups being relocated. Work areas are also noticeably quieter than they were a few years ago as changes in processes and work levels have increased workloads. In less pressured times, morning teas were quite a regular feature in the life of different sections and departments. These now appear to be much fewer and of shorter duration. At least one group, however, has a monthly after work social get together.

The sheer size of the organisation and its physical dispersion means that the occasions when the whole staff meets together are rare. This only happens now when some outside venue is booked for the CEO to make a major announcement. A social club organises various activities such as quiz evenings, outings to the cinema, petanque, and an end of year social function. However, the numbers supporting these activities are relatively low.

**Helping each other out:** One of the findings of the Climate Survey was that staff valued each other. A workplace counsellor who visits the School on a regular basis commented that staff are

very supportive of each other, for example, colleagues help each other out with their work when they are overloaded or have been ill. Newcomers spoken to find it a friendly place in which to work. This support and friendliness is one of the things that is most valued in this workplace and given as an important reason by people as to why they like working here. It may also be one of the reasons for the traditionally very low rates of staff turnover.

**Language**

Because it is an educational organisation SCT staff use all the jargon associated with this field of knowledge. In addition, as with all organisations, it has built up its own in-house language and list of acronyms known only to people who work in the organisation. In a time of restructuring some of this is relatively short-lived remaining only as part of the institutional memory of those who have been there for a while.

**Acronyms:** Restructuring is reflected in the changing language of acronyms. Three years ago AOLS (Adult Open Learning Service) and SOLS (Schools Open Learning Service) were replaced by the ESC (Education Service Centre) which later became the SAC (Student Administration Centre) a term which disappeared when the section was reconstructed  as the Registry. A growing force are the RRs or Regional Representatives. On the other hand, the ETs or external teachers have always had something of a precarious existence and never more so than today, so this term is likely to be heard less and less.  The CMT or Combined Management Team is a recent innovation and E-school has now become part of the everyday vocabulary.

**Forms of Address**: All staff, no matter at what level of the hierarchy, use first names when addressing each other.  Honorifics do not exist in the day to day work of the organisation.  The greetings used in emails also reflect this informality. (See Chapter Seven.) People do not seem to be overly concerned with status.  This may be a reflection of the generally collegial and relaxed nature of people's working relationships and the feeling that they are all professionals. It also possibly reflects the egalitarian nature of New Zealand society. Also as there are many long serving staff many  relationships have been built up over time.

The language of the organisation and the forms of address used will be explored in more depth in

the chapters detailing the findings from the study of the email corpus.

**Communication**

There is a widespread perception among staff that decisions are made behind closed doors and that their input is neither sought nor valued, leading to a feeling amongst some of disempowerment, semi-alienation, dissatisfaction, low morale and cynicism. While the CEO operates an 'open door' policy, staff were reported in the Climate Survey as feeling isolated from him. "There is a perception that communication and decision-making processes have broken down." One of the other points noted was that staff would like big improvements in the consultation process. One of the issues identified in decision-making was the lack of communication of reasons for a decision. This may be one of the reasons why the new vision and stated values of the School are not unanimously shared. According to the Climate Survey: "Even if people still don't agree that the decision is right, reasons give them the link into vision, values and objectives and guidelines that are forming the base and framework of the direction the organisation is going." Also contributing to the feeling of alienation is the fact that most of the communication from higher management to staff at large is done by email. There is virtually no personal contact between management in the main building and staff in the outlying buildings.

**Style of leadership**

As suggested above, the leadership style is autocratic and oligarchic. The CEO, in consultation with his small Central Management Team, makes decisions. While staff are sometimes asked for their input on matters of strategic importance so that an impression of consultation is given, there is the feeling that the game plan has already been decided so that any contribution they make is just tweaking around the edges. Department heads have a certain amount of autonomy in how they manage their departments but this is always in line with policy emanating from above into which they have no real input, and within strict budgetary constraints.

**Treaty of Waitangi**

The School's Maori name sits alongside its English name on the letterhead. As a government-funded organisation SCT is obliged to promote the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. A large framed copy of the Treaty hangs in the stairwell of the main building demonstrating to those who

view it that the organisation is trying to meets it obligations to the tangata whenua (the people of the land.) Te Reo lessons and visits to a marae are provided for the staff. New learning resources are expected to take into consideration the different cultural values and learning needs of the School's Maori students. Any public ceremonies are usually preceded by a powhiri, the traditional Maori welcome ceremony.

### 4.2.5   Sub-cultures

A subculture has been defined as:

> a subset of an organisation's members who interact regularly with one another, identify themselves as a distinct group within the organisation, share a set of problems commonly defined to be the problems of all, and routinely take action on the basis of collective understandings unique to this group. (Cited in Frost et al: 1985:226.)

A number of sub-cultures can be identified at SCT. Because of the physical dispersion of buildings, staff in one building rarely, if ever, get to see staff in the other buildings. This, and the fact that the organisation is a very large and complex one, has probably contributed to the development of a number of these. Sub-cultures have also developed along vertical and horizontal lines. These subcultures exist in varying degrees of harmony or competition.

Restructuring seems to have been accompanied by a greater fragmentation. New groups have come into being but a policy change also precludes teachers from working now in other areas, such as editing, which brought them into regular contact with other groups. The new team of managers, the CMT, is a new  sub-culture. The Climate Survey noted a lack of trust between the staff and the CMT. Teaching staff feel that the new non-teaching 'corporate type' managers do not value their skills or their knowledge of the School, have no institutional knowledge or knowledge of distance pedagogy, and no understanding of issues like irregular work flows.  This was seen to be a major factor in job dissatisfaction. Many of the staff have not met them personally let alone had any contact with them. To these staff they are faceless bureaucrats from whom they receive the occasional email message.

There has also been the development of sub-cultures along professional lines with the division between teaching and non-teaching staff being the most obvious one. More recently the expansion of Media Services, through the import of a number of mainly young staff, has seen the creation of another sub-culture. The division between teachers and Media Services staff is not just along horizontal lines but also along chronological lines. The generation X culture of the latter contrasts with that of the mainly baby-boomers of the former. The Climate Survey reported that some tension existed between this group and the teachers over who controlled the production processes for written resources.

Even within the teaching areas it is possible to discern sub-culture groupings. The different levels of teaching, early childhood, primary and secondary operate within their own physical and curriculum areas and there is little interaction between people in primary and secondary for example. As secondary are the largest group their needs can sometimes seem to dominate. Even within secondary there are differences in the way different departments do things and to some extent too in the 'collective personality' of the group. Heads of Departments have different management styles and these have an effect on the culture of their team. The Climate Survey reported widely differing levels of morale in different groups. Unlike many other sections an air of optimism seems to reign in Media Services, in the e-section, which does all on-line teaching, and in the technology area. The establishment of the e-section has seen the development of another sub-cultural grouping. A certain tension also exists between them and the other teaching departments who see them as something of a favoured group as they have much lower staff student ratios. What unites the different sub-cultures and is at the heart of the dominant culture is the shared goal of serving the School's student body, although the different sub-cultural groups do this in different ways.

Whereas once staff felt connected to the whole School through a shared vision and through relationships with other sections which had developed over time and in a time when there were more opportunities for people in one section to meet people in another section, now an individual's feeling of connectedness is likely to be just to their immediate work group.

### 4.2.6    Underlying values and assumptions

The new culture brings with it the assumption that information technology is the way forward and that its adoption is essential if the School is to survive. The people now who are most likely to get the accolades and promotion are those who enthusiastically embrace the new direction. There is also the assumption that the School's future direction, and very existence even, is dependent on the political masters it serves.  The new vision has brought into question many of the old assumptions and values which were based on a school culture.

Although it sometimes seems to get lost sight of, there is also the belief that education is important and that the School exists to provide the best possible education for its students. This belief has been something of a trap as, in trying to meet the needs of its changing student roll, SCT has tried to be all things to all people with the result that its resources have been stretched very thin and the staff pressured to do evermore.  Amongst the vast majority of the teachers and other members of staff there is the belief that they must do everything possible for their students, many of whom are disadvantaged. It is this belief that explains the dedication that has been commented on by outsiders.

### 4.2.7    Conclusion

The culture of SCT today is far from being static and in equilibrium but is rapidly evolving. The rather relaxed, very friendly, people-centred and 'school-like' culture of the past is rapidly being replaced by one which moves it into the mainstream of the New Zealand business environment with its emphases on accountabilities, efficiencies and performance. As it takes the big leap into the world of IT which senior management sees as being a direction which will ensure its future survival, the School is experiencing something of a culture clash. On the one hand there is the group of older and long-serving staff members who remember how the School was and what it stood for, and who still hold to those values and that vision. They are wary of the new approach and the new managers who represent the new vision, and who are constructing the new culture.  The 'oldies' feel these 'newies', who operate from the main building and seldom venture out of it, do not really understand the main work of the institution and what it is about.  They also feel that

aspects of the new 'corporate' culture are inappropriate for a school. They may recognise that change is necessary but when they look at their students, many of whom come from educationally, socially and economically deprived backgrounds and who may not even have a phone let alone a computer, they are not completely convinced that the new strategic direction and the new vision is the best way to go. They feel that the two things which have earned the School the reputation it has, the quality of its teaching resources and the dedication of its teachers, are in danger of being lost. Nor can they understand why in a time of strict budget constraint, yet more managers seem to be being appointed.

Within this whirlpool of changing cultural values, the one value that remains constant and which seems to exist amongst all the various sub-cultures is that of commitment to the student. In its summary, the first finding noted by the Staff Climate Survey was: "Teachers are passionate about giving high quality teaching to their students." This passion was seen as being one of the greatest strengths of the organisation.

## 4.3    A comparison of the cultures

While both organisations are affected by outside forces, in terms of their dominant culture the two workplaces are very different. One is a private sector enterprise and part of a global-multinational which means many of the major decisions affecting it are made off-shore, the other is a very New Zealand institution and part of the public sector which means that it is answerable to the government of the day and the New Zealand public which it serves.  Although both are concerned with efficiencies and cost-cutting, this is particularly so in the educational organisation where the increased demands made on it have not been matched by increased funding.

The composition of the staff of both organisations is also very different. The white middle-class tertiary educated group who make up by far the largest proportion of the SCT staff  are a minority at Revelinu which has a high percentage of its staff coming from non-European and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Also while one organisation has a predominantly male staff, the other has a predominantly female staff.

Technology, in the form of email and internet access, has been quickly and readily adopted in the educational organisation as a result of the new IT culture and the highly educated staff. As a result, email messaging has replaced much face-to-face and telephone communication. In the manufacturing plant, the new technology has not affected communication patterns to the same extent. Email and internet access is not nearly so widespread and, to avoid miscommunication, much of the communication between the white and the blue-collar areas still needs to be face-to-face.

Leadership styles too are quite different. The 'team ethos' and more consultative management style of the manufacturing plant, contrasts with the more autocratic, oligarchic leadership of the educational organisation and may explain the different levels of trust existing in the two organisations between management and the rest of the staff.

The size and physical layout of the two organisations also has an effect on their culture. The smaller size staff and one-site location of the manufacturing plant means that there is considerable intermingling between staff in the administration areas and those in the factory. Management has worked too, to reduce the divide between the two. They have shared meeting places such as the staff cafeteria, store and bar, and it is relatively easy for the whole staff to come together. Consequently the staff all know each other and a friendly, familial atmosphere prevails. This is assisted too by the fact that many of the staff are long-serving and that there are a number of family connections amongst them.

In comparison, in the educational organisation, staff are scattered over four sites and several kilometres. While there is some to and fro movement for meetings and the like, staff working on another site may be known only by the name at the bottom of an email or in the telephone list. Staff from the other sites, who feel isolated from the main body of the School, seldom attend social events, such as lunchtime barbecues, held in the main building. In addition, restructuring has led to a high staff turnover. A staff that used to know each other well and used to be nearly all teachers, no longer does and no longer is. Unlike the long-serving teaching staff, many of the new staff are on contract and thus constantly changing. These factors have all created a very fragmented staff and a "plethora" of sub-cultures divided not just along vertical and horizontal lines but also along

chronological lines. Most of the social interaction that occurs does so within the individual's own work area. Sub-cultures exist in the manufacturing plant too but the impression gained from the data is that the staff is more unified in terms of sharing management's goals and vision. In terms of both the modernist's (unified) and Hagner's (inclusive) definition of a 'strong' culture, (see Chapter Three) the culture found in the manufacturing plant would seem to be a stronger one on both counts than that found in the educational organisation.

At the time the research was carried out both organisations were undergoing restructuring. This restructuring was however affecting the cultures of the organisations differently. In the educational organisation the culture was undergoing considerable change as the CEO and governing body sought to construct a more corporate IT culture and mentality. These new oppositional forms were meeting some resistance from the staff many of whom felt that the cult of the corporate was not appropriate to what is essentially a School while doubts also existed about the viability of the new, expensive IT equipment particularly in an environment of cost-cutting. The introduction of this new culture and with it the new staff who were to implement it, has created feelings of alienation amongst the existing staff who feel disempowered and undervalued. The result is a fragmented culture with one group of staff sharing the new vision, while another group clings to the values of the traditional 'school' culture. In the manufacturing plant, on the other hand, restructuring and the threat of redundancies, rather than dividing the staff seems to have united them in the resolve to do better and support their local manager who, they know, will always come out fighting for them and their jobs.

These major differences in the way restructuring has affected each organisation is one of the most manifest indicators of the different cultures.

## 4.4 Relationship of the workplace culture to organisational communication patterns

The data gathered from interviews, the questionnaires, the individual communication records (See Chapter Three) as well as the variation in the volume of emails collected from the senior manager in each workplace showed that there were considerable differences in the way in which people communicated in each organisation. It also showed that these differences in communication pattern

were strongly influenced by the different workplace cultures.

The vision of the educational organisation is to be "learner centred and digitally focussed". To this end staff receive ongoing training in relevant new computer technologies. All the teaching and administrative staff have their own PCs and internet access. These steps have promoted a culture where staff feel at ease with information technology (IT) and willing to use it. Email is an expected means of communication. With the possible exception of some of the staff in the despatch area, everybody communicates by email. The high use of email is also supported by the scattered physical layout of the organisation. The much higher volume of email traffic recorded in the educational organisation versus the manufacturing plant, is a reflection of this culture. (See Chapter Five.)

There are a number of reasons why email is far less widely used in the manufacturing plant.

•People working on the factory floor prefer face-to-face contact and, generally speaking, are not highly IT literate. The organisational culture is such that the blue-collar workers are valued members of staff. Accommodating to their communication preferences may be one way of expressing this.

•As many of the factory floor staff come from non-English speaking backgrounds, face-to-face communication reduces the possibility of messages being miscommunicated. Because the socio-cultural backgrounds of the people working in administration and those working in the factory are quite different, meaning is more likely to be effectively negotiated in face-to-face communication where body language and other non-verbal and verbal cues support the message, than in written communication.

•The friendly nature of the manufacturing plant workplace and its location on one site means that the fastest way of getting something sorted or clarified is often to just go and see a colleague. Also, people frequently meet each other in the canteen or around the building in the course of their work.

•While many of the salaried staff have individual work PCs this is not universal. People working in the laboratory, for instance, share a PC with one or more colleagues. On the factory floor fewer than half of the staff have email access. For those in a shared computer situation, to check for or send an email message means having to go to where the computer is located and log on. This, and the fact that email messages may not be regularly checked, also acts as a disincentive

to use email.

The result of the above is that in the manufacturing plant setting, email use is mainly restricted to people in the administrative area who use it principally to communicate with colleagues overseas or, internally, with colleagues who are physically distant, and for non-urgent and non-sensitive messages. While face-to-face interaction is still the dominant form of communication in both workplaces, it has a much more significant role in the manufacturing plant. The telephone does not feature greatly in either organisation.

# Chapter FIVE

## *Email use in the two organisations*

Although email was introduced into both workplaces in the nineties, the different realities existing in the two organisations and their different workplace cultures have led to the development of quite different patterns of email usage.  At the same time, the greater use and dependence on email in the educational organisation has influenced the patterns of social interaction and communication there, and constructed new realities to a greater extent than in the manufacturing plant where it has had less influence. When email was introduced into the educational organisation, the practice of using it frequently as a tool of communication began initially with those enthusiastic to adopt the new technology. Gradually, more members of staff became email users and their frequency of use increased as they became more familiar with the technology and its advantages. The increase in pick-up was aided too by the growing expectation of both the school's internal and external clients that email would be used. The typification of these new practices thus lead to the establishment of new communication patterns and ways of interacting.

The findings reported in this chapter are based on a self-report questionnaire completed by approximately two dozen employees in each workplace and follow-up interviews conducted with a number of them.  The questionnaire and follow-up interviews were designed to find out people's use of email, their attitudes to it and their email practices.  In addition a corpus of emails (see Chapter Three) was collected from each workplace.

In the first part of this chapter email use in both organisations is described. A comparison of the discursive functions of the three corpora follows. In part three the role of email in relation to other communication media is discussed. Two documented case studies then further elaborate the reasons for the choice or rejection of email as a mode of communication.

## 5.1    Usage patterns

### 5.1.1   Email use in the educational organisation

Email has become a major tool of communication in the educational organisation and usage there is considerably higher than in the manufacturing plant. Email communication takes up a considerable part of the working day, as indicated in Table 5.1, and would appear to be increasing.  A study done in the same workplace in 1999 (Waldvogel: 1999) showed that only 50 percent of the staff spent more than 30 minutes daily on their email. This more recent figure shows that that percentage is now nearly ninety.

*Table 5.1*
*Amount of time spent on email communication in most recent day at work*

| Time | Respondents | |
|---|---|---|
| | No | % |
| More than 2 hours | 1 | 4 |
| 1-2 hours | 11 | 39 |
| 30 mins to 1 hour | 13 | 46 |
| 0-30 minutes | 3 | 11 |
| Total | 26 | 100 |

Eighty-six percent of the staff surveyed reported that they spent more than 30 minutes a day on email with nearly half of those spending over an hour a day on it. All said that they attended to their email at least several times a day, and one quarter attend to it continuously. Markus (1994: 518) comments that this kind of collective behaviour is a way that email senders at the organisation she studied "invested their medium with the speed and richness usually associated with the phone." Email is an accepted and expected mode of communication. While email takes up considerable time, most (18) of the respondents felt it to be a time-saver as against only three who viewed it as a time-waster. Half felt that there was an expectation that email should be used as much as possible, and most agreed that email was used frequently to communicate.  With only one exception, those interviewed stated that they felt competent using this medium and that their use of it was not restricted by inadequate typing skills.

Eighteen of the respondents returned data about the pattern of their email usage over a week.

However, as the timing of this survey was not ideal, the information gathered does not give a truly representative picture. Some of the staff collected this data during a week when many of their colleagues were on holiday, others during the week that included a public holiday. Three people gave nil returns for this day. Using the raking method which assumes no interaction between the person and the day of the week, a value has been imputed in these three cases.

**Emails sent and received**

The graph below shows the total number of emails sent and received by these 18 members of staff over a five-day period.

*Figure 5.1*
*Emails sent and received by 18 staff over a five day period*
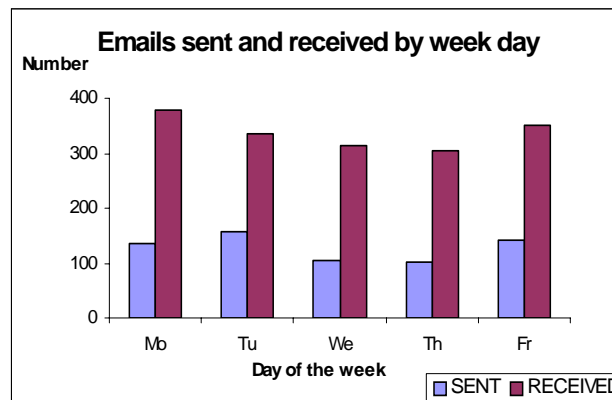


The figures for this group show that on average they sent seven emails a day. Seven was also the median figure which suggests a symmetric distribution. However there was a considerable range. A student dean sent an average of 23 a day while one teacher averaged just one a day. In general, managers and people in senior positions sent the most. The managers interviewed sent on average 16 a day. Approximately 80% of the work-related emails sent outside of the school, were sent by the two student deans and eight teachers included in this sample suggesting that email is playing an important role in communicating with students and their support people.

Over two and a half times as many emails were received as sent. Over the five-day period these staff members received on average 18.25 emails a day, with a median of 19, again suggesting a symmetric curve. With one or two exceptions it was managers and senior staff who were the

biggest email recipients. Those interviewed received on average 33.9 a day, similar figures to those cited in the Rogen Report.

*Table 5.2*
*Destination and type of emails sent and received by 18 staff over a five-day period\**

| Addressee | Received | Sent |
|---|---|---|
| Everybody | 3 | 30 |
| Department/Group/Section | 10 | 14 |
| Individual-Internal work related | 63 | 39 |
| Individual-Internal, personal | 5 | 6 |
| External – work related | 12 | 5 |
| External – non-work related | 7 | 6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| | (639) | (1642) |

\*The figures are percentages. The numbers are shown in brackets.

As Table 5.2 shows, email is predominantly used for internal and work-related communication. Over 80 per cent of the emails sent and some 90 percent of those received were generated internally. A very large proportion of these internal emails were work-related ones to individuals. Emails of a personal nature, which were non work-related, accounted for only about 12 per cent of the total emails sent and this percentage was inflated by one individual's totals. However, it is likely that the figures showing emails sent to groups and to everybody also included some non work-related email. Because these can be very time-consuming, many staff find them annoying.

**Trends in usage**

The amount of time spent on email communication is likely to increase even further as nearly eighty per cent of those surveyed felt that their email use had increased over the last twelve months. All of those interviewed also felt that the use of email in the organisation was increasing. This increase in usage is in line with international trends and continues a trend reported on in a study done in the same workplace in 1999 (Waldvogel: 1999). Rogen International, who have made the first international study of the impact of email, made this comment in their 2001 report. "In 1995, employees sent three emails per day and received five. Email usage has jumped more than six-fold, with employees now sending an average of 20 emails and receiving 30 emails each day." They also reported that executives were spending at least two hours per day using this medium.

Over half of the respondents gave as the main reason for the increase in usage, the increasing number of people with access to email, their greater facility with it and recognition of its advantages, and the increased expectation that it will be used.  Four people mentioned the increase in communication generally, both internally and externally, while another three specifically commented on a change in their position which had necessitated the demand for more communication with others. The emerging IT culture is also fueling the greater use of email. This presents as something of a double-edged sword.  On the one hand people are better and more speedily informed, on the other, work pressures are increased. One third of the respondents felt that email meant they now communicated more with people in their own organisation about work, while 40% felt they now communicated more with people in other organisations about work. More information can lead to information overload with the important messages being lost amongst the not so important. The speed of the medium means too that there is the expectation of a speedy response. Eighty-five per cent of those surveyed felt that it was important to reply promptly to email messages with 24 to 48 hours being stated by a number of people as a reasonable time frame.

### 5.1.2    Email use in the manufacturing plant

The manufacturing plant makes far less use of email as Figure 5.2 shows. Even though management is supportive of the use of email and ongoing training is available, only one third of the respondents felt that there was the expectation that email should be used as much as possible. Fifteen people returned data about the pattern of their email usage over a week. As in the educational organisation email traffic tends to be heaviest at the beginning and end of the week. The ratio of sent to received emails at about 1: 3.3 is slightly lower than in the educational organisation.  A total of 214 emails were sent by the fifteen respondents and 710 received. On average each individual sent 14.3 emails a week, or just under 3 a day, and received 47, or just over 9 a day. However, there was considerable individual variation with the average somewhat inflated by one individual's tallies. Individuals' totals of sent emails for one week ranged from 3 to 39 and for received emails from 11 to 147.

*Figure 5.2*
*Emails sent and received by 15 staff over a five-day period*

Emails sent and received

Number
250
200
150
100
50
0

M    T    W    T    F
Day of the week
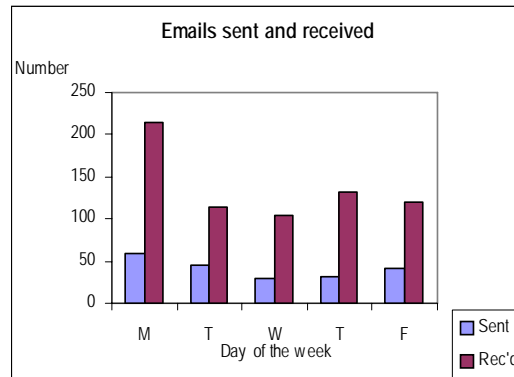
☐ Sent
■ Rec'd

As at SCT, by far the greatest number of emails sent (84%) and received (92.5%) were internal ones. Table 5.3 shows the nature of these emails.

*Table 5.3*
*Internal and external emails sent and received by 15 staff over a 5-day period*

| Type of email Internal | No sent | % | No received | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Job relevant | 157 | 88 | 506 | 77 |
| Work-related but not relevant to individual's job | 16 | 9 | 129 | 20 |
| Other | 5 | 3 | 22 | 3 |
| Total | 178 | 100 | 657 | 100 |
| **External** | | | | |
| Work related | 10 | 29 | 20 | 37 |
| Other | 25 | 71 | 35 | 65 |
| Total | 35 | 100 | 55 | 100 |

Over three-quarters of the emails received by individuals are relevant to them in terms of the work they do. However, they also receive quite a number which, while coming under the general classification of work emails, are not of direct relevance. This includes a large number of the emails sent out by the IT and HR division. If sent from Australia, the time difference may mean that the information is out of date by the time it is received. These emails can be a source of annoyance, particularly for people who work four days on, four days off and come back to find a large number of messages awaiting their attention, many of which are irrelevant. One respondent, while acknowledging that IT emails needed to be sent, estimated that only about 1 in 50 of these would apply to him. As one person commented, the danger with receiving a lot of irrelevant emails is that there may be a tendency to ignore many of them, some of which may need to be read. Unlike at SCT, most of the external emails sent and received are non work-related.

Even though the figures for SCT were collected a year earlier, on average individuals surveyed at that organisation sent and received more than twice as many emails per day as those surveyed at Revelinu. Email use also appears to be increasing in the educational organisation at a faster rate than in the manufacturing plant. Eighty per cent of those interviewed at SCT reported that their use of email had increased over the previous twelve months compared to fifty percent at Revelinu. Thus, while email use is continuing to increase at SCT, it would seem to be leveling out at Revelinu.

See Chapter 4.4 for a discussion of the reasons for this variation in use.

## 5.2    The discursive functions of email

Through their communication in a workplace, people are generally trying to do the work of the organisation whilst also maintaining good working relationships with their colleagues. The first of these can be described as the transactional function, the second as the interactional, interpersonal or affective function. Much workplace communication also has to do with what Iedema (1997) calls institutional positioning, or people establishing their status. Most emails either directly or indirectly do all three of these things.

The work of an organisation that is conducted through email seems to be mainly to do with
1. passing on information
   XL. to keep people informed
   XLI.    to provide a reason for a directive
   XLII.    to ask for advice
2. seeking information
3. requesting either directly or indirectly that something be done.

Emails are also used to express thanks although this is often linked to one of the other functions listed above, and, to a lesser extent, to make a commitment to do something.

In spite of its weaknesses (see below), Speech act theory provided a suitable framework for analysing in detail these communicative functions of email.

### 5.2.1 Developing a classification system

In developing a functional speech act classification the above-mentioned seemed to be the main categories to concentrate on. The aim was to keep the categorisation simple while also enabling the different functions to be clearly shown with the aim of providing some quantitative data showing the uses to which email is put in the workplace.

As it is not possible to know in most instances what the perlocutionary effect of an email is, or its effect on the thoughts and actions of the reader, the functions are mainly based on what it is reasonable to infer that the sender intends to achieve by making a particular utterance in a particular context. This, the illocutionary point, is deemed to be the most important point of an utterance (Allan 1998).

Taking all of the above into consideration the email messages were coded using the following speech act functions:

XLIII.  *Information giving:* This category corresponds to Searle's representatives. (See 3.1.2.)

XLIV.  *Directives:* All speech acts where someone is being asked to do something apart from giving information are classified as directives. This category only partly corresponds to Searle's category of directive as it does not include information seeking questions or invitations. While information seeking can be considered a directive, it was given its own category as it was felt useful to separate this very prominent email function out from other directives to see just how important a role email plays in this. Invitations too have also been classified separately. The classification criteria for the category of directives and information seeking questions used here are discussed fully in Chapter 8 Directives.

Directives were further subdivided into direct and indirect. The distinction between direct and indirect is based on that given by Searle (1979 cited in Allan 1998). According to Searle an indirect speech act is one in which the Speaker performs one illocutionary act but intends the hearer to infer another illocution by relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic.

*3. Information requests:* This mainly covers questions seeking information, advice or an opinion.

**e.g. AC 13a**
Advice please?

*4. Invitations:* These are a subset of Searle's directives. They have no persuasive force and do not benefit the writer. Rather they appear to be of more benefit to the reader whose participation they invite. They give the reader an option and suggest to the reader that they could do something if it is of benefit to them.

**e.g. AC15a**
Feel free to contact me if you need help.

*5. Commissives:* This corresponds to Searle's category. They commit the speaker to some future course of action e.g. offering, promising, volunteering etc.

*6. Expressives*: According to Searle these commit the speaker to the expression of a psychological state. Reiss (1985) says their extra-linguistic function is to convey the feelings and attitudes of speakers towards hearers. They have social-interactive values. *Thanks* is counted as an expressive if it does serve the function of thanking and is not just being used as part of a ritual close. For example, in the following message as *Thanks* does not seem to be related to anything in the message, it is considered just a ritual close and thus not counted as an expressive.

**AC11**
Subject: Temporary phone.
Hi folks,
I am temporarily located on Ext. 8672
Thanks
Michael

In his taxonomy Searle included also Declarations. (See 3.1.2.) This category has not been included here as the data collection contained no examples of Declarations.

## Critique of speech act theory

Reiss (1985) sees the strong points of Searle's classification as being that it provides a finite economy of classification and associates illocutionary types with typical functions. However, it has been criticised on the grounds that it is rule bound and excludes references to the perlocutionary effects, or the effects the utterance has on the thoughts and actions of the listener, as opposed to the intentions a speaker expresses in speaking (Thomas: 1995). Various other taxonomies have been proposed for classifying speech acts using slightly different criteria. Bach and Harnish (1979), for

example, use all of Searle's criteria except direction of fit and give prominence to the speaker's psychological state or attitude, while Allan (1998) uses hearer's evaluations.

A problem with the theory that Stubbs (1983:153) has pointed out is that speakers can perform speech acts without overtly indicating what they are doing. The illocutionary force of many speech acts is context dependent. However, with this data it was possible to overcome this shortcoming to a large extent and Speech act theory has proved very useful for this analysis as it has provided a methodology to identify the communicative functions of the messages. To help reduce some of the arbitrariness that there could be in the interpretation of speech acts, the key person was asked to note what they saw as being the main function of the emails they received and sent. For emails written by other writers, classification was based on the perlocutionary effect, if there was a responsive message, and in some cases on informant knowledge. As a participant observer in the white-collar workplace, I knew the contextual background of many of the messages. In the other workplace, follow-up discussions with some of the participants helped fill in the contextual background of many of the messages and how they should be interpreted. Assuming that such processes take us close to what participants understood as the meaning of a message, this left just a small number of messages where a best guess finally had to be made.

**Multifunctionality and coding difficulties**

While some workplace emails appear to be unifunctional, many are bi or multifunctional. In these latter, all the different functions were noted but the main function was singled out.  In many instances the main function was clear from the context. In some it was not. Where the main function was not immediately obvious, it was deduced from follow-up interviews with the sender, from previous messages if the message was part of a chain, or, where there was a response, from the sender's response. In some instances a best guess, based on my own reading of the context and situation has had to prevail. This serves to illustrate that even quantitative data is often not completely objective as the analyst's subjectivity may be needed in the classification process.

Where there was uncertainty over whether the main function was to give information or to make some kind of request, the main function has been shown as being to give information if it was felt that the receiver would have met the request regardless. The following message chain provides an

example of this.

*AC91b.*
Subject: re Monday
Colin
I'm sorry but I will  have to miss SMG meeting on Monday as I have a medical appointment in at 10. I will be back after that and will get the info from Larry.
Christina

*AC91c*
Subject: Re: re Monday
Ok that's fine. Would like to chat with you sometime Mon/Tues if possible.
Colin

*AC91d*
Subject: Re: re Monday
Colin
Probably Tues would be better – I don't have any appointments that morning at this stage so let me know when you're free.
Christina

In AC91d, as the receiver was likely to have contacted the sender anyway to arrange an appointment, the main function of this email is shown as giving information about availability rather than requesting an appointment time. This email could also be considered to be multifunctional as, in addition to giving and requesting information, through its use of first names, it also does some relationship building.

On the other hand, where information is given to inform a directive and prepare the ground for it, the directive is seen as being the major function.

### 5.2.2    Topics and issues

Apart from speech act functions, another aspect of looking at the role of email is to see how many topics and or issues are dealt with in the course of a day or week using this medium. This immediately raises the question of what constitutes a topic and what an issue.

While there are numerous references to the word 'topic' in the literature and various attempts have been made to define what it is (Bublitz 1988, Brown and Yule 1983 cited in Wardhaugh 1998,

Levinson 1983), these are all in relation to spoken interaction. Thus Brown and Yule state: "it is a feature of a lot of conversations that 'topics' are not fixed beforehand but are negotiated in the process of conversing." Topic is generally seen as being the recognizable core or substance of a conversation or what is being talked about. "Topic is a category distinguishable from individual contributions to the conversation and superordinate to them. It holds the attention of the participants in the conversation and provides the framework for the contents of their contribution." (Bublitz: 25) Bublitz distinguishes between a topic subject and a discourse topic. The latter refers not only to the subject of the conversation but also to what is done with it. A discourse topic is thus "the complex entity formed by the speech act and the subject linked to it." (Bublitz:25) Levinson (1983:313) discusses topic in relation to reference. "A and B are talking about the same topic if they are talking about the same things or sets of referents….or about the same or linked concepts." Topic is often discussed too in terms of topic control, topic maintenance and topic shift. (Hanak 1998, Ng and Bradac 1993, Holmes and Stubbe 2003).

Unlike topic, issue is not treated in the literature but, for the purposes of this research, it was useful to make a distinction. The Collins English Dictionary (1986) defines an issue, in a context relevant to this study, as:

> *1. a topic of interest or discussion  2. an important subject requiring a decision*

As synonyms for issue, Collins New World Thesaurus (1979) lists the following: *point, matter, problem, concern, point in question, matter of contention, argument, point of departure.*

For topic it gives: *question, theme, subject, text, thesis, theorem, material, proposition, resolution, motion, argument, field of inquiry, point, point in question, matter, matter in hand, moot point, affair, division, head, issue.*

While there is considerable overlap, synonyms for issue that are not listed amongst those for topic are: matter of contention, point of departure. The latter synonym suggests that an issue is something ongoing; the former, that unlike topic an issue is not neutral.  This idea is reinforced by the verbs that frequently collocate with issue. Whereas we talk about a subject, we address or deal with an issue. Both of these verbs suggest applying oneself to a task. This involves a greater degree of engagement than just talking about. Using the above as a basis, for the purposes of this research, I

have ascribed the following working definitions to these two terms:

*Topic* –the subject of the email text as defined either by the subject line or by asking the question, "What is being talked about?" Topic tends to be neutral. It involves such speech acts as telling and asking. Unlike spoken interaction where there may be some negotiation of the topic, the writer of an email message sets the topic by writing it in the subject line. The recipient has only to press the reply button to 'maintain' the topic and remain in the 'conversation.' The technology facilitates topic maintenance by automatically inserting Re on the subject line when a response is made. To change topic, in principle if not always in fact, a new memo needs to be created with a new subject line. Thus the subject line provides immediate identification of the topic.

*Issue* - a subject of ongoing discussion looking towards some resolution or action or point of agreement. It involves talking about whether to, or talking about what to. It will typically involve speech acts such as opining, discussing, arguing, debating, clarifying, etc. as well as just telling or asking.

Using these definitions, an issue is taken as being a topic that involves ongoing discussion which can be on or off-line. An email that is part of an on-going discussion is thus considered to be issue-related. One issue may comprise a number of topics and sub-issues. For example, in corpora two the main issue was that of the restructuring of a section. Related to this however, were a number of sub-issues such as the new mail delivery procedures, staffing allocations and the like. Issue-related emails are likely to form part of a thread of messages related to a single topic which is discussed over a period of time. However, they may also exist in isolation as, for example, this one from the Revelinu corpus.

**UL 34**
**Subject: Re Collective Contract  negotiations**
Shiree has suggested that a note be made to look at 14.1 (apprentices) of the contract to either eliminate $1^{st}$, $2^{nd}$ etc
qualifying or have it removed at the next negotiations.
Do we have a place for capturing this sort of note?
Mim

Because this message would appear to be part of an ongoing discussion it has been classified as issue-related.  In contrast, topic-related messages are those which have a subject which does not involve

any ongoing discussion. This does not, however, preclude a response which may be an acknowledgement, an answer or a further clarification. Many messages conveying or seeking information will fit into this category. For example the following is a topic-related email.

**AC6**
Subject:  Re: Water Damage in TC Level 4
Many thanks for the update

A topic message may include reference to an issue but if the topic itself is not an issue, the message is counted as a topic rather than an issue-related message. AC26a is an example of this kind of message. It refers to a proposal which is an on-going issue, but the minutes themselves are not an issue.

**AC26a**
Subject  RTLB meeting minutes
Marianne– here's the updated version of our notes re the RTLB meeting with the Ministry on Friday. I have added that you will be updating the proposal – can you send it to Colin and myself – then when we are all agreed on the wording – we will forward it to Gerald. Thanks Barbara

### 5.2.3    Findings from the corpora analysis

The three corpora (two from SCT and the Revelinu corpus) were analysed separately**.** The reason for isolating the two SCT corpora was to see if the functions performed by email were different in a corpus consisting entirely of issue- related messages compared to one of a more general nature.

**The SCT corpora**
The two separate corpora were made up as follows:
Corpus One: (AC corpus) 274 messages (14113 words)
Corpus Two: (IPS corpus)121 messages (8274 words)

**Corpus One:** Apart from a few emails of a confidential nature which were deleted, the corpus contains all the internal work-related messages received and sent by a key person in the organisation over a one week period. He wrote 66 percent of the male messages and 39 percent of the total number of messages in the corpus.

This corpus gives some indication of the important role played by email in carrying out the administrative work of an organisation. Using the definitions given above, the 274 messages covered 88 topics and addressed 26 different issues. The corpus also provides evidence of the amount of individual contact by email. In the course of a week's work, the key person was in contact with over 50 different individuals via email. He operated in a relatively uniplex network, that is, he related to a great many people mainly in a single capacity. (Milroy 1987: 51) This corpus supports the statement that: "In a work situation members are bound together in largely impersonal network ties focussed around single tasks. " (Milroy 1987: 21) In the following extract from an interview Colin reflects on his use of email:

*…because of numbers, I tend to clear them regularly. It's a real focus for me. It's pretty much constant use. If I'm not fiddling with paper here then I'm doing something on screen. I probably spend more time on screen than dealing with things on paper which is a bit of a problem as I don't get to do some of the important things. What I am doing is the urgent here and now and not actually focussing on some of the bigger things….I use emails a lot because part of my thinking is I can leave it, I can send it, I can go away and do something else. The other person may or may not be there and can pick it up later and say, "Oh yes Colin wants to talk about or do something." It's at your leisure.*

Colin's comments show that email has become a key part of the way he works. In a later part of the interview he commented that he would not now know what to do without it. However, his comments also highlight a downside of this modus operandi. The immediacy of email means that for him anyway, the bigger issues are constantly being pushed to one side as he struggles to keep up with the 'busy' business that email creates.

**Corpus Two** contains 120 messages written over a two and a half-month period related to one issue, the restructuring of a section. The two main people involved were:

●the Head of the Department (Alan) into which the restructured section was being incorporated who had the main responsibility for the restructuring

●a senior person (Marianne) in the section being restructured. Not surprisingly most of the communication, including most of the emails, was between these two people. Seventeen separate topics and sub-issues related to the restructuring were discussed by email which was also used to pass on minutes of meetings and keep the affected staff informed about what was happening. Through the tone of his emails, Alan tried to create a positive and friendly working atmosphere during what was a fairly stressful period for the staff.

Alan wrote half of the total number of messages in the corpus and nearly three-quarters (74%) of the male messages. Seventeen of the other 39 messages were written by Marianne. The corpus contains nearly all of the email communication related to this issue. The few that are missing are messages that had been deleted before the corpus was offered to me. Much of the communication relating to this restructuring was carried out face-to-face and a number of the emails make reference to meetings either between individuals or in a group. The following extract from an interview with Alan gives a good indication of email's role in this whole process and of how it is often used alongside other means of communication.

*Email often served as a cement. We would have a meeting, then it would be documented through word and then sent through email as an attachment. There was quite a lot of that, Also quite a few one liners where someone had an idea and would say what do you think of…? And that would activate a phone call and we'd talk about it at length or it would activate a meeting or we'd take a notice of it for the next meeting. It's hard to put a percentage on it. Sometimes all of the business, particularly at Te Peno, was conducted almost solely through email, in other buildings and then we were getting a response from them but nearly always would then need a face- to-face meeting. So we had one meeting with Lionel Newton from Te Peno here and then towards the finish we started to have phone calls with Sam Johnson because things were starting to go wrong which we knew would happen so then we all went out to Te Peno to try and sort it out. Often an issue would arise through an IPS teacher who would say I've just had this from school X. Look at it. So we'd look at it. Marianne and I might talk on the phone. Sometimes if we'd had enough of it we'd then move on to Te Peno.*

When asked when he would email Marianne rather than just picking up the phone and talking to her, Alan replied as follows:

*All the time. Sometimes we'd just flick emails off to each other late or early or if you were responding to somebody else you'd include them in the loop. There was a triangle [circle] of Te Peno, IPS teachers Marianne, Cath, Colin and sometimes other players in there as well. It was rather a large circle. Sometimes if you were looking at that circle you might then flick something to a key person. Email was quite essential as Marianne was hard to get hold off.*

Alan's comments highlight the very important role that email played in the whole restructuring process. It was used

●to document and disseminate outcomes

•to disseminate ideas and problems and stimulate thinking about these before they became the

  subject of a phone call or meeting

•to keep people informed.

His comments also show that email has its limitations. An email discussion can only proceed so far before it begins to create its own problems as misunderstandings and misinterpretations creep in that can only be resolved in a face-to-face meeting.


The table below summarises the similarities and differences between the two corpora in terms of speech act functions.

*Table 5.4*
*Email speech act functions – SCT*

| Type of Speech Act | Messages performing this Speech Act | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Corpus 1 | Corpus 2 | Corpora 1 and 2 |
| Information Giving | 44 | 41 | 43 |
| Information Seeking | 10 | 15 | 11 |
| Directives | 26 | 17 | 23 |
| Invitations | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Commissives | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Expressives | 12 | 18 | 14 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | (438) | (209) | (647) |

\*The figures are percentages. The numbers are shown in brackets.

In both of the SCT corpora, information giving dominates as the main discursive function accounting for over two-fifths of all the messages. The percentage of messages having this function is virtually the same for both, 43 percent. Corpus Two contained a slightly higher percentage (15%) of emails with an information seeking function than Corpus One (10%). The important role that emails plays in the transmission of information is shown very clearly by these figures which also show a very close similarity between the two corpora for this function.  The second most important function for which email is used is the issuing of directives. Overall nearly a quarter (23%) of all the speech acts fulfilled this function. However, they were more dominant in the week's corpus (26% of all functions) than in the issue-related corpus (17%) where expressives were the second most important function. This was the most noticeable difference between the two corpora.

Commissives (6%) and invitations (3%) occur with similar frequency in both corpora.

A possible reason for these differences in discursive function where they exist, is the nature of the two corpora. Whereas the majority of the messages in Corpus 1 involved day to day administrative matters many of which were short announcements, instructions or quick responses to questions, those in Corpus 2 related to the restructuring.  Many things needed to be clarified and possible solutions to problems explored as they arose. Hence a number of these messages asked whether meetings were necessary and about people's availability to attend them, about existing and suggested procedures and about staffing . As new ground was being charted, a number of messages also asked people to give their ideas on certain things. The nature of the corpus would thus seem to have some effect on the functions for which email is used.

The personalities of the key people also played a role. A large number of the emails in Corpus Two were exchanged between the Head of Department (HOD) and a section leader with whom he was working very closely in the department's restructuring. During the course of this, they developed a working relationship which allowed for the exchange of a lot of banter so it was not uncommon for feelings to be expressed in an email that also fulfilled other functions. Possibly because relationships were more distant. This expression of feelings did not occur to the same extent in the messages in Corpus 1.

**The Revelinu corpus**

The dataset comprises 121 email messages from two main sources. The largest group are from an acting manager who saved his inward and outward emails for five days. A smaller group came from a senior person in the organisation who saved all the emails he received and sent related to an issue to do with a product item. In addition there are a few emails from two people who recorded all their communications for one day. This included saving the day's emails. There were 49 authors, 23 female and 26 male. Two males, the acting manager and the senior person, wrote over 30% of the messages. The other authors each wrote between one and four messages. The relatively small size of this corpus reflects the more limited use made of email at Revelinu.

The emails in this dataset covered 57 topics including 30 issues.  The average message length was

79 words. The table below shows the results of a speech act analysis of this dataset compared to the SCT corpus.

Table 5.5
*A comparison of email speech act functions in the two organisations*

| Speech Act | SCT Corpora | Revelinu Corpus |
|---|---|---|
| Information giving | | |
| Information seeking | | |
| Directives | | |
| Invitations | | |
| Commissives | | |
| Expressives | | |
| Total | | |

*The figures are percentages. The numbers are shown in brackets.

Here, as in the educational organisation information giving stands out as the main use of email. It accounted for nearly half (47%) of all the speech acts contained in this corpus and was the main function of a third of all the messages. Information seeking made up another eleven percent. In second place and comprising 20% of the speech acts and main function, is the issuing of directives. Invitations, expressives and commissives together made up the remaining 22%, each accounting for between seven to eight percent of the total. However, where such a speech act was part of an email message, in nearly 99 percent of cases it was not the prime function.

### 5.2.4    The two organisations compared

*1. Discourse functions:* In terms of discourse functions, in this particular dataset there is little difference between the two organisations. The percentage figures, in fact, show a close similarity. In both, the seeking and transmission of information clearly dominates accounting for over half of the total number of messages, 54% in the educational organisation and 58% in the manufacturing plant. In the latter, because there was a slightly higher percentage of information giving messages, there were percentage wise slightly fewer directives and expressives. The organisational culture thus seems to have little effect on the purposes for which email is used.

*2. Multifunctional emails***:** The complexity of emails is reflected in part by the multi-tasking that many of them do. An analysis of the number of discourse functions carried out by each email shows that many email messages are bi and even multi-functional.

*Table 5.6*
*Number of functions performed by an email*

|  | Corpus One | Corpus Two | Combined SCT Corpora | Revelinu Corpus |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unifunctional |  |  |  |  |
| Bifunctional |  |  |  |  |
| Multifunctional |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

*The figures are percentages. The numbers are shown in brackets.

In the SCT corpora approximately one half (48%) of all the emails performed just one function. There was a slightly higher percentage of these in the first (49%) than in the second (42%) corpus. Approximately the same proportion were bifunctional (44% Corpus One, 42% Corpus Two) but there were more than twice as many multifunctional ones in the second corpus compared to the first probably because some quite complex matters were being dealt with.

In Corpus 1, the AC corpus, probably reflecting the nature of the corpus where, as previously mentioned many of the messages were short announcements, instructions or quick responses to questions, there were very few multi-functional emails.The most frequently occurring type of multi-functional message was that which gave information, issued a directive and expressed a feeling, usually appreciation. These accounted for about 20% of the multi-functional messages. In the IPS corpus the most frequently occurring combination of functions was giving information, asking for information and expressing a feeling. Approximately a third of the multi-functional messages had these discursive functions, while almost the same number gave information, issued a directive or a commitment and expressed a feeling. In the Revelinu corpus, there was another slightly different combination of functions in the most common type of multi-functional messages. This one gave information, issued a directive and made a commitment.

The statistics do not, however, show the richness of an email message which can fulfil many functions at the same time. In addition to their transactional functions many of the messages also convey social or affective meaning which is not fully  accounted for in the analysis of discursive functions. This is done by means of greetings, which set the tone of the email (see Chapter 7), by mitigators (see Chapter 8), and through the direct expression of feelings. Social and affective meaning is also conveyed by the absence of these linguistic features. It is largely through this affective function that the interaction is negotiated and that people's roles and identities are constructed and expressed and the interpersonal relationship between them and their addressees constructed, modified or reconfirmed. The following example from the SCT corpus illustrates this complexity of function and meaning.

**AC68**
*Subject:  temporary office*
Leah
I have discussed with Sheila, Fay and Barbara and there is agreement for you to move into former office and until the end of term depending on what needs to be done and the changes to accommodation.
Please do so immediately.
I don't know who to send a message to to explain why this move is taking place, so maybe someone could advise me please.  I do not wish to send to "everyone".  Is there a distribution list somewhere???

 Spencer -Leah heeds her computer and phone as well.  Could this all be "done".
Thanks
Colin

With this short email message Colin is doing the following:

- telling Leah he has acted on the issue and reporting progress to her

- directing her to move immediately

- seeking information (who needs to be informed about the move)

- showing he is mindful of people's time– (he doesn't want to bother people with irrelevant information)

- making a request of Spencer and at the same time letting Leah know that things are happening

- doing some relational work (thanks Spencer in anticipation)

- indicating his status and position by the way in which he issues his directives. He gets straight to the point and uses the imperative form in his directive to Leah. While his directive to Spencer is somewhat softened by the use of 'could' it has clear directive force. Both directives suggest that he has a legitimate status right to ask that these things be done.

All of the above are discursively accomplished. Through his discourse Colin performs a very particular type of professional identity, namely that of a manager.

All of these varied functions of email are shown at work in Chapters 8 and 9 which discuss directives and email's role in knowledge creation respectively.

## 5.3    The relationship of email to other forms of communication

Sections one and two of this chapter have described and compared the extent of email use in the two organisations and discussed the discursive functions for which it is used. Email is, however, just one of a number of communication media available in today's workplace. When and why people use email as opposed to other forms of communication is discussed in this next section which gives an overview of the relationship of email to other forms of communication in both organisations. It discusses how staff view email and their media choices in general before a small case study which focusses specifically on two individuals' media choices and the reasons for them. This overview leads naturally to Chapter Six where a detailed case-study of four individual's communication use during a working day aims to help further interpret the place of email in the wider communication nexus and cultural context of a workplace.

### 5.3.1    Email

The increase in email usage has been at the expense of other more traditional forms of communication and especially of letters and memo. At SCT more than half of the respondents indicated that their use of these had decreased, while nearly 50% reported a decrease in the use of the telephone, fax and face-to face communication. In the manufacturing plant too, 58% of those surveyed reported a decrease in their use of letters but a considerably smaller percentage recorded a decrease in their use of faxes.  The main use of email seems to be for day to day administrivia. Email is not, however, used indiscriminately. The questionnaire data indicated that people think carefully about their reader and how they word their messages. In both organisations over 79% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with questions asking about this.

The big advantage email has over these other modes of communication is that it is able to speedily communicate the same information to many people in diverse locations. Among the other uses of email mentioned by people in both organisations were the following: collaborating on documents, making complaints, distributing and receiving graphic and document attachments, humour and newsgroups, clarifying meanings and interpretations, registering interest or application for conferences and the like, pre-meeting preparation and post-meeting follow-up, communicating about work matters with people in other countries and time zones and communicating with students (SCT only).  Email is also used widely when it may be difficult to get hold of someone by phone or to avoid interrupting that person or another person. It appears too that the increased use of voice mail, which removes the necessity to pick up a ringing phone if the message recipient does not wish to be interrupted, is making it more difficult to make direct contact by phone. This latter is likely to become increasingly important. Because of the electronic trail it leaves, email is also used where records are wanted. For a global organisation like Revelinu, where communication often has to be made with people operating in different time zones, email has an added advantage. It is also of advantage here because a number of the staff are shift workers and not available for telephone or face-to-face communication.

Email is appreciated, amongst other things, for its efficiency as a transmitter of information and also for the fact that it provides an audit trail and record of the communication. One person commented

thus:

*" especially when you've got a team to run, it provides a means of ensuring that everybody gets the same message and that when there are responses that everybody gets to see the history of all the correspondence – it gives a complete record*."

Two of the other comments made in interviews were:

*"It's really excellent for arranging meetings. People very definitely don't debate a meeting time to the extent they did with a personal invitation by phone. By email it's more of a fait accompli."*

*"It's a wonderful facility for reminding, coaxing, editing and collaborative work flinging emails around a group of people. You can kick someone's butt and get the result you want without being offensive.  It gives people the capacity to respond in their own time but there is a requirement to respond."*

However, there is also communication for which email is seen as being not at all appropriate. While it may be used to avoid an intimidating or confrontational situation, three quarters of the respondents in the SCT and a number of those in the manufacturing plant saw it as not being a suitable media for the resolution of conflicts or for any matters of a personal or a sensitive nature. As one person commented:

*"I would not reprimand an individual on email.  All that is face-to-face.*

In these situations face-to-face communication is generally preferred although, at SCT, the telephone was also mentioned. In her study Markus also found that: "email was regarded as the primary medium of internal work-related communication, appropriate for any task that did not involve social, work-related interpersonal or personnel matters. The telephone, on the other hand, was viewed as the primary medium for maintaining social relationships." (Markus 1994: 519) In the two organisations studied here, face-to-face is the primary medium for maintaining social relationships with the telephone only being used for this purpose when face-to-face is not available.

As stated earlier, email was also considered not suitable:

•for communicating with factory operators

•if there was a danger of a message being passed on (as one respondent had learned to their cost)

•if a phone call would be quicker

•for communication with staff not on email or who were unlikely to check their emails on a regular

basis.

Just as email is seen as offering real advantages in providing an audit trail, the converse is also true. Email is to be avoided if you do not want a record or fear that a message may be passed on.

In spite of the many definite advantages email offers it is often a second best choice of communication. While managers may prefer to communicate by more socially present modes the reality of organisational life often means that email is used instead. When this is the case, it is important that they balance the use of email with other more personal forms of communication to maintain social relationships. Several of the managers interviewed indicated that they do try and make a point of seeing staff face-to-face as often as possible to maintain social relationships. One person however expressed concern that managers were using email more rather than walking along the corridor. Staff could feel email was used to be directive and to isolate managers from having to front up and make verbal decisions. This was a particular danger during a period of organisational change as email was impersonal and could lower morale.

### 5.3.2    Face-to-face

In both organisations, the interviews and questionnaires indicated that face-to-face is still the most commonly engaged in form of communication and at Revelinu it is also the preferred form of communication. At SCT when asked what communication activity they had engaged in most on their most recent day at work nearly half of those surveyed mentioned that their main communication activity was either attending meetings or having one-to-one conversations, while for another six it was talking on the telephone.  Only eight people said that email and other written forms of communication dominated their communication activities. In the manufacturing plant, nearly two thirds of the respondents reported that they had spent more than an hour of their most recent day at work engaged in face-to-face communication. Only one third spent the same amount of time corresponding by email. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents in the manufacturing plant said they preferred people to talk to them rather than email them while only eight percent preferred email. The others had no clear preference. At SCT, perhaps expressing the different culture, only 39 percent of the respondents expressed a preference for face-to-face communication.

Face-to-face remains the best medium for communicating about complex matters or for anything that has an element of conflict or that requires a human touch.

*"If I want somebody to know more about what I'm saying than I can say in text, that is the body language, the steely eye, the attitude, the sort of care for someone having problems…I feel it's very important I'm there with them. It's establishing relationships with people. When things are very involved it's better to sit down with people.*

**Meetings:** On the basis of responses in the interviews and questionnaires, email has not reduced the need for meetings or the amount of time spent at them. While emails can be used to schedule or remind about meetings, send agendas, get some of the preliminary work done and delegate or follow up on action points after a meeting, meetings, either on a one to one or small or large group basis, are still a major component of a manager's day and play a very important role in getting the work of an organisation done. Nor would it seem that email has made any significant contribution to reducing the amount of time spent by these managers at meetings.

*"I still attend the same number of meetings, the meetings are just as long and there is still difficulty fitting everything in. Email fleshes out, is chat, but hasn't replaced meetings."*

Email can be used to initiate discussion about an issue but this can only be taken so far. One manager mentioned that they had been involved in an email discussion with two other people trying to sort out an issue:

*"Ultimately it was let's get together and talk about it because we'd been running into difficulties with email."*

A similar comment was made by another manager who said things started to go wrong when a matter was just discussed by email and phone calls so a meeting was called. An example was also quoted of email escalating a conflict that had arisen as people were starting to say nasty things to each other on email. Because there was so much miscommunication, a meeting was then called to try and get the issue resolved.

Other points made about meetings were that they were the best way of ensuring the full participation and support of all those involved, that they provided the opportunity for members of a group to interact and to get to know each other's foibles and specialities and thus were important

for teambuilding, that they provided a way for people to learn their portfolios and present them to others and that everybody got to hear the same things at the same time.

*"If there's any kind of negotiation involved or clarification of tasks or role or function or who's accountable as a lot more people have to buy into it. The problem with email is that sometimes other people can't see the buy in."*

In these workplaces face-to-face communication including meetings appears to be the primary medium for maintaining social relationships. These findings are similar to those mentioned in the Rogen Report cited above. It also found that email had not reduced the amount of face-to- face communication required at work and that meetings were still highly valued. "While executives are spending 120 minutes a day receiving, checking, preparing and sending emails, they are also spending 130 minutes a day in formal and informal face-to-face meetings."

### 5.3.3 The telephone

The increased use of email appears to have had a greater effect on telephone use at SCT than at Revelinu. Over 40% of the respondents here reported that their use of the telephone had declined compared to 24% in the manufacturing plant. However, there appears to be much higher use of the telephone at SCT than at Revelinu. For 23% of the respondents this was the form of communication they had most engaged in on their most recent day at work. The corresponding figure amongst the respondents in the manufacturing plant was eleven percent. The low use made of the telephone at Revelinu is supported by the data gathered from the four recordings. (See Chapter 6.)

People's responses indicated that when a quick answer and no record of a communication is required or desired, the telephone is still seen as a better medium than email. The telephone is also often used to make the initial contact or, similarly to face-to-face communication, if there's a desire to convey more than just the text message.

*"If I need information urgently I'll phone. Email might be the same day or the next day."*
*"If I'm contacting people for the first time and they don't know me I would do it always by phone or in person."*

### 5.3.3    Letters, faxes and memos

These and particularly the latter, are the forms of communication that have been most affected by the advent of email. Nearly half of the respondents at SCT reported that their use of these had decreased, while the corresponding figure at Revelinu was 58 per cent. Letters seem to be used now only when greater formality is required and when there is a need for the organisation's brand to appear on the communication.  In these situations an email is not seen as being sufficient.

*"I'd use a letter if I was offering you a job for instance, certainly employment, contractual, industrial that kind of situation where the other person needs a copy of the letter or offer and it should be on letterhead.  It is therefore more official."*

Where formality and speed are both required, the electronic media of email is sometimes used to transmit letters. A formally typed letter from one organisation to another may be sent via email and a back up copy sent in the mail.

### 5.3.4    Channel-switching

Some of the comments above indicate that email is frequently used alongside other forms of communication. Being able to use email in a "channel-switching" scenario makes it a very useful tool.

*"Quite often I discuss emails with people on the telephone. We're both looking at the same email and talking on the telephone trying to get a solution."*

Email provides a good way of sending out a document before a meeting.  It can be printed off, reflected on and then taken to a meeting to be discussed. The manager quoted earlier, described email as serving as a cement in the sense that the documentation after a meeting would be sent out as an email attachment.  Or, someone would have an idea and send it as a one line email message asking for people's opinions.  This could either activate a phone call to discuss the idea or it could be made an agenda item at a meeting.

## 5.4 Factors governing the choice of email as a mode of communication: two case studies

Data gathered from the interviews and questionnaire indicates that people's choice of communication media is affected by whom they are communicating with. To further explore whether or not people make conscious choices about how they will communicate information to their colleagues and what governs their choice if they do, two people from the manufacturing plant, Flynn and Will, kept a record of their communications for a set period of time, noting for each communication made, the purpose of the communication, the medium of communication they chose and the reason(s) for this choice. One person kept a record of all their communications related to a particular issue, the other kept a log for two hours each day for four days. At the end of the period, a follow up interview was conducted with each of the participants.

### 5.4.1 Flynn's communication choices

At the time of the research Flynn was the acting HR Manager for the organisation. As the nature of his position meant that he was dealing with a lot of personal and sensitive issues, face-to-face and telephone were his main media choices. Flynn kept a record for two hours each day over a four-day period of all his communication interactions. These are detailed below.

*Day One 8.30 – 10.30*

| No | Medium | Comments | Reason for media choice |
|----|--------|----------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Telephone | The issue concerned the performance of an employee. It was complicated and evidence needed to be gathered. Flynn rang the employee's | speed<br>a complicated issue |

| No | Medium | Comments | Reason for media choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | supervisor to set up a meeting and express his feelings. | |
| 2 | Face-to-face | The meeting with the employer's supervisor to get the supervisor's point of view. | a complicated issue |
| 3 | Face-to-face | A meeting between Flynn, the employee, and a union representative at which Flynn presented the company's point of view. | as above<br>Flynn wanted to make sure there was no misunder-standing and show that this was an important matter. |

### Day Two: 10.30-12.30

| No | Medium | Comments | Reason for media choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Face-to-face | Another issue this time relating to the relationship between a supervisor and the union delegate. It lasted 20-30 minutes. | To sort out the matter speedily. The issue was complicated and Flynn wanted to show that the matter was important. |
| 5 | Telephone | Flynn made a 5 minute call to the factory manager to schedule a meeting with him as he wanted him involved in the discussions. He wanted his opinion about something and needed quick action. | speed – to get a quick reply a complicated issue |
| 6 | Face-to-face | This meeting of Flynn, the factory manager, the supervisor and the union delegate to thrash everything out lasted 30-45 minutes. | speed – to get a quick reply. The issue was complicated and Flynn wanted to show that the matter was important. |
| 7 | Email | This message was seeking confirmation and clarification. | Email was used to give a written record and to make sure that the message got through. |
| 8 | Email | a message providing payroll information | as above |

### Day Three – 12.30-2.30pm

| No | Medium | Comments | Reason for media choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Face-to-face | Flynn needed information and confirmation of something. | The addressee worked in an office nearby. |
| 10 | Face-to-face | This meeting with an individual involved potential disciplinary action. The addressee was instructed to go away and think about their actions. | to show that the message was important, that it got through and to show Flynn's authority |
| 11 | Telephone | This was just a quick telephone call about a routine matter. The telephone was the fastest medium to perform the task. | speed –to get a quick reply |
| 12 | Telephone | as above | to get a quick reply |

### Day Four 2.30 – 4.30pm

| No | Medium | Purpose | Reason for media choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Email | to schedule an appointment between a manager and an external consultant. | to allow the addressee time to reply at his leisure |
| 14 | Face-to-face | Flynn needed to ask for and give information and ask his addressee to do a follow-up. The information was needed quickly. | speed and to get a quick reply |
| 15 | Email | to send a draft letter and invite any input | to have a written record and send an electronic attachment |
| 16 | Telephone | This was a follow-up telephone call to the email sent above to discuss the draft letter. | to make personal contact and because the issue was a complicated one |
| 17 | Email | Flynn is responding to a previous email and passing on information regarding a meeting time. | to ensure the message gets through, to confirm that he has received the earlier message and to have a written record |
| 18 | Email | Flynn is responding to an earlier email seeking his opinion on an issue. | to have a written record and ensure the message gets through |
| 19 | Email | Flynn's email is advising the payroll staff of a change of salary. | to send an electronic attachment |
| 20 | Telephone | Flynn needed to confirm information regarding a cell phone. It was a simple yes no matter but one that had to be resolved that day. | speed and to get a quick reply |

Flynn's communication choices show that he tends to use the telephone when a quick response is required and to schedule meetings. Face-to-face communication is used when there are complicated and sensitive issues to deal with. As his record shows, there are often several viewpoints that need to be considered when he is dealing with 'people' issues in his role as Acting HR Manager. In these discussions, visual and auditory cues are an important part of the communication. Also, the different viewpoints need to be clearly understood so that there can be no misunderstandings. These are communications that require strong social presence. During these meetings, minutes are taken so that there is a written record.

"Media can carry meaning beyond the content of a message and this meaning is socially constructed over time." (Webster and Trevino, 1995) Being called into the office of someone in a position of higher authority has come to acquire a social significance. At least one of Flynn's communications involved a formalised 'telling-off'. In messages three, four and six, calling someone into his office for a meeting is also used to emphasize the importance of an issue. Through his media choices,

Flynn is also reinforcing his identity as a manager. In communication 10, one of the symbolic cues that he transmits by calling someone into his office is to show that not only is this is a serious matter but also that he has authority. The other instances when he does this also convey this authority.

Flynn is not a heavy email user. The medium is too lean for many of the people issues he needs to deal with. Unlike face-to-face communication, which is considered the richest medium because it offers information from many channels: visual, auditory, gesticular and enables instant feedback and clarification, email, although capable of carrying considerable affective or relational  meaning is nevertheless considered too lean a medium  for negotiating sensitive issues. As much of Flynn's communication is with people in the factory, who may not have high levels of literacy or ready access to a computer, email is often not an option. Also as computers may be shared, email is not appropriate for sending communications of a confidential nature.  Flynn uses email to send information when time is not a major consideration and when he wants to keep a written record. It is also useful when there is other electronic documentation to send, as in the case of the draft of a letter. In the one example of this included in Flynn's log, the addressee had time to consider the letter before a phone call with him to discuss its contents.

### 5.4.2    Will's communication choices

Will is a senior in the Planning Department. He has his own office which opens out into the open plan area shared by the other members of the planning team. He thus has easy access to the people in his immediate work group. Will kept a record of all his communications dealing with one of the company's products. Most of this communication was over a ten-day period.  In all, there were seventeen communications related to this issue, over half (9) of which were face-to- face. Six messages were sent by email and the telephone was used twice. Why did he make these choices?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No | Medium | Purpose | Reason for media choice |

| 1 | Face-to-face | to make one of the planner's aware that a product was to be deleted | speed |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Email | responding to Pam's email | speed - Will's communication partner was in Australia |
| 3 | Face-to-face | passing on information | speed -communication partner worked just outside his office |
| 4 | Face-to-face | making a request - Will asked one of his colleagues to check an item with the supplier. | as above |
| 5 | Face-to-face | making a request - Will asked the secretary to update costs. | as above |
| 6 | Face-to-face | making a request - Will asked one of his colleagues to check an item with the supplier | as above |
| 7 | Face-to-face | Will checks a cost with one of his colleagues. | as above |
| 8 | Face-to-face | Will checks out something else with a colleague | as above |
| 9 | Email | passing on information in response to an email | |
| 10 | Email | seeking information | needs a quick response and communication partner is in Australia |
| 11 | Email | passing on information | as above |
| 12 | Email | advising colleague of a revised plan | needs to communicate with a number of people - the main addressee is in Australia |
| 13 | Face-to-face | expressed thanks to a colleague for cancelling a product and asked about something else | communication colleague worked just outside his office |
| 14 | Telephone | butt kicking – wanted to get colleague moving on something and also discussed something else | used the telephone to Australian colleague to show the communication was important |
| 15 | Telephone | responded to telephone message seeking information | speed |
| 16 | Face-to-face | discussed a product to be deleted with two of his colleagues | speed and colleagues worked just outside his office |
| 17 | Email | updated colleague on a product | speed and addressee in Australia. |

All of Will's communications related to this issue were quite straightforward, as also was his choice of communication media. For most of his communications he is either making requests of colleagues who are working in the same area as he is, or passing on information to them. As they are physically near, the easiest and fastest way of communicating is to just go out and see them. The one time he uses email to communicate with them is when he is forwarding on information that they all need to see. For routine matters such as passing on information or responding to the requests of his Australian colleagues, email was the most appropriate means of communicating. It is

time independent, ensures that the message gets to the addressee, and can be sent to any number of people at the same time. However, on the one occasion when he wanted to convey that a matter was important and that his Australian colleague needed to move faster on it, he picked up the telephone. In this situation, the telephone takes over from face-to- face communication in someone's office, the role of conveying the symbolic cues of importance and urgency. This example also reinforces the choice of the telephone over email when speed is an issue.

### 5.4.3   Summary

These two case studies confirmed the findings from the survey questionnaire, interviews and recorded communication interactions, that the decision as to which mode of communication to use is largely a conscious one influenced by the context of the interaction and expediency. In the main people choose the media which they feel is best suited to the communication task in hand and likely to give the most effective outcome taking into consideration the nature of the task, whom they are communicating with and the situation at the time. At Revelinu, communication choice is largely governed by the social culture of the workplace. The physical dispersal of people over time and space also plays a role. Because Revelinu, is a global organisation, a number of the local staff report to managers in Auckland and Sydney and its IT section is based in Singapore. In addition, senior staff are also frequently away overseas. This means that face-to- face communication is often not an option. Because of time differences, the telephone is also often ruled out. In these circumstances, email may not be the preferred form of communication, but it may be the only feasible one. Management attitudes towards IT were not seen as playing an important role. The Revelinu plant at Te Peno is part of a multi-national corporation and management is encouraging and supportive of the use of IT. Excellent training facilities are provided for the staff. Other factors, however, mean that email is often bypassed in favour of face-to-face communication. (See Chapter 4.)

## 5.5   Conclusion

Email has become an important part of the communication pattern in both organisations where is it used predominantly for internal communication and for day to day administrative functions. The most noticeable of these is the transmission of information which accounts for over two-fifths of the

speech act functionality of email. The issuing of directives is also another important use.

Email has, however, been adopted in very different ways. At SCT it has been fully embraced by nearly all the staff because it fits in very well with the organisation's way of working, its developing IT culture, the literacy levels of the staff and the physical nature of the work site. Its use is likely to continue to grow as the organisation moves increasingly into online teaching and its client body gains greater access to the net. In the manufacturing plant, the adoption of email has been more circumscribed and it has changed pre-existing patterns of communication to a limited extent only. It is used mainly in the administration areas and for external communication and has had little impact on the factory floor. The nature of the workforce means that communication between the white and blue- collar areas of the plant and on the factory floor will continue to be mainly face-to-face.  Email growth appears to have reached a plateau and without increased access to PCs is unlikely to greatly increase.  Possibly because Revelinu has a lower-context culture than SCT, email messages are on average longer and a higher percentage are multi-functional. A low context culture is one where the meaning is found in the actual words used in a communication rather than in the shared context (Trenholm 1999:100).  In a high-context culture the meaning does not need to be spelled out to the same extent. "Speakers don't bother to say what they believe listeners already know. They also believe that where and how something is said is as important as what is said." (Trenholm 1999:100).

A comparison of the two organisations shows that email is essentially a white-collar mode of communication. In both organisations, email has added another choice of media. As it fulfils the same functions as memos and to some extent also, faxes and letters, but has a number of advantages over them, it has largely replaced these. Because it has made communication easier and possible in situations where previously it was not possible, it has led to a considerable increase in the amount of information being conveyed. New ways of conducting business and new behaviour patterns are thus being constructed. This is most noticeable at SCT where email has had the greatest impact. Email has not, however, replaced face-to-face communication as the preferred and most common form of communication.

The data shows too that the choice of the media to use for any given communication is more likely

to be conscious than arbitrary and influenced by a multiplicity of factors including a person's role, the nature of the interaction, who the addressee is, the status relationships of the writer and the addressee, the number of addressees, and constraints of time and distance.

# Chapter SIX

## *Factors affecting organisational communication patterns and the role of the different communication media*

Chapter 5 provided an overview, based on survey data, of how email fits into the overall communication pattern of both organisations, the communicative functions for which it is used, the extent of its use and the reasons why it is or is not chosen as a mode of communication. To provide further elaboration after the broad general picture, specific examples of the rationale behind the media choices of two senior people in the manufacturing plant were provided. This chapter, which centres around a case study, continues the focus on the specific. Based as they are on single instances, case studies are 'suggestive' rather than representative but they allow for a more detailed examination of the particular aspect of the culture that is being investigated and have the advantage of being 'strong in reality.' (Adelman et al 1976 cited in Nunan 1986:78) Here, a case study approach has been adopted to study more closely how email fits into the working day of four individuals. It thus helps interpret email's place in the wider communication nexus and cultural context of the two organisations.  As well as investigating in more depth the reasons for an individual's choice of a particular communication mode and the tasks for which different modes of communication are used, this case study addresses the following questions:

•how much of the working day is spent communicating with others?

•how long is spent on email communication compared to face-to-face communication, telephone and other written forms of communication?

•to what extent are an individual's communication patterns influenced by

> their status and role in the organisation
>
> the workplace culture?

The analysis examines how four different people occupying very different roles make strategic use of the different forms of communication available to them, the amount and type of communication they do using each channel  and how each of these channels fits into their total communication pattern.

The data, which produced the findings on which this chapter is based, came from the recordings these four people, occupying very different roles, made of all their communications on one workday. The methodology is outlined in 3.3.2.

## 6.1    The participants

Three of the four participants are from the manufacturing plant; the other is from the educational organisation. The three participants from Revelinu had assisted with other aspects of the research and had indicated a willingness to be involved with this project as well. Because I was less familiar with communication patterns there than in my own workplace, SCT, it made sense to have a wider representation from Revelinu. Jenny, the participant from SCT, was not involved in the initial data gathering but was willing to assist when approached. She was asked because she was now occupying the position of the key person, who had provided the main email corpus.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants.

**Jenny**

Jenny, a senior manager at SCT, has responsibility for the staff, administration and teaching programmes of a number of departments. As hers is a key role she is a member of the five member Senior Management Group. Her role is also one which is very people oriented. Jenny is very much a 'people person' and operates an open door policy.  Her office is centrally located on the top floor of the main building of the organisation. As it adjoins that of her Personal Assistant (PA) many of their communications take place on the threshold of the door between their rooms.

On the day the recording was made, Jenny started work at her normal time of 7.30am and left work at 7.00pm.  Apart from 'popping in and out' of her PA's office, she left her office only three times to meet with people. One of these meetings was offsite. For most of this day then, she was based in her office, trying to catch up on her emails.  As it happened, she saw fewer people than normal, since many of the teaching staff were attending an in-service day. The fact that she had informed people that she was recording her interactions may also have discouraged some from calling in on her.  However, the number of telephone calls she logged, and the amount of email she

received was no different from the norm.

**Will**

Will is a senior planner at Revelinu. He has his own office which adjoins that of his boss, the planning manager, and opens on to the open plan office shared by his four female colleagues in the planning team. The day on which he recorded all his communication interactions was, in his words, a relatively quiet one.

**Laura**

Laura is the site TPM (Total Planning Management) coordinator for Revelinu. As such she mainly liaises between people in the production teams on the factory floor and upper management. Laura works in an open plan office. Her day was also relatively quiet as she was preparing a presentation.

**Glenda**

At the time of the data collection, Glenda had just moved into a new position as Amenities Support Officer in the staff sales store at Revelinu. Her job was to keep the shelves stocked and look after the customers' orders. She was still learning her new job and receiving instruction from Jerry whom she was replacing. All her recording took place in the Staff Sales Store between 12.45pm when the store opened and about 3.30pm when the doors closed.

## 6.2    Analysis

Emails and telephone conversations did not present any quantification problems. Face-to-face interactions, however, raised issues of where to draw boundaries when talk was superficially continuous, or when long pauses appeared in interaction between just two people.

The following method was adopted to resolve such issues. A meeting was counted as one interaction with each of the people attending.  For other face-to-face interactions, one interaction was deemed to be an exchange with a person which came to an end when one of the interlocutors moved away or started interacting with someone else. The moving away or interaction with someone else was seen as creating a termination, either temporary or permanent, to the

interaction. For the purposes of timing an interaction, a person was considered to be still participating in the interaction as long as s/he was contributing in some way, either through an interjection, a comment or laughter. In the store, for example, there were frequent intermittent exchanges between Jerry and Glenda when no customers were present. A comment was often followed by a period of silence which was then interrupted by another exchange of comments. As long as the participants appeared to be continuing the same conversation, their comments were judged as part of one exchange. Only the actual verbal interactions were timed.

*Table 6.1*
*Recorded interactions*

| Name | Emails | | | Telephone calls | | | Face-to-face | Interactions | |
|------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | Sent | Rec'd | Time | Sent | Recd | Time | No | Time | Addressees |
| Will | 4 | 23 | | 1 | | 01m | 31 | 1h.46m | 10 |
| Laura | 2 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 20m | 23 | 1h.59m. | 18 |
| Glenda | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | 01m | 59 | 1h.17m. | 24 |
| Jenny | 24 | 38 | 2h.47m* | 0 | 5 | 17m | 57 | 4h. 45m | 33 |

*Times have been rounded to the nearest minute

*Figure 6.1*
*Time spent communicating using the different communication modes*

*As neither Will and Laura timed their email interactions, the times recorded for them are based on their lowest estimate of the amount of time they typically spend on email communication in a day.

## 6.3    Factors affecting organisational communication patterns

As both Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1 show, the communication patterns of the participants varied considerably. The analysis suggests that the main factors responsible for this variation are:

XLV.    the specific workplace culture

XLVI.    the person's status in the organisation

XLVII. the person's role in the organisation

### 6.3.1 Workplace culture

The workplace and its culture seem to have a considerable effect on the mode of communication used. As previously discussed (Chapters 4 and 5) there is a much greater use of email in the educational organisation, the vision of which is to be 'learner centred and digitally focussed' and which is developing an IT culture, than in the manufacturing plant where the majority of the staff work on the factory floor and are not very IT literate. Although Jenny is very much 'a people person' and prefers face-to-face communication, the number of emails she sends and receives in a working day is, in part, a reflection of the culture of her workplace where there is an expectation that email will be used. The combined total of email interactions of the three Revelinu participants is far fewer than for Jenny alone, and this is in large part too, a reflection of the culture of that particular workplace.

### 6.3.2 Status in the organisation

On the basis of this data, status seems to affect not only the amount, but also to some extent the type of communication a person engages in. Jenny, the person of highest status, engaged in more than twice the number of interactions of the next highest ranked participants, and addressed considerably more than twice as many people as either Laura or Will. She also spent significantly more time communicating with other people. Her use of email was over twice that of Will who recorded the next highest pattern of email usage. Whereas the work emails received by Will and Laura were all from other people working within the organisation, a number of Jenny's emails came from outside. Her high status position means that she needs to communicate with people outside the organisation, and vice-versa.

As only four people were involved in the data collection, of whom only one was from a senior management area, it is not possible to generalise, but if the pattern for Jenny is typical of that of other people in senior management, status also seems to affect the number of people with whom one communicates. Over two thirds of the time that Jenny spent in face-to-face communication

(68%), she was talking to other people who held quite senior positions, (50%), or with her PA (18%). Over 60% of her email communication was with people of senior rank. This contrasts with the communication of the other participants, most of which was with other people in their work teams.

### 6.3.3    Role within the workplace

Even within the same workplace there was a wide variation in the extent to which the participants made use of the different modes of communication. This difference can more readily be seen if we compare the number of interactions that occurred for each person using each mode of communication. The differences are, in part, explained by their different roles in the organisation.

*Figure 6.2*
*Number of interactions using each mode of communication*
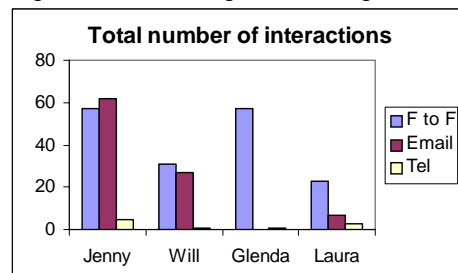


The graphs indicate that the greater the amount of communication with people in white-collar areas, the higher the percentage of email communication compared to face-to-face talk. Both Will and Jenny operate primarily in white-collar areas and the ratio of their email to face-to-face interactions is very similar. Although Jenny spent considerably more time interacting face-to -face than by email, she interacted with a slightly higher number of people by email. Her face-to- face communication on site was with people she met as she moved around the workplace in the course of her work, or with people she needed to see or who needed to see her to discuss matters which could not be dealt with appropriately by email. Her email interactions were with people outside and inside the organisation whom it was not practicable or not necessary to meet face-to-face.

In Will's group there is a considerable amount of face-to-face interaction between the different members. This is facilitated by the open plan nature of their work setting which makes it easy for Will to go and see his boss in an adjoining room or discuss something with one of the other

members of his team. However, Will also has considerable dealings with colleagues in Australia and for this communication he depends on email or, if urgency is a factor, the telephone.

Glenda, on the other hand, is interacting with people all the time as they come into the store to pick up orders. Most of her clients are from the factory. While orders can be submitted by email, most of the people she interacts with choose to deliver their orders personally. Email would deprive them of the chance to catch up on the local 'news' as a certain amount of gossip is exchanged in the store as the orders are transacted.

In her role as TPM facilitator, Laura straddles the two sections of the organisation, the administrative area and the factory. Because of her involvement with the factory staff, most of her communication is face-to-face. She uses email or the telephone to communicate with colleagues in Australia or, where face-to-face communication is not practicable, with colleagues in the administrative area.

## 6.4    The role of the different communication media

### 6.4.1    Email

An analysis of the main functions of the 62 emails sent and received by Jenny on the day of the recording shows that email is predominantly used for transmitting and requesting information, especially the former. Fifty-four or just over 85% of all the emails had this, or the giving of an

*Figure 6.3*
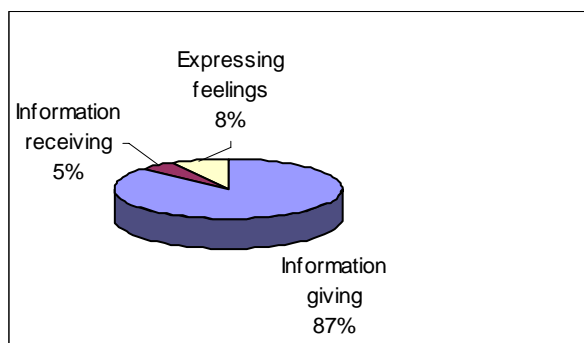


*Communicative functions of Jenny's emails*

opinion or clarification, as their main function. The percentage of emails serving this function was

virtually the same for those received (84%) as for those sent (87%). This information-giving role is also reflected in the number of messages that had attachments, some 25% in total. All of these, apart from one, were with the messages received. Two of the emails received and one of those sent asked for information or advice while the remaining five (one sent, four received) expressed feelings of some sort, for example appreciation.

Making requests did not feature as one of the functions Jenny uses email for. Will spends one to one and a half-hours a day on email. Like Jenny he uses it mainly for sending and requesting information. A secondary use is for making requests. Laura does not use email to any great extent but finds it useful for organising meetings involving a number of people and for short confirmation messages. The two work-related emails that she sent were to colleagues in Australia. Both made requests. As many of the requests Laura needs to make are to ask people to present data in graphical format, she does not normally like using email for this purpose because of the danger of misunderstanding. However, for Australian colleagues who are not on site, it is clearly useful to use email. Laura received five work-related emails: one was to do with a purchase, the others were responses to her messages. One of these was related to her pending visit to Australia, another to the visit of someone to her plant. On a normal day, Laura spends half an hour to an hour on her email.

The valuable role email plays in communicating with a large number of people at once is reflected in the fact that this was the reason it was chosen for twenty-nine or 47% of all Jenny's messages (two thirds of the incoming messages and a sixth of the outgoing ones.) Will also mentioned reaching a wide audience as a reason for choosing email. The next most important reason was speed. It was chosen for this reason for over 40% of Jenny's outgoing and 18% of her incoming messages or 27% of the total number. One of the advantages of email is that it provides a written record and this was the reason for its choice for nearly 20% of the messages. The other reason email was chosen and accounting for 6% of the messages, was to ensure that the message got through.

*Figure 6.4*
*Reasons for Jenny's choice of email*

Multiple
addressees
47%

Paper trail
20%

Speed
27%

To ensure message
gets through   6%
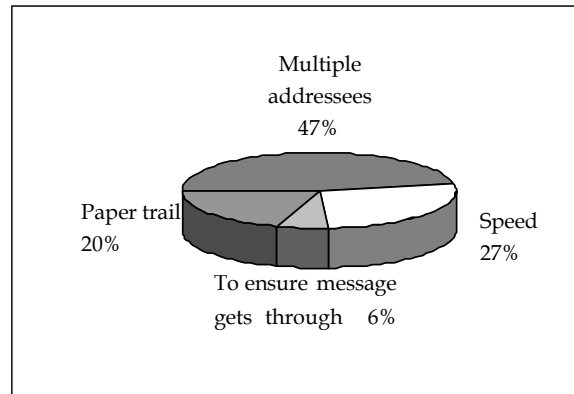
Apart from five of the received messages and two of the sent ones, Jenny's emails were all internal. For Jenny, like many of today's managers, email is an important part of the working day. On the day of the recording she spent two hours and forty-seven minutes of her time in the office writing and responding to emails. However, email is often for her, the work she takes home to do.

### 6.4.2   Face-to-face communication

For all four participants, face-to-ace was by far the preferred and most important means of communication.  Each person working in the manufacturing plant recorded between one and two hours of face-to-face interaction, while Jenny, who was having a paper work day, still managed to clock up nearly five hours of face-to-face communication. Furthermore, apart from Jenny, the participants interacted with more people face-to-face than by all other means of communication combined.

**Meetings**

Meetings still appear to take up a lot of the workday. Three of the four participants spent between half an hour to one and half-hours attending a meeting. Jenny went to an offsite meeting with a colleague to meet with two people from another organisation. At this meeting they were looking at ways in which the two organisations could work together on a particular issue. Will attended one of his group's monthly validation meeting. Here the members of the team pool their knowledge about where things are at with certain products. Laura attended a TPM group meeting where the

participants were brainstorming as they worked together to develop a matrix.

The analysis identified a number of noticeable features of these meetings, including:

- They were a rich forum for discussion. In two of the meetings in particular, those attending were inputting information or ideas, and getting feedback from the rest of the group about these ideas.
- The meetings served as a means of increasing solidarity between the participants with a certain amount of bonding going on. In the meetings that Will and Jenny attended, for example, this was accomplished through humour, while Laura's meeting included the team having lunch together.

In all of the meetings it was possible to hear the participants jointly constructing the talk of the meeting by adding their ideas, and elaborating on, or seeking or giving clarification of points already made. Because they shared the same socio-cultural and work backgrounds, they operated within the same frames of reference and were on the same mental wavelengths. Thus they were able to understand each other, and progress their work. They were also able to pick up on each others' witticisms.

Because it clearly has a team building role, as well as providing a forum for the sharing of ideas, it is likely that the meeting will continue to be a very important part of workplace communication.

**With individuals**

Jenny reported that the fifty-seven separate interactions with individuals that she recorded were fewer than she would have on a normal day. Apart from three, they all involved people working within the organisation and ranged in time from the few seconds needed to greet someone, to a discussion with a colleague about a staffing matter which lasted some twenty-three minutes. Of the other five longer recorded interactions, three were primarily concerned with giving and seeking information, one was seeking advice and one was outlining a proposal. In the course of these interactions Jenny communicated verbally with thirty-six different people.

The close working relationship between Jenny and her PA is reflected in the twenty-eight separate interactions, mostly of an administrative nature, and the nearly thirty-two minutes of oral

communication between them.

There was a noticeable degree of "phatic communion" in the interactions. Phatic communion, a term developed by the anthropologist Malinowski, is that language which "serves to establish and maintain a feeling of social solidarity and well-being." (Lyons 1968: 417 ) Greetings, with a smile in the voice, always accompanied first encounters, and there was frequently some non-work related small talk. Studies of small talk in workplaces have shown that it occurs around the edges of task-oriented talk. "People use small talk at the boundaries of interaction, at the beginning and end of the day, at the start and end of meetings, and sometimes at points within meetings." (Holmes:2000a) Jenny's first interaction with her PA for instance, involved several minutes of small talk of a personal nature, again reflecting their close and easy working relationship. Several other instances of small talk were recorded with her PA and other colleagues. In this 'noticing and paying attention' to the addressee there was a considerable amount of solidarity creating positive politeness.  See Example 2 below for an instance of this.

Some fifteen instances of humour, which provoked laughter, were noted in the interchanges, some of which was occasioned by the recording.  Most were initiated by Jenny and all expressed solidarity.  In this initiation of humour Jenny is also constructing her identity as the higher status person as, when initiating a conversation, it is the acknowledged superior who sets the tone of solidarity or formality. "A successful attempt at humour indicates that the speaker shares with others a common view about what is amusing – thus maintaining or creating solidarity, while also enhancing the speaker's status within the group." (Holmes: 2000b)

Jenny prefers face-to-face communication because of the visual, auditory and other cues it gives, which email does not. *"I can judge more from people's tone of voice, from an oral base."* She also finds it much faster and more effective than email which may take a number of messages to get to the same place as a brief face-to-face interaction. In her previous positions, email was seldom used so she has had to adapt to it in her present workplace. But, in spite of her strong preference for face-to-face communication, the strong email culture of her workplace is reflected in the large number of messages in her mailbox each day.

All but four of Will's face-to-face interactions with individuals were with his colleagues in the planning team and his manager. These interactions took place either in his office or in the team's open plan area. Apart from one, all of the interactions with his team mates involved discussions of various product items. He spent approximately thirty minutes of his day, for example, checking through various items on the computer with one of the members of his team.

Laura's face-to-face interactions with individuals involved a discussion with a colleague over some photos, and several general discussions with colleagues about training for the teams and problems that one of the teams was having. Intermingled with these were a number of mainly short interactions, of a more social kind, with various colleagues she met as she moved around the building or who came into her area.

A considerable part of Glenda's job involves interacting with people. Fifty-seven separate, mainly short, face-to-face interactions were recorded. They were of two kinds:

XLVIII. with customers who came into the store to place or collect orders. These conversations were mainly of a transactional nature as Glenda discussed their orders with them. However, they also often involved a considerable amount of social chat related to family, the recent social club raffle, people' s work situation and the like.

XLIX.   with her boss. Social chat was intermingled with the instruction that her boss was giving her about different processes and products. This happened either when they were alone or when she was with a customer and something needed to be clarified.

Merely stating the functions of these face-to-face interactions disguises the richness of many of the encounters. Apart from the relational work, the discussions that led to the business getting done allowed for the expression of opinions, the voicing of concerns, the joint construction of solutions to problems and the maintenance, reinforcement and performance of institutional identities. The following examples illustrate a number of these aspects of meaning. They show this multifunctionality of talk and the construction and maintenance of social relationships that goes hand in hand with the work being done.

# Example 1

**Context:** Jenny passes by her PA's desk on her way back from her meeting.

Jenny:     J's been in

PA:       Yes just as the ? fire-alarm

Jenny:     Oh (laughs)

PA:       as she was walking through with her friend M was coming to check about the timing with R you know the hour and a half

Jenny:     oh yes I meant to do that with her

PA         I put that/

Jenny:     earlier/

PA:       yeah I put it in umm Tuesday is it the 18th? 19th? something like that and it's 10.30 there was nothing/

Jenny:     cos we've got to check this book as well

PA:       else that day

Jenny:     10.30 I've got that one

PA: 1    10.30 till 12.00

Jenny:     OK that sounds good august I'm sort of working of both those diaries that one and this one          you've got to kind of check  both

PA:                                                                          yeah      yeah that's what I went into because/

Jenny:     mmm, good

PA:       I wrote it in there

Jenny:     yeah check that overview one ok that's good excellent good

PA:       um see the resource one isn't in there yet you've got one/

Jenny:     oh I've got/

PA:       until three that day

Jenny:     I've got

PA:       I didn't know if you used that as your tentative one you see you don't write them in the main one yet

Jenny:     no no I write them in there cos its quicker

PA:       once they go in there they're happening

Jenny:     and it should be happening oh it's September, August isn't it

PA:       August yeah

Jenny:     so

PA:       it's definitely 1 to 3 resources

Jenny:     it's got a bit cooler out there now

PA:       I"ve printed this c and t stuff off but I've left it on the screen so it is printed. That's your Monday papers so that we get a um

Jenny:     lovely ok so I'd better read that

PA:       and anyway M was coming through and cos the alarm had started and um

Jenny      laughs)

PA:       and they were putting their things down and M didn't know who they were so she said oh you family cos you know in your office sort of thing and I'm saying it's Jenny's daughter and they were standing there and C said you'll have to get out that's the fire alarm

Jenny:     laughs

PA:       so they were calm they just went out I think they saw everybody running but it didn't faze them

Jenny:     laughs

PA:       and down the stairs they went and um I saw her outside again when she was going away so um yeah it was quite a funny situation/

Jenny:     they've gone to town haven't they?

PA:       yeah walking into a fire alarm in the place

This conversation between Jenny and her PA weaves in and out of small and on task talk. Jenny initiates it by asking if her daughter has been in and this provides the opportunity for her PA to relate what happened when her daughter arrived. Her mention of M reminds Jenny that she was

supposed to arrange a meeting time. Her PA picks up on this quickly and tells her that she has done this and lets her know when it's for. They then discuss the two diaries. During this part of the conversation there are a number of overlapping sequences. Tannen (62: 1994 cited in Wardhaugh: 295) calls this kind of simultaneous speech "cooperative overlapping"  and adds that it is "supportive rather than obstructive, evidence not of domination but of participation, not power, but the paradoxically related dimension, solidarity. It is motivated by high involvement rather than disruption." Jenny introduces some more small talk with her comment on the weather but her PA ignores that and finishes the on task message she wants to get across. Once that's finished she returns to relating what happened when J's daughter came in and both enjoy this amusing incident. Throughout the interchange Jenny repeatedly gives positive reinforcement to her PA: *that sounds good, good, good excellent good, lovely*. Her use of *OK* repeated at several points lets her PA know that she has noted the points she's been making.

In this short interchange a number of things have been accomplished

•her PA has updated Jenny on new diary entries and reminded her of a meeting time

•they've clarified the purpose of the two diaries.

•Jenny has given her PA some positive feedback about what she's done.

•the amusing incident they've shared has helped build solidarity.

•Jenny has been reinforcing her role as her PA's superior through the nature of her directive*s*

   *"you've got to check that book as well" "you've got to kind of check both" "check that overview one*." and through her commendations. It's appropriate for a superior to commend.

At the same time, because they know each other well, Jenny's PA feels that she can express her opinion about the two diaries in a way that perhaps suggests what she thinks they should be for.


# Example 2

**Context***: Alan has called into Jenny's office and they have spent several minutes discussing staffing issues and a failure to meet deadlines. Jenny is Alan's manager

Alan:…….there are other projects around which I thought have got much heavier loads
Jenny:      Mm MmMmMm Yeah Yes, that's another one of those conversations I'm going to have to have. I'm waiting to get your staffing data to have a look at that as well. Mm
Alan:      Well I'll shoot off and um I'm
Jenny:      alright . How you feeling?
Alan:      Well I'm really pleased it's Friday
Jenny:      Yes, yes it's been a long week, this week hasn't it. New shoes, no not new shoes just
Alan:       Yes, new shoes

Jenny:   New shoes?
Alan:    Yes new shoes. I got them when I went to T. There was a sale on so that was good wasn't it
Jenny:   Oh good. Yeah, yeah I think we are all tired but how are you feeling within yourself?

In this second interaction we see the phatic communication picked up at the end of the business side of their meeting. Holmes has commented that small talk is common at the end of interactions, that it serves a range of functions, especially attention to addressee's face needs and that it can reorient participants to their personal rather than their role relationship (Holmes 2003:91). The above example is a good illustration of this.  Alan has been away because of a family bereavement. Jenny is aware that he has been under a lot of pressure and shows her concern as he is leaving by asking how he is. She agrees with him about it being a tiring week and then comments on what seem to be new shoes. (Shoes are one of Jenny's particular loves.) She brings the conversation back to the tiring week, then once again asks him how he's feeling. She is not using just a ritual formulaic phrase; she genuinely wants to know.

There is considerable solidarity shown here in the expression of concern, in the noticing and in the repetition of each other's words. Jenny is here 'doing power' by adopting a motherly role when she asks Alan not just once, but twice, how he is.  One of the 'male acceptable' ways that women have of doing power in the workplace is by adopting certain roles associated with being female, i.e. acting as a queen, a mother or flirt (Holmes VUW seminar November 2004). Jenny also performs her managerial identity by reminding Alan that she's waiting for his staffing data.

In the workplace, face-to-face interaction acts as a very rich lubricant which can greatly facilitate the work of the group, their shared endeavour. Shared knowledge enables members to tune in and relate to the "in group" jokes, stories and gossip and this helps bond team members together. The following example from the manufacturing plant provides an example of how small talk, which is common before the start of a meeting as the participants settle down, helps this bonding.

# Example 3

**Context:** The supply planning team at the manufacturing plant are having the monthly meeting where they check out if there are enough materials on hand to make the product orders. They have come into the room and are getting themselves seated. Comments have already been made about the state the previous occupants left the room in and the recording that Will is making.

Noeline:  My throat's swollen so I won't be doing much talking
Mark:      Oh OK
Nora:      What's wrong with your um pierced tongue?

Noeline: Oh it's not that. I'm sick so my tongue and my throat are swollen.
Will:      Is your tongue pierced?
Noeline:  Yeah
Nora:      Hadn't you noticed that Will
Will:        No
Nora:      Go like that . It's swollen and ????
(Laughter)
Noeline:  Can we just move on from that?
(Laughter)
Noeline:  He's saving that
Will:      Yeah, good. You've got to have something to say on the tape. Is Stephen joining us?
Noeline and Nora:   No he's going to shout us brumbies tomorrow because he's totally stuffed up his diary.
Will:      Ok. Let us start with liquids.

In this opening sequence to their meeting there was considerable laughter and solidarity shown as the participants joked about the condition of the room, the recording and Noeline's pierced tongue. They also have a little friendly dig at their boss who's 'totally stuffed up his diary' and as a result is going to buy them morning tea. Having ascertained that he's the most senior person there by finding out that Stephen isn't coming, Will then asserts his authority and gets the business part of the meeting underway with his *OK* a word often used by managers as a means of moving things along.

For those able to read the auditory, visual and body language cues that are part and parcel of the spoken language, face-to-face allows for a much richer interpretation of meaning than other  forms of communication. It offers too "the human moment" which Hallowell describes as "an authentic psychological encounter that can only happen when two people share the same physical space." (Hallowell 1999: 59) Without 'human moments' misunderstandings are likely to increase and trust breaks down. "The absence of the human moment in an organisation can wreak havoc." (Hallowell 1999: 60) It is not surprising therefore, that face-to-face remains the preferred form of communication.

### 6.4.3    Telephone

The telephone seldom rang in either workplace.

Jenny's telephone communication comprised one 15-minute call (not recorded for confidentiality reasons), and four very short calls, three of which were from family members outside the organisation. The five phone calls she received during the day approximated the number she

normally receives. Within her organisation email takes preference over the telephone and the same holds true for the people outside the organisation with whom she communicates. Most of the internal work phone calls Jenny receives are from people in a similar managerial position to herself.

Will did not make any telephone calls and received one from a colleague in another section.

Although Laura prefers the telephone to email because she finds it easier to 'read' people this way, her telephone usage is also low, and she made only one call. This was returning the call of a colleague in Australia who needed to discuss with her the arrangements for her visit there. The telephone was the obvious medium for a discussion with a colleague in another country. The call she received from an onsite colleague was to discuss arrangements for the next group meeting and to exchange ideas.

Glenda did not communicate with any of her fellow workers by telephone, probably because people preferred to go in person to the store.

Face-to-face, email, the telephone, in that order of importance were the three communication channels used by these participants. They wrote no letters, memos or faxes.

## 6.5    Results and discussion

The findings from this case study generally validate the findings in Chapter 5 re media choice and media use. The only discrepancy is that less use was made of email for requesting by the three participants in this study than in the wider study. The data collected from the four participants involved suggested the following answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, at least for these four people:

L.  In spite of the rapid growth of email communication, face-to-face interaction remains the preferred form of communication and dominates interaction time at work. The time spent by each of the participants communicating face-to-face was greater than the total amount of time spent using all other forms of communication, and, in the case of two of the participants,

considerably more. In both organisations face-to-face was the communication channel of choice of all four participants when their communication partner was physically available and more than just information needed to be conveyed or a quick response requested or sought. Face-to-face is preferred when an issue needs to be discussed or an opinion aired, when more than just written feedback is felt to be desirable, when there is the danger of miscommunication or when there exists the need for 'a human moment'. The reason for this preference seems to be that face-to-face is a much more interactional and efficient form of communication. One short conversation may convey what would require several emails. Also face-to-face talk typically communicates much more than just the actual words spoken. Two of the participants commented that so much could be communicated by a tone of voice and a visual signal.

Meetings appear to remain an important form of communication when a group of people need to come together to discuss an issue or pool knowledge.

Email was the preferred medium when people were physically distant, when communication needed to be made with a number of people at once, when a paper record was desired and when there was neutral information to convey. This suggests that email has largely taken over and considerably expanded the role of memos, faxes and letters

The telephone was not a significant mode of communication. It was primarily used for communication with the outside when a quick response was required, and, internally, for a quick response from someone who was physically distant. It was also used when issues needed to be discussed with someone whom it was not feasible to meet in person.

LI. Choice of channel is situational and strategic, and the forms of communication used are to a large extent people and context dependent. A much greater use was made of email communication in Jenny's workplace because there is the expectation there that people will use email and also all staff members have ready access to it. The people that she needs to communicate with are all highly literate and have their own PCs. Even though Jenny is a "people person", and will often override email and go and see someone instead of using it, the nature of her workplace and her role means that a considerable amount of her communication

is still by email.

At Revelinu, people in the white-collar area were more likely to go and see someone in the blue-collar area than send an email as not only was there less likelihood of miscommunication, but also there seemed to be a general understanding that people working on the factory floor preferred face-to-face communication.

LII. Regardless of a person's role, communication with colleagues whether face-to-face, by telephone or by email takes up a considerable part of the working day and typically involves communication with many different people related to many different issues. However the amount of communication appears to increase with increasing status. The total amount of time each of the four spent communicating during their working day ranged from one and a quarter hours for Glenda to nearly eight hours for Jenny. On the basis of this data, most of the communication of people in senior management positions would seem to be with other people in senior positions, usually one step removed from them in status terms. Most of the communication of people in less senior positions is with equals who are likely to be members of the same work group.

The analysis thus suggests that the workplace culture does have a considerable effect on the extent of a person's communication and their choice of medium but that this is also influenced by his or her status and role in the organisation. It further suggests that workplace communication patterns and the way in which people manage their communications are highly complex and that communication patterns vary not only from workplace to workplace but also within workplaces. In addition, even though Chapters 7 to 9 demonstrate that email is able to carry considerable relational and other meaning and is not as 'lean' a medium as originally thought (see Chapter 2), the analysis indicates that email does not offer the same potential for rich communication as face-to-face interaction. For this reason, in spite of it many advantages as a mode of communication, it is unlikely to ever replace face-to-face as the dominant mode of communication in the workplace.

# Chapter SEVEN

## *Linguistic features of emails 1*
## *Greetings, closings, and message length*

Having considered the discursive functions that email performs in the workplace and its role in the total communication nexus of an organisation, this chapter and the following one discuss some of the stylistic aspects of workplace email messages and explore how relational meaning is conveyed by email. Greetings and closings form part of this study because of the important functions they perform in interpersonal interactions and because of what they reveal about people's relational practices.

## 7.1    The role of greetings and closings (sign-offs)

One of the norms of human behaviour is that people greet each other when they come into contact and exchange ritualistic words of closure when they part. Greetings and closings perform a valuable social role. Eckert and Mc-Connell-Ginet, (2003:138) describe this role as follows: "Greetings and farewells offer formulas to ease the strain created for face by the beginnings and end of interactions." Laver (1975: 218) elaborates: " the function of the behavioural role that characterises the opening phase is to lubricate the transition from noninteraction to interaction, and to ease the potentially awkward moments of the encounter before the main business of the encounter is embarked upon… The closing phase is once again a transitional phase, easing the transition from full interaction to departure." Laver sees the closing as relevant to the participant's need to establish a continuing consensus for further encounters and to consolidate the relationship experienced in the current interaction.  Whereas the opening phase looks inwards to the coming interaction, the closing phase looks outward to the resumption of social life outside of the momentary relationship of the encounter. To a large extent, but not universally, these rituals of greeting and closure have been carried over into people's email behaviour.  Many emails begin with a greeting or some acknowledgement of the addressee and have some form of closure at the end.

The responses of those surveyed indicate that most people like a message to start with a greeting and close with some parting words. At SCT two-thirds of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it was important to start a message with a greeting and sign it off; at Revelinu the figure was over seventy percent. Amongst the reasons given for this, politeness and respect for the other person were mentioned a number of times. Another reason given was that it personalises the message and by so doing helps it to achieve its objective.T he general feeling was that it is nice if they are there but they are not essential. The following comments made by respondents at Revelinu are indicative of the attitude of most of those surveyed:

*I don't mind [receiving a message without a greeting] but it doesn't sound quite so convivial. It would be nice.[to have a greeting]*

*Some people don't write greetings – you notice it  You're just a bit surprised neither positively nor badly and think that's strange. Maybe they just don't have time or maybe that's just the way they do it.*

Although both the greeting and the sign-off are superfluous in the sense that the format of the email means that the sender and receiver are known to each other, there seem to be two reasons why they are considered important:

- they provide a personal touch and a warmth that it is hard otherwise to inject into the email medium and in this way do some of the work of relationship building in an organisation.
- the type of greeting or sign-off can also be used to send a message of distance, solidarity or expectation.
- 

The absence or presence of a greeting and the type of greeting set the tone for the conversation that is to follow and can be used by the writer as a way of constructing his/her identity and relationship with the reader. The way in which a message opens very often conveys such information as the writer's personality, their status, their age, their gender and their mood at the time.  In an email communication, it is the person initiating the message, the writer, who can be proactive in setting the social parameters of the interaction through the linguistic choices s/he makes as s/he has the first call. The reader, can, if responding, challenge and renegotiate these although this will already be somewhat from the backfoot and reactively.  In a spoken interaction, the 'working consensus' of the interaction (Goffman, 1959 cited in Laver: 1975) is negotiated before the business starts, as

both participants have the opportunity to tentatively explore the social identity and momentary state of mind of the other to define their own role in the rest of the interaction. According to politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1967) more formal terms of address show negative politeness or the desire not to impose on the reader, while more informal forms of address show solidarity. As Laver (1975: 224) says, the choice of term of address is normally governed by the status differential between the two speakers. Or, put in social constructionist terms, status influences the address terms used and the address terms contribute to the construction of status relationships. In a downward interaction, the acknowledged superior can choose to show either solidarity or formality. In an upward interaction, unless solidarity already exists between the two interlocutors, the acknowledged inferior may choose only formal terms of address. In email communication, the absence of any greeting or name acknowledgement can be a linguistic habit, a mark of solidarity or a distancing device. While such an opening does nothing to facilitate the interaction, it is neither formal nor informal but simply suggests a "let's get down to business straightaway" approach. This may be either because the two parties involved in the interaction know each other well enough that they do not need to go through the ritual of re-establishing their relationship or because the 'business' is seen as being of prime importance.

The extent to which greetings and closings are used in email messages in the two workplaces is discussed first. There then follows an analysis of how greetings and closings contribute to the construction of such aspects of social identity as status, social distance and gender. The findings from the study of this one feature show that very different interactional patterns exist in the two workplaces.

## 7.2  The use of greetings and closings in the two organisations

### 7.2.1  Greetings

As Table 7.1 shows, the use of greetings differs greatly in the two organisations. In the educational organisation 59% of the messages began without any form of greeting while another 21% started simply with the person's name. While a high percentage of the messages were written by the two key people (see 3.3) and this could therefore be said to influence the findings, there was no

consistency to the pattern of their greeting use. Sometimes they used greetings, sometimes they did not and when they did, they type of greeting used varied. Only 20% of the messages contained any general greeting such as *Hi*, and of those that did *Hi* was the most popular (38 messages or 10%) followed by *Dear* and *Hello* (about 3% each) and *Good Morning* (2%). Two messages used the Maori greeting *Kia ora*, one of which accommodated to the ethnicity of the receiver. In the manufacturing plant on the other hand, the figures were almost reversed. Most messages (58%) began with a greeting word usually accompanied by the addressee's name (53%). Another quarter began with a name only, while, in sharp contrast to the educational organisation, only 17% began with neither a greeting nor a name. Here too *Hi* found in half of the messages, was the most popular greeting word. The second most favoured greeting word but starting only seven percent of the messages was *Dear.* However, with only one exception, *Dear* was used to start messages to a group. Eighteen percent of the 44 messages addressed to a group began in this way. *Good morning* was used twice, including once to a group, and *Hey,* once.

*Table 7.1 Greeting use in email in two Wellington workplaces*

| Greeting Type | SCT | | | Revelinu | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total % | Male % | Female % | Total % | Male % | Female % |
| No Greeting | 59 | 65 | 49 | 17 | 16 | 16 |
| Greeting word only | 5 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| First name only | 21 | 18 | 27 | 25 | 20 | 34 |
| Greeting word + first name | 15 | 13 | 17 | 53 | 57 | 47 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 394 | 243 | 151 | 121* | 75 | 44 |

* includes two people for whom there was no gender indication

While it might be thought that an initiatory message would be more likely to have a greeting than a follow-up or response message, in both organizations, whether a message was initiatory or follow-up seemed to have no effect whatsoever.

In the Revelinu corpus, where two thirds of the messages were first or only communications on a topic, the percentage of messages having no greeting (17) was the same whether the message was an initiatory or sole message, part of an ongoing dialogue or a response. However, as only 10

percent of the messages in this corpus were follow-up messages, the numbers are too small to be more than indicative. Sixty percent of initiatory messages contained a greeting word (7.5%) or a greeting word and a name (52.5%). This compares to 45% of the response messages.  In these the greeting word was always accompanied by a name.

With two exceptions the messages that did not have a greeting or acknowledge the sender fitted into one of four categories. They were either:

LIII.    a brief note accompanying an attachment

LIV.    a product update information message

LV. a response or follow-up message

LVI.    a message from the IT staff

Crystal (2001: 100) also observed that between people who know each other, "greetingless messages are usually promptly sent responses, where the responder sees the message as the second part of a two-part interaction (an adjacency pair), for which an introductory greeting is inappropriate."

Over half of all these messages, however, contained some parting formula such as *Regards, Cheers, Thanks*. The two exceptions, mentioned above, were a quick query between close colleagues and a message to a group.

In the SCT corpora, 161 (59%) of the messages were first or sole communications on a topic. The number of follow up messages (4%) was even smaller than for the manufacturing plant. Consequently the presence or absence of greetings in these messages is not of great significance. None of these response messages contained a greeting word. Approximately equal numbers of them started either baldly (six messages) or with the person's name only (five messages). Thirty-seven percent of the messages were responsive.  A slightly higher percentage of these messages started baldly (66%) than those initiating a communication (59%). Eighty-seven percent of responsive messages started either baldly or with just the person's name compared to 82% of first messages.

The 20 messages to individuals in the AC corpus that started with a greeting word and or name, with one exception included all those which introduced a matter of a fairly delicate nature, made a major request of a higher status person or expressed appreciation for a major request granted . The one exception was a message where a higher status person was making an apology and explaining to one of his staff, an action that had been taken. In these situations, it would seem that the use of a greeting word and the person's name is deemed to show a greater level of respect and deference to the addressee

**Discussion**

The use of greetings to start email messages is much more a feature of the manufacturing plant than the educational organisation and is possibly a reflection of the more friendly and familial culture of this organisation. It may also reflect what other data about the manufacturing plant has shown, namely that people matter and that staff value each other. Symmetrical forms of address have been associated with solidarity (Brown and Gilman, 1960 cited in Tannen 1998: 262).  In the manufacturing plant there was widespread use of the greeting form, *Hi + name.* The lack of greetings in many of the emails collected from the educational organisation tends to suggest that this is a business first, people second culture and that there is less solidarity amongst the staff here. Many of the messages in this corpus were, however, brief administrative exchanges between people who were in quite frequent email correspondence.

In terms of the presence or absence of greetings, the findings from the manufacturing plant are not dissimilar to those of Crystal (2001). Two-thirds of a sample of 500 emails from people who knew him, contained an introductory greeting. However, in his study, *Dear* was by far the most frequent individual greeting formula. Messages containing *Dear* were twice as common as messages without *Dear*. The most frequent greetings in order of frequency were*:*

●*Dear* + name

●Name

●*Hi* + name

In my study *Dear* was the greeting in only two percent of the messages in the SCT corpus and seven percent of those in the Revelinu corpus. The bias towards the use of *Dear* in the English study may be attributable to a somewhat higher value placed on formality in the section of English society to

which Crystal belongs. A family member working in the London finance sector has commented that in the places he has worked, nearly all emails begin with just the first name of the person being addressed.

## 7.2.2 Closings

The use of closings in the two organizations closely mirrored that of greetings.

In the educational organisation in spite of the preference expressed by those surveyed to have a sign-off, over one third of the messages ended without one while approximately another third ended with the writer's first name only. This emphasises the need to have actual statistical data on usage, since what people say is very often different to what they do. In other words, 60 percent of the messages finished without a sign-off or with just the writer's first name.  Only a small percentage contained some kind of farewell formula. *Thanks* (27 messages) was the most common closing followed by *Regards*  (22 messages) and *Cheers* (18 messages). Sometimes *Thanks* was used genuinely to express thanks for something done or in anticipation of the meeting of a request, but there were also a number of instances where it was used just as a ritual closing formula.

*Table 7.2*
*The use of closings in email in two Wellington workplaces*

| | SCT | | | Revelinu | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of closing | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| No closing | 34 | 36 | 31 | 10 | 8 | 9 |
| Name only | 38 | 42 | 31 | 15 | 16 | 14 |
| Farewell formula only* | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Farewell formula + name | 11 | 10 | 15 | 46 | 44 | 52 |
| Thanks only | 3 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Thanks + name | 12 | 7 | 15 | 27 | 29 | 25 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | 394 | 243 | 151 | 121 | 75 | 44 |

*e.g. Cheers*

In the manufacturing plant on the other hand three-quarters of the emails signed off with a closing word such as *Cheers, Regards*, a phatic comment such as *Have a nice day*, or *Thanks* and the person's

name. *Thanks,* used either as a farewell or an expression of gratitude for something done or about to be done, followed by the person's name was the most popular closing and ended 29% of the messages. *Regards* (19% of the messages) and *Cheers* (15% of the messages) were the next most popular closings and the only others that reached double figure usage. *Regards* seems to be used where more formality is sought, as of the eight messages signed off with both a first name and a surname, three of these used *Regards.* Again the pattern in the manufacturing plant is much more akin to what Crystal (2001) found. Eighty percent of his interpersonal messages ended with a pre-close such as *Best wishes, See you soon. Thanks,* the other 20% gave a name.

**Discussion**

The wide variation that was noted between the two organisations in the use of greetings, is also found in the use of closings. The patterns mirror each other. Whereas a large proportion of the messages in the SCT corpus ended abruptly with the writer making no attempt to end on a note that, in the words of Laver, helped consolidate the relationship or established a continuing consensus for further interactions, quite the reverse was the case in the Revelinu corpus.

There are several possible reasons for the low use of greetings and closings at SCT. One is that less friendly and more impersonal emails are part of its culture and may reflect the social distancing strategies people use when they feel alienated from much of what is going on. Another is that because of the greater volume of messages they receive, relative to their Revelinu counterparts, managers in particular are responding to them under pressure. The key person from whom the bulk of the emails came, averaged over sixty a day. In these conditions, the niceties such as greetings and closings are the first things to get sacrificed. Email may thus be assisting in constructing a less personalised culture. A third possibility is that greetings and closings are omitted because there is an assumption that they are unnecessary in exchanges amongst professionals engaged in a common purpose. My observations lead me to believe that all three factors may contribute here.

## 7.3    How greetings and closings contribute to the construction of aspects of social identity

Many factors are relevant in interpreting the linguistic choices people make. Three important ones are status, social distance and gender**.** The greetings and closings were analysed to see how their use

contributed to the construction of these aspects of social identity. All three proved to be relevant to some extent.

### 7.3.1    Status

In the workplace some people have the right to expect others to do their bidding by virtue of the legitimate power, derived from their role, that they have over them.

In both organizations people of higher status were more likely to be greeted or acknowledged by name than people of lower status. This suggests that greetings or the use of a person's name are seen as a form of politeness and/or as a way of constructing the recipient as worthy of respect.

In the manufacturing plant, of the 65 messages sent to individuals whose status was known, 15 were sent to people of higher status, 16 to people of lower status and the remaining 34 to people of equal status. Because of the small numbers the following comments have to be treated with a certain caution. Even though greetings are widely used in this plant, there was still a higher percentage in messages going to people of higher status. Nearly three-quarters of these messages contained a greeting word and the person's name compared to just over half for the corpus as a whole, 50% to people of lower status and 62% to equals. However, while two of the messages to higher status people started baldly, all of the messages to lower status people started with either the person's name or a greeting word or both suggesting that in this culture, people of lower status are acknowledged and treated with respect.

At SCT on the other hand, only 17% of the 132 messages sent to higher status people started with a greeting and the person's name. This was only marginally higher than the 15% corpus average and not markedly higher than the 8% for messages sent to lower status people. Similarly, while nearly 60% of the messages in the corpus as a whole contained no greeting or acknowledgement of the

receiver, the figure for messages to higher status people was 45% and for messages to lower status people, seventy percent. Thirty percent of the messages to equals contained greeting words.

*Table 7.3*
*Greetings: Effect of Status*

| Greeting Type | SCT | | | Revelinu | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Emails between equals % | Upward moving emails % | Downward moving emails % | Emails between equals % | Upward moving emails % | Downward moving emails % |
| No Greeting | 50 | 45 | 70 | 12 | 13 | 0 |
| First name only | 20 | 34 | 20 | 20 | 13 | 38 |
| Greeting word only | 0 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 12 |
| Greeting word + first name | 30 | 17 | 10 | 62 | 74 | 50 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 30 | 132 | 152 | 34 | 15 | 16 |

Signing off a message is also a way of doing deference or signalling respect and thus constructing the addressee as having status. In the educational organisation messages sent to higher-ranking people were more likely to be signed off in some way (69%) than those sent to lower-ranking people (57%). Status had however, little effect on the type of sign-off used although greater use was made of *Thanks,* with or without the sender's name in messages sent to higher-ranking persons (16%) than to lower-ranking persons (9%). In the manufacturing plant no great difference was discernible in the sign-offs in messages to high or low status people. There was one message to a person of higher status and one to a person of lower status that had no sign-off. The most common sign-off for messages to both higher and lower status people was *Thanks* + name (53% of messages to higher status people and 63% to people of lower status). The main difference was in messages to equals. Half of these messages ended with a closing of some sort, either a word of farewell or phatic comment, or the person's name. The corresponding figures for messages to higher and lower status people were 20 and 12 percent respectively. This suggests perhaps  greater solidarity between people of equal status.  A larger sample might, however, have produced a different pattern.

While these patterns show that status is acknowledged to some extent through the use of greetings,

in the educational organisation in particular they are not hugely marked. The fact that in this organisation a relatively high percentage of the messages to high status people (45%) contained no greetings while in the manufacturing plant all of the messages contained some acknowledgement of the recipient does suggest that in both these organisations either people are not particularly status conscious or status conscious but inclined not to acknowledge it.

### 7.3.2    Social distance

Whereas status refers to the role relationship between the writer and reader in terms of their professional duties, social distance refers to their degree of acquaintance on both a personal and a professional level.  In a large workplace this is a factor of how well they know each other and the frequency of their interactions.

In the manufacturing plant greetings and closings contributed to constructing relationships as more or less distant. Distant colleagues were more likely than close colleagues to be both greeted and acknowledged by name. Seventy-six percent of distant colleagues were addressed in this way compared to 46% of close colleagues, which was fewer than for the corpus as a whole. A higher percentage of messages to close colleagues started with just their name or a greeting word by itself than for the corpus as a whole. Messages being sent to a group were the least likely to start with both a greeting and name acknowledgement. Sixty percent of group messages either started without a greeting or with just a general group name compared to the corpus average of 42 percent.

A similar pattern was evident with closings. Messages to groups and distant colleagues had the highest percentage of polite closings, that is with either a farewell word and the writer's name or with *thanks* and the writer's name, indicating that these closing forms did important interactional work in constructing the relationship between participants and suggesting the attempt to reduce social distance and establish solidarity.  The percentages were 79 for distant colleagues and 75 for groups compared to 65 for messages sent to close colleagues.  Messages written to a group were the most likely to end without any kind of sign-off (18%) while for the corpus as a whole it was ten percent. A higher percentage of messages addressed to close colleagues ended with just the

person's name or initial than those written to any other group. Nearly a third of these messages closed with just a name while the corpus average was 18 percent.

At SCT it was also the messages to distant colleagues that were most likely to start with a greeting and name. However unlike at Revelinu, messages to groups were  more likely than messages to close colleagues to start with a greeting word or a greeting word and name.

*Table 7.4*
*Greetings: Effect of Social Distance*

|  | SCT | | | Revelinu | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greeting Type | Close colleague % | Distant colleague % | Group % | Close colleague % | Distant colleague % | Group % |
| No Greeting | 59 | 50 | 59 | 10 | 9 | 30 |
| First name only | 32 | 19 | 9 | 31 | 12 | 30 |
| Greeting word only | 1 | 3 | 12 | 10 | 3 | 5 |
| Greeting word + first name | 8 | 27 | 19 | 48 | 76 | 26 |
| Total Number | 175 | 105 | 77 | 29 | 34 | 44 |

In the educational organisation there were no real differences in the closings of messages to distant and close colleagues. Almost equal numbers of messages of them ended baldly  (35 and 38%) respectively. The most noticeable difference was in the messages to groups.  These messages were more than twice as likely as messages to distant and close colleagues to end with either *Thanks +* name or a farewell word + name. Forty percent of group messages ended this way compared to almost half that number for both close (19%) and distant (22%) colleagues.

The findings show that greetings and closings tend to be used more to people of higher status than the writer and to distant colleagues suggesting that these formulaic components of email are valuable resources for constructing relationships at work. In the educational organisation these formulae are used to construct solidarity more often in the messages sent to distant colleagues and

to groups than in those sent to close colleagues.

### 7.3.3    Gender

Gender identity is also constructed through the linguistic choices people make. It has been noted (Holmes: 1995:48) that in many contexts females are more likely than males to pay attention to the social and affective aspects of an interaction. This applies also to computer-mediated language (CMC) as Herring (1996,2000) has shown. While it was initially thought that computer-mediated language was inherently more democratic than other communication media as, amongst other things, it neutralised sex, an analysis of male and female messages on bulletin boards by Herring (2000) has challenged this belief. Her study, using the hypothesised features of women's and men's language, indicated the existence of gender marked styles.

*Table 7.5*
*Greetings: Effect of Gender*

| Greeting Type | SCT | | | Revelinu | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All % | Male % | Female % | All % | Male % | Female % |
| No Greeting | 58 | 64 | 49 | 17 | 16 | 16 |
| First name only | 24 | 21 | 28 | 25 | 20 | 34 |
| Greeting word only | 3 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 2 |
| Greeting word + first name | 15 | 13 | 17 | 53 | 57 | 47 |
| Total Number | 395 | 243 | 152 | 121 | 75 | 44 |

Data on greetings and closings from the educational organisation tends to support Holmes' contention. However, it is not supported by data from the manufacturing plant. The pattern revealed by men and women's use of greetings in the two workplaces was quite different. In the educational organisation women acknowledged their addressee more frequently than men and

made greater use of greetings and sign-offs, all of which express positive politeness or identification with the addressee and construct a positive relationship. Two-thirds of the messages written by men contained no acknowledgement of the sender or greeting of any sort compared to 49% of those written by women. Over a quarter of the emails written by women started with the person's name compared to 21% of those written by men. Salutations such as *Dear*, *Hi*, and *Hello* with or without the person's name were seldom used by either sex, but were favoured slightly more by women. When used, they were usually accompanied by the person's name. Interestingly, when men did start their message with the person's name or a greeting this was more likely to be in a message to a group or to another male than to a woman. Nearly three-quarters of the messages written to women started without a greeting, while the corresponding figure for messages written to another male or a group was 59 percent. The pattern was reversed for women writing to men. The figures show women using the addressee's first name or a greeting more often when they are writing to men (49% of instances) than when they are writing to another woman (43%) or to a group (40%).

While there was very little difference between the number of men who used a closing or sign-off of some sort and the number of women who did so, women were less likely to terminate their messages with their name only. Women were nearly twice as likely as men to conclude their messages with a farewell formula or *thanks* accompanied by their name.

In the manufacturing plant however, it was men who used more devices which expressed positive politeness than women. The percentage of male and female messages that began baldly, that is without a greeting word or any acknowledgement of the addressee, was 16% for both male and female.

However, a higher percentage of women than men started their messages with just the person's name (34% of the female messages compared to 20% of the male messages) while a correspondingly larger percentage of the male messages started with a greeting word. Sixty-five percent of the messages written by males started this way compared to just under half of the messages written by females. In contrast to the educational organisation, men writing to women were also more likely to begin their message with a greeting word and name than vice-versa.

Seventy-four percent of the messages men wrote to women began this way compared to 48 percent of the messages women wrote to men and 68 percent of the messages men wrote to other men. As there was only one female to female message a gender to gender comparison is not possible. Women however, were more likely than men to begin their messages to groups with a greeting and the group name than men. Fifty percent of their messages to groups began this way compared to 29% of male messages to groups.

There was no real difference however, in the way men and women closed their messages. Equal numbers ended them baldly. Seventy-three percent of the male messages and 77% of the female ones ended with some sort of closing word and the person's name.

**Discussion**

In looking at the gendered use of greetings and closings, the patterns in the two organisations are again very different. At SCT, where women dominate staffing numbers, they construct female identities through their greater use of greetings and closings. At Revelinu, where males dominate, it is more likely to be male than female messages which contain greetings and closings. A possible explanation for these different patterns in the two organisations may be that the type of male working in the manufacturing plant is more likely than his counterpart in the white colour organisation to have 'old world values' about masculine and female roles. These values would see him adopting a more protective and courteous stance towards women than his counterpart in the educational organisation where women dominate numerically and where more liberal values predominate.

## 7.4 Message length

The corpora differed considerably in the average number of words comprising an email message.

*Table 7.6*
*Average number of words per message by sex and by corpus*

|  | SCT corpora | | | Revelinu |
|  | Corpus 1 | Corpus 2 | Both |  |
| Male | 50 (157)* | 52 (83) | 51 (240) | 75 (72) |
| Female | 55 (117) | 84 (33) | 61 (150) | 64 (43) |
| All | 52 (274) | 61 (116) | 57 (390) | 67 (115) |

*Actual numbers are given in brackets

The most likely explanation for the variation in message length between the two SCT corpora is the different types of business that were being done. Many of the messages in Corpus One were short announcements or quick responses to a question. Nearly a third (31%) of the messages in this corpus contained 20 words or fewer compared to just 19 percent in Corpus Two. In Corpus Two, which was dealing with issues raised by the restructuring, more detailed explanations sometimes had to be given as backgrounding to a request and for general information. Request messages were considerably longer in this corpus averaging 80 words compared to 60 in corpus one.  In comparison, just 16 percent of the messages in the Revelinu corpus were 20 words or fewer. In this corpus messages containing a request averaged 100 words. These messages often included quite detailed background information and allowed for all contingencies and were consistent with this being a lower-context culture than SCT. ( See below, and 5.5 for definitions of low and high-context culture.) The message below is not atypical.

**UL 16a**
Subject: Training WL1's

All,
Here is a draft list of courses for your WL1 staff.
Only a few have been booked as we have been waiting for more PDP's to come
in. We wish to start the full booking process late next week.
Please check the course names and ensure you are still comfortable with
these people attending. You only need to contact us where changes or removal from a course is
appropriate.  (Initially please contact Rebecca as I will be away from 27th March -April 4th.)
Shortly after booking dates venues and times will be communicated to bothyou and your staff.
Some courses are naturally run internally via the skills matrix. Where
there are places available we will add individuals to a course.
(Please indicate if you wish to see a copy of the production course
calendar) There are some gaps on some specific courses, especially the ones we are
bringing from Australia. These tend to be for a large number and will be
advertised to the wider audience shortly.
Thank you for your swift reply to the training need.
Regards.
Glenn.

Not surprisingly, the number of words in a message would seem in part to be related to the number of functions a message expresses, as there is a relationship between the percentage of multi-functional emails in a corpus and the average message length. Messages in SCT Corpus Two, where there was a higher percentage of multifunctional emails, were on average longer than those in SCT Corpus One. Over a quarter of the messages in this corpus were 20 words and under. In the Revelinu corpus, which had the highest percentage of multi-functional emails, the messages

were on average 25 percent longer than those in the combined SCT corpora.

Another reason for the difference in message length may lie in the different cultures of the organisations. Because of the greater educational and cultural diversity of the staff in the manufacturing plant, language needs to be more explicit. In this sense the manufacturing plant is a more low-context culture than the educational organisation. In all corpora initial messages in a thread were, on average, considerably longer than subsequent messages. In Corpus One the average length of initial messages was 69 words. Subsequent messages averaged 42 words, some 40% shorter.  Initial messages accounted for 42% of all the messages on this corpus. In Corpus Two the corresponding figures were eighty-six and sixty-two.  Subsequent messages were, on average, 28% shorter. Thirty-seven percent of the messages here were initial ones, a figure that is not greatly different from that of Corpus One. In the Revelinu corpus initial messages were considerably longer than those found in the SCT corpus. Averaging 108 words, they formed 38% of all messages. Follow-up and response messages, which averaged fifty-nine words, were some 45% shorter.

The reason for initial messages being longer is that in many instances they have to provide the scaffolding, the detail and the background for a request or ensuing discussion. If it is a first contact between distant colleagues, then it is also likely to be more formal and polite than subsequent messages.

In both SCT corpora women averaged longer messages than men did but whereas in the first corpus the difference was in the order of 10%, in the second corpus it was over 30 percent. However, in the Revelinu corpus the converse was true. In contrast to the SCT corpus the average male message at seventy-five words, when outliers were removed, was on average 15% longer than the average female message**.**

In a review of the literature on amount of speech James and Drakich (1993, cited in Eckert, McConnell-Ginet, 2003:115) found that in 61% of the 34 adult mixed-gender interactions they looked at, involving a variety of speaking tasks, men talked more than women overall. Women talked more than men in only two of these studies. Men dominated particularly in task-oriented

and formal situations. The remaining 16 studies showed either no gender differences or, sometimes males, sometimes women talking more. James and Drakich attributed the male dominance of the formal interactions to status characteristics theory, that is that those with greater status expect and are expected by others to perform better.

Research on the length of male and female messages using electronic media has produced conflicting findings. The findings from Revelinu support, albeit to a lesser degree, what Herring has found. Her research (1994, 1995,1996, 2000) has shown that in mixed-sex public discussion groups on the internet, men "hold forth in displays of verbal dominance." (Herring et al:1995) On average their messages were one and a half to two times longer than those of the women (Herring: 1996) reflecting what happens in mixed-sex face-to-face meetings where there is much evidence that men speak more than women (Bilous and Kraus, 1988: Mulac, 1989: James and Drakich, 1993). She concludes that this dominance pattern is due not to the nature of the medium but rather a learned behaviour carried over from off-line social and professional contexts.

However, in an experimental study using psychology students, where the researchers used both female-preferential and male–preferential language when communicating by email as netpals with their male and female participants, Thomson, Murchaver and Green (2001) found that neither the participant's gender nor the netpal involved in the email exchange had a significant effect on the total number of words written by the participants, although the linguistic style impacted on participant's language use.

How then to explain the difference in male and female message length between the two organizations? The context of the communication has been shown to be a factor affecting the respective contribution of males and females in face-to-face communication. "In contexts where the primary function of talk is interpersonal or social, women tend to contribute more. When the primary function of talk is referential and focuses on information, men often talk more." (Holmes, 1992: 132) However, inasmuch as this idea of context can be applied to workplace email communication it does not appear to be a factor. An analysis of the messages where the main function was the giving of information revealed that in two of the three corpora the female messages were longer. In the Revelinu corpus where male messages on average were longer than female messages, the female information-giving messages averaged six words more than the male

ones. The most marked difference, however, was in the issue-related corpus from the SCT where female information giving messages averaged just over fifty words more than the male ones after an outlier had been removed.

One explanation, not inconsistent with both sets of findings, is that it is to do with the workplace culture. The manufacturing plant is a more male dominant culture. Some 70% of the staff are male and males occupy 12 of the 13 management positions. The figures are reversed in the educational organisation where women comprise just over 70% of the staff and occupy approximately half of the senior and middle-management positions. Where they are in a position of relative numerical and status strength, women may feel more empowered and able to participate more fully and actively. This may explain too, why in the female-dominated world from which the issue-related corpus came, their contributions were so much longer than those of their male colleagues.

A comparison can perhaps be drawn with Carol Edelsky's (1981) study (cited in Gal, 1995: 176) of 'floor' in mixed-sex faculty meetings at an American college. In the first kind of 'floor' which men dominated by taking longer turns, fewer people participated, speeches took longer, there were few overlaps, many false starts and hesitations and speakers used their turns for reporting facts and voicing opinion. The other kind of 'floor', which occurred at different episodes of the same meetings, was characterised by more widespread participation in similar ways by both men and women, little hesitation in speaking and shorter turns. Although face-to- face meetings and email are very different media, the same kind of factors may be at work here, namely that where men control the institutional power as in the first kind of 'floor' and the manufacturing plant, women may feel constrained interactionally. "The kind of floor more congenial for male strategies of interaction depends on images of heroic individuality, competition and the celebration of planning and hierarchy." (Gal, 1995:176) The manufacturing plant culture, which enacts the competitive values of the market place, represents this kind of 'floor' but at the same time it does not preclude feelings of engagement and solidarity amongst the staff who work there. In the education world, on the other hand co-operative collaboration is valued. It is an environment in which many women feel comfortable, particularly when they have numerical superiority. This may be why, in this culture, their email messages tend to be longer than those of their male counterparts.

## 7.5    Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that even within two organizations in the same city, great variation exists in the use of greetings and closings in work emails. Does the absence or presence of greetings and closings in an organsation's emails then provide insights into its culture? The findings presented here tend to suggest that it does. Studies of the culture of the two organsations have shown that Revelinu has a culture where staff and management are more in harmony and supportive of each other than at SCT. This is reflected in the patterns evident in their use of greetings and closings. The much greater use of greetings and closings at Revelinu suggests that its staff are concerned to establish a friendly tone in their interactions and maintain good interpersonal relationships. The informal terms of address used indicate strong feelings of solidarity.  In the educational organisation, on the other hand, greetings and closings were used in only about 20% of the messages suggesting that more importance is placed on the message rather than how it is conveyed. Even though in the workday environment cooperative collaboration exists and is valued, the changing nature of the staff and their roles, brought about by the restructuring and the physical dispersion of workgroups, means that people in different sections do not know each other very well. This plus the mistrust and uncertainities created by the restructuring appears to have created the social distancing and low solidarity reflected in the paucity of greetings use in the emails.

The workplace culture would also appear to be relevant in accounting for the different lengths of email messages and whether or not it is males or females who write the longer messages. In the low context culture of the manufacturing plant, where communication is often across groups that do not have shared understandings, messages need to be clear, unambiguous and spelt out. In the high context culture of SCT more can be taken for granted. At SCT, where there are more than twice as many women as men on the staff and they occupy almost an equal number of the senior and middle management positions as men, it is the women who write the longest messages on average. The converse is true at Revelinu where males outnumber the females by more than two to one and dominate management. More research in other workplaces is needed to test whether being part of the numerically stronger group in a culture that subscribes in the main to values the individual feels more comfortable with, leads to greater participation and feelings of greater involvement that are reflected in the length of messages written. If so, than the group that has numerical supremacy may

be the group that also has the expectations to perform better.

Through the linguistic choices they make people construct their own social identity and that of others. Like many other linguistic tokens, greetings and closings encode social information. This analysis has shown that in both organizations greetings and closings are used to construct colleagues as more or less worthy of respect and as more or less socially distant. This is done through the choice of whether or not to include a greeting or closing and, if included, the choice of greeting. In both organisations, greetings were more likely to be used to higher than to lower status people and to distant colleagues than to close colleagues. At SCT closings were also more likely to be used to higher status people. However, the fact that a relatively high percentage of messages from lower to higher status people contain no greetings or name acknowledgement while a relatively high percentage of downward moving messages do, suggests that in these two workplaces people are not particularly status conscious. The widespread use of first names and predominance of informal forms of greeting denoting solidarity exchanged amongst communication partners, regardless of status, possibly reflects the egalitarian nature of New Zealand society. The use of the informal *Hi*, widely used at Revelinu, constructs solidarity, while *Dear* constructs greater formality. This latter however, was not greatly used in either organisation.

Distant colleagues were more likely than close colleagues to be both greeted and acknowledged by name, suggesting the attempt to construct positive working relationships by reducing social distance and establishing solidarity. The pattern of greeting use between the genders was quite different in the two organisations. At SCT women were more likely than men to use greetings and closings. Both sexes used greetings more often when they were communicating with the other sex than with their own sex. The converse was true at Revelinu with men using greetings more frequently than women and especially in messages to women. The fact that this is happening in a manufacturing plant where males predominate may indicate that men are showing deference to women and constructing them as more worthy of respect. In the more liberal environment of SCT, on the other hand, where women predominate, the patterns could be interpreted as indications that men may view women more as equals.

# Chapter EIGHT

## *Linguistic features of emails 2*
## *Directives*

## 8.1    Introduction

Directives is used here as a generic term to include commands, requests, advice and suggestions.

Even more than greetings and closings, directives provide a rich data source for examining how the sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance and gender are actualised in people's workplace emails.  They also provide a means for examining people's relational practice and the extent to which the workplace culture is instantiated in people's email style. It is principally for this reason that they have been chosen as an item of study to help answer the research questions that relate to the strategies email writers use to negotiate workplace relationships and make their messages less face-threatening. This chapter reports on the findings of the study made of directives in the email corpora.

There are a number of reasons why a focus on directives is important in a consideration of the style of workplace emails.

LVII.    Because they are inherently face-threatening acts, directives enable us to see how email writers negotiate workplace relationships and make their messages less face-threatening while at the same time getting things done or accomplishing their transactional goals.  Organising action, which is one of the key functions of a directive, often involves a subtle interplay of power and politeness. The directive needs to not only make clear what the required action is, but it must also negotiate power and social distance relationships in a way that provides evidence of respect and concern for the feelings of others or politeness. In the workplace, where effective relational practice means maintaining connections with co-workers in a way that helps preserve the future growth potential of a relationship (Fletcher: 1999), the tone of a

directive can impact on relationships. A carelessly written message can work against getting a task done and damage a working relationship. It is useful then to see what strategies people can and do use to minimise the face threat of a directive and ensure the addressee's full co-operation.

LVIII.   It is perhaps through directives more than any other speech act, that people construct and perform their organisational identity. This is done not only through the degree of mitigation and or boosting that is used but also through the directive form chosen and the way in which it is structured.

LIX.      Directives are one of the main speech act functions performed by email. In the corpora of both the workplaces studied, directives were second only to information giving in terms of speech act functions. In the SCT corpus they account for nearly a quarter (23%) of all the speech acts; in the Revelinu corpus, for some twenty percent (19.8%). If we add to the actual directive itself, the background information that frequently accompanies it, directives and their accompanying text comprise a considerable part of email message text.

LX. Media richness theory has argued that email, as a lean medium, cannot effectively convey rich information. Writers like Lee (1994) Markus (1994) and Huang, Watson and Wei (1998) have shown, however, that rich communication can be realised in the lean email medium. By showing how email is used to convey both transactional and affective messages in many and often complex ways, and how readers draw on their own situational knowledge to interpret meaning, this study of how directives are realised in email communication further illustrates this.

The questions this analysis of email directives seeks to answer are the following:

LXI.     Do email directives differ in surface form and in the strategies used from
   •spoken directives
   •other written directives?

LXII.    When and how do email writers
   •strengthen the force of their directives
   •mitigate the force of their directives?

LXIII.   What different patterns emerge in relation to different status relationships

- •superiors to subordinates

- •equals to equals

- •subordinates to superiors?

LXIV.   Do different patterns emerge for distant and close colleagues and groups?

LXV.   Is there a difference in the way men and women write directives?

LXVI.   Are directives realised in different ways in different workplaces and if so why?

To answer these questions the analysis has focussed on three areas:

- •the strategies used to boost and mitigate directives and when they are used

- •the syntactic form of email directives

- •the structure of the directive within its co-text.

Both a quantitative and a qualitative approach have been adopted. Examples of emails are analysed qualitatively to support and illuminate the patterns which emerge from the quantitative analysis based on the frequencies of occurring items.

## 8.2   Definitions used

Directives are generally defined in the literature as a class of speech act which has the function of getting someone to do something. In classic speech act theory directives are defined as: "attempts to get the Hearer to do something; they therefore show world to words fit (things are to happen in the world to make it fit the propositional content) and express the Speaker's wish or desire that Hearer do A." (Searle 1975 cited in Allan, Keith 1998).

"A directive is an utterance, which attempts to get someone to do something." (Paltridge 2000:25).

The definitions of Searle and Paltridge are broad enough to include questions, which could require just a linguistic response, either oral or written. Leech's definition limits directives to those speech acts requiring a physical response. He states that directives are intended to produce some effect

through action by the hearer ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending – frequently competitive i.e. the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal e.g. ordering, asking – so negative politeness is important (Leech 1983). In her study of teacher directives, Holmes (1983:97) restricted her definition of directives to those utterances intended to elicit a non-verbal response.

The definition of directive used here, however, follows Searle's broad definition with one notable exception. Questions, which are defined here as requests for information as opposed to advice, have not been included as directives. They have been classified separately under the speech act function of information seeking. This is such an important and pervasive speech act function of email that it seemed important to separate it out. Invitations, which are also included by some writers as directives, have also been classified separately as they seem to offer more benefit to the hearer than to the speaker. The term directive used in this study is therefore limited to those email utterances where the action to be performed is more or less at cost to the addressee. In these terms the giving of advice and the making of suggestions are somewhat problematic as, although often considered directives, they would seem to be primarily for the benefit of the addressee. However, as they are considered by some writers to be control acts e.g. Vine (2001) and they are an attempt by one person to get another to do something, they have here been included as directives. It could also be argued that there is some cost to the addressee in taking advice or in following up on a suggestion. For example, it may entail a loss of face, or an attitudinal or other change in a person's behaviour. However, the divisions are not always clear-cut and in a number of instances the classification has had to be a matter of personal judgement (see 8.2.1).

The definition of directive given above thus includes the following categories (after Bach and Harnish 1979:47): Requestives, Requirements, Prohibitives, Permissives and Advisories.

Thomas (1995:98) defines what the preconditions of a directive are:
• the propositional content should refer to the future
• the hearer is able to perform the act (the preparatory condition)
• the speaker wants the hearer to perform the act (the sincerity condition)
• the utterance is to count as an attempt to get the hearer to do something (the essential condition).

In their set of preconditions Labov and Fanshel (1977:78) included the need for the action and request legitimacy. These are, however, problematic as this would rule out all directives which entail an abuse of power. Also, in a workplace setting where a directive can be given to a colleague of equal or superior status, request legitimacy is not necessarily a given.

No distinction is made between those speech acts such as orders, requirements and imperatives where the Speaker gives the Hearer no option but to comply, and requests where the speaker expressly gives the Hearer the option not to comply. In terms of the analysis which looks at the effect of sociolinguistic variables, particularly status, on the number of softening and boosting devices used when giving directives, no real benefit is gained by making this distinction. Also, the usual criteria for distinguishing between these two types of directives, namely role relationships, expectations of compliance and the right of refusal, and who benefits from the action become quite difficult to apply in the case of email. A request or directive can be sent to multiple addressees who may differ in their role relationship to the speaker, in the obligation they have to comply and as to whether or not they will benefit from the action.

## 8.2.1 Coding problems related to definitions

While in most instances speech acts, classifiable as directives using the above definition, were relatively easy to distinguish, this was not always the case. Where the distinction was not clear, it was sometimes necessary to look at the message from three perspectives: the sender's intention, the hearer's interpretation and my own reading of it. Fortunately I had help with this. In both workplaces, the managers, who saved their emails, were given a list of functions and asked to indicate for each email what they saw its main function as being. This gave me the writer's and sometimes the reader's interpretation of the message while, where there was a return email from the receiver, their interpretation of the message was provided. Context is also very important. As a participant observer in one of the workplaces, I had the advantage of, in many instances, having a degree of familiarity with this.  However, there were still cases that were not straightforward, particularly when it was a matter of deciding whether an interrogative was just an information seeking question or a directive. While Bach and Harnish see questions as being special cases of requests in that "what is requested is that the hearer provide the speaker with certain information"

(1979:48), when viewing some questions this definition did not greatly help.

The emails below highlight some of these problems of classification and how they have been resolved.

**UL39a**
Subject: Customer Service

Hi Swati
How are April & May numbers coming along ???

Regards Mark

Is this email simply asking for information or is it making a suggestive request i.e. attempting to get Swati to provide some figures? It may of course be doing both things. Vine's discussion of this issue (Vine 2000: 4.1.2) proved helpful in making the distinction. She cites Aarts (1989:121) who states interrogative sentences are usually requests for information. Email UL39a is an interrogative which would tend to place it as information seeking. However Labov (1972:125) gives a general rule that states that for a request for information to be heard as a "valid command it is necessary for the following preconditions to hold: B (the hearer) must believe that A (the speaker) believes that:

LXVII.  X needs to be done

LXVIII. B has the ability to do X

LXIX.   B has the obligation to do X

LXX.    A has the right to tell B to do X."

In this workplace situation it can be safely assumed that role rights and responsibilities mean that preconditions 1-4 are met.  Also, as Mark and Swati are equals, Mark has the right as part of his job function, to expect the figures from Swati and hence the right to tell Swati to produce the figures. Since this seems to be the case, Labov's rule would mean that UL39a can be interpreted as a directive.

UL39a also follows Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975:33) third rule

LXXI.   "any ….interrogative is to be interpreted as a command to do (directive) if it refers to an action or activity which teacher and pupil(s) know ought to have been performed or completed and hasn't been."

Hence I have classified UL39a as a directive. In the workplace setting, teacher and pupil could be replaced by colleagues. As the email was written in July it is not unreasonable to assume that the figures for April and May "ought" to have been there. Additional reasons for interpreting this as a directive are:

• the repetition of the question mark which indicates that this is no ordinary question.

• Swati's response as this is clearly how he has interpreted it.

**UL39b**
Subject: RE: Customer Service

Sorry abt the delay - I have downloaded april, may and june - i need to
finish the report for april. I will need a bit more - we are 2 planners
down - so i am at the busy filling in. May and june results are in the
"Calc" worksheet in the CS Summary spreadsheet. The location is:
n:/data/rl corporate/supply chain/cross-functional/sia performance
and targets/sia 2002/june/cs summary.xls

Regards,
Swati

I have also classified AC5b below as a directive rather than an information request on the grounds that:

• it was viewed by the addressee as being a directive

• it meets the command criteria of Labov cited above and Sinclair and Coulthard's third rule. i.e.
As the affected person, Alf should have been kept informed about what was happening and he has every right now to know what his current status is. Alf is a Senior teacher who has just been seconded to another section. Colin is his superior and the principal of the whole secondary division.

**AC5b**
Subject: Draft advert for senior chemistry teacher

Hi Colin.
This announcement suddenly appeared without my consultation.  Apparently it has now gone to press.  I'd like to know where my position as senior teacher chemistry stands (including the management unit that the position carries). Surely I should have been approached (at least by the Principal) before the job was advertised?
Could you please clarify the status of my position as senior teacher.
Alf

Colin's reply AC5c also posed problems of definition. It appears more of an invitation, as superficially it would appear to be of benefit to the Hearer rather than the Speaker, a defining characteristic of an invitation. However if the suggestion is followed through it gets the H off the

S's back and so also benefits the Speaker, and it does meet Bach and Harnish's preconditions of an advisory which is a sub-group of directives, namely:

In uttering e, S advises H to do A if S expresses:

•the belief that there is (sufficient) reason  for H to do A and

•the intention that H take S's belief as (sufficient) reason for him to do A (Bach and Harnish:48).

**AC5c**
Subject: Re: Draft advert for senior chemistry teacher

Greetings Alf
I don't know the details of your agreement with Bob.
Bob did agree that I  could fill the vacancies caused through staff being appointed to e-section so I acted on that by seeking a recommendation from HOD science with instructions to look at the longer term.  I acted on his advice and saw no reason to do otherwise.
I am sorry this happened.  Can I suggest that early next week, you contact Bob for clarification.  I have copied this email to him.
As the secondary Principal I accept some responsibility in this situation but I think he's your first contact.
Colin

These examples serve to illustrate not only the multifaceted approach that is often needed for appropriate classification but also the many and complex ways in which people use language.

## 8.2.2    Direct and indirect directives

Directives can be either direct or indirect speech acts. There are many ways of attempting to get people to do something and a variety of linguistic forms that can be used. These range from commands and orders to suggestions and invitations. Commands and orders often take the imperative form while more 'polite' attempts may use interrogatives or declaratives. While imperatives are generally considered to be the most forceful kind of directive followed by declaratives and interrogatives, context as much as syntactic form is important in determining directive force. The particular linguistic form chosen is likely to be influenced by such variables as the relative status of the two interlocutors, the social distance between them, which may in turn be a product of their status difference, their gender, the particular context in which the interaction takes place, and the nature and reasonableness of the task.

The following example of a message from a PA to her boss illustrates how status differences are

over-ridden when social distance is low and supports Wolfson's 'bulge model' of interaction.(1988) Wolfson suggests that people who are close to each other and people who are complete strangers know where they stand with each other and so even though the status difference is considerable, can be quite informal and direct with each other. Of more importance than status, is the closeness and length of the relationship. In this kind of work relationship where each person knows their own duties and responsibilities they can be very direct about things that are part of what the other person expects to do. Politeness can be dispensed so directives do not need to be mitigated and may even be boosted as is the case here, e.g. note the use of *ASAP* . The relationship is also close enough for the PA to feel she has the right to be able to give her boss her own personal opinion about what he should do.

**Ac112a**
Subject:  Rotorua Conference - probs with plane bookings

Caller Laura Sanders Communications – 797 9274
 Message:  No problems with conference booking but there is with your flight home.  The plane is fully booked. They have put you on the waiting list but will pay for a hotel for you if you can't get home that night and will get you on a plane the next morning which arrives in Wgtn by 7.55 (I think I would be quite happy to stay the          night – Laura said it will be a lovely hotel and you can just relax!!).  Please let Laura know ASAP.


Because the person giving the directive is involved in persuading the other person to act as they would like them to act, a directive is a power act. One strategy for making a directive less face-threatening or less of an affront to the hearer is by being indirect. In an indirect speech act, "the speaker means something which is different from the literal meaning of what he or she says." (Paltridge 2000:20) The Hearer is expected to infer this by relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Indirect illocutions tend to be more polite because they increase the degree of optionality and hence lose some of their force.

"The more indirect an illocution is the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be." Leech 1983:39). He adds (1983: 39):

> A general principle of goal directed behaviour is that individuals adopt the most direct course of action that is judged to be consistent with the fulfillment of their goals. If a speaker employs an indirect strategy to fulfil a goal, it is likely to be that S wants to achieve some other goal e.g. avoid uncooperative behaviour, maintain good social relationship.

The most extreme case of indirectness must be that where a directive to one person is merely hinted at or presented as a message to another person. Email is particularly suited to this strategy and several examples were found in the corpora. (AC31e in Section 8.5.2 provides an example of this.)

## 8.3    Studies of directives in written and spoken discourse

Much work has been done on directives with most of the theories developed around speech acts. Many of the directives analysed have been:

•single utterances with minimal reference to context and co-text

•elicited responses e.g. Blum-Kulka, House and Kaspar (1989), and

•have often involved face-to-face communication in a variety of settings including workplaces, e.g. Ervin-Tripp's benchmark 1976 study of directives in American English, Holmes's (1983) study of teacher directives, Weigel and Weigel's (1985) study of directives in a migrant  agricultural community, Blum-Kulka, House and Kaspar's 1989 cross-cultural study of requests and apologies, and Garvey 1975 and Sealey's 1999 study of children's requests.

Studies of written directives in workplace settings using naturally occurring data are more limited in number and are more likely to see the whole text as providing part of the context for the directive.

General differences between written and spoken directives were noted by Pufuhl Bax (1986) in a comparative study she made of office directives. The written work directives were more direct and content focussed than the spoken directives. More mutual negotiation and signaling of changes in the social relationship took place in the oral than in written directives and there was evidence that the two modes were organised differently. This may be, however, because her written data set comprised short notes or office memos usually placed on the addressee's desk. She concluded that in order to make valid statements about directives, pre-sequences and modality markers had to be taken into account. These can shape the nature of a directive or the choice of not making a directive at all.  However, interpersonal relationships are important in both. Her study showed that:

individuals in an office while acting in their roles as supervisor and subordinate, also try to

communicate on an interpersonal level. This means that although the interlocutors are aware of rank differences, they are also interested in building and cementing a social relationship as individuals who share common goals .(Pufuhl Bax 1986).

A number of studies have examined the effect of status on written directives.

Pilegaard argued that politeness is the result of "a number of illocutionary acts wound together in the text as shown by hedged presequences in directive speech acts." (1997: 224)

Using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, he analysed requests made in business letters. He shows that the level, form and distribution of negative politeness correlate with sender status and vary as a function of the dynamics and course of business communication. Politeness strategies are used to prepare the ground for the formulation of the letter's main requests, to redress the face-threatening act of requesting and to round off the letter.

Syntactic, lexical and structural variations between two main text types of documents, relational and routine, were found by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996) in a small study which looked at evidence of the influence of status on the politeness strategies used in the formulation of requests. Their data was authentic texts written by the managing director of an international joint venture. Where the writer's power and status were higher than the readers, the other (you) orientation predominated, only minimal pre-request forms were used and post request forms were boosted. There was also a lower frequency of interrogative request forms and less variation of modal verb forms. Of the four clause types identified to ask requests, declarative, modal-initial, interrogative and imperative, the declarative clause was the most frequently used.

Using a genre-based approach in his study of written directives, Iedema (1997) claims that the way a directive is structured suggests status. A directive which contains a lot of backgrounding 'work' first suggests a text written by somebody presuming lower status and writing up to higher level officials trying to generate a collegial atmosphere. By contrast, a directive where the command is given first followed by the rationale suggests the writer is not concerned with mitigating the text and tends to signal higher status.

It has also been noted that written business requests are realised in different ways in different cultures. In an extensive cross-cultural study of requests in business writing, Yli-Jokipii (1994) found that Finnish writers tended to a greater degree of indirectness than British and Americans, the other two cultural groups in her study. She noted too a discrepancy between form and function with writers trying to avoid appearing to have made a request on the lexico-grammatical level and preferring more ambiguous request formats. Hence few requests were realised in the imperative form.

The studies cited above do not take cognisance, however, of prescribed practice. Contemporary organisational communication assumptions are that you put the needs of the reader first. As your reader is busy, this means that you get quickly to the point in simple, direct language. Recommended current practice is that the request appear in the first couple of sentences. Although a conversational friendly tone is also stressed, writers who follow contemporary practice may seem less linguistically polite. One of the aims of this present study is to investigate the extent to which email directives resemble or differ from spoken and other written directives.

## 8.4 Methodology

### 8.4.1 The data set

From the combined corpora of 515 emails, the 190 messages containing directives were isolated. The first part of the analysis examined the number of mitigators and boosters found in each of these. One message sometimes contained several directives, not all to the same person. In the few cases where more than one individual was involved, the number of mitigators and boosters applying to each person was considered separately. In the second part of the analysis, the 203 separate directives contained in these messages were examined for syntactic form and structure.

Using politeness theory as an initial theoretical framework, the directives were firstly classified on a 1-6 scale showing type of direction or indirection, and then according to the number of intensifiers and softeners used. Finally each directive was imputed with an imposition rating and a modified version of Brown and Levinson's formula was used to calculate its face-threat. The aim of this was

to see to when and to what extent writers made their directives more or less polite by softening or boosting them and to what extent this was affected by status, social distance, gender and the weight of the imposition. Although politeness theory has limitations, which have been pointed out by its critics (see 3.1.3), it did offer a means of quantifying the amount and type of relational work that was being done in the email messages. As such it enabled comparisons to be made related to sociolinguistic considerations while also offering a basis of comparison between the two organisations. However, this study has had to go beyond politeness theory and consider other variables such as the workplace culture, the message context and gender to more fully account for the patterns shown.

### 8.4.2   Coding the dataset

### Definitions
The following definitions have been used:

- bald – A bald directive is one that contains no mitigating or softening elements

**e.g.  AC65a**
Subject: Dean's meeting. 10-12, Tues. TC3.

- boosted – A directive which contains devices used to increase its force. Examples of boosters are time intensifiers e.g. *immediately*, modal verbs such *as must, ought to, should, need to* and a message being given high priority.

**e.g. AC13e**
Agree that a meeting with Bob ASAP would be in order.

- mitigated –A mitigated or softened directive is one that contains devices used to reduce its strength and make it more polite. Mitigators include grammatical forms, for example the modals *could, may, might*, positive and negative politeness strategies including hedges, phatic comments, greeting and closing remarks, rationalisations and justifications, and orthographic features such as exclamation marks and emoticoms. See Appendix lll for a full list of what has been counted as mitigators and boosters.

**e.g. UL14**
Hi  Debs

Can you please print a copy of the letter you did for Larry re his leave entitlements and print out another copy of the Supplementary sick leave policy. Michelle is going to Auckland and will go and see Larry, it seems that he didn't receive the letter, so she will take him another copy.
Thanks
Frank

A number of softeners have been used in this message**.** Frank has used a greeting and signed off the message with a *Thanks* and his name. He has also used Deborah's nickname. This solidarity marker acts as a further softener. Used here, *please* seems to act as a further softener but see below. And he's given a rationale for his request .

- <u>backgrounded</u> – This kind of directive contains background information relevant to the directive e.g. the rationale for the directive. Backgrounding is used to contextualise the directive and, in many instances also, to provide a justification for it. When it does the latter it helps to soften the directive. UL14 above is an example of a backgrounded message.

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## Coding directive type

The directives were initially classified into one of the following six categories:

LXXII.  bald and boosted

LXXIII. bald

LXXIV. mitigated and boosted

LXXV.  mitigated, boosted and backgrounded

LXXVI. mitigated

LXXVII.         mitigated and backgrounded

While directives fitting into the first two categories are direct and can be considered to have the highest illocutionary force, it is not really possible to array categories 3-6 on the basis of their degree of strength and this classification is therefore only suggestive. Mitigated and backgrounded directives are more likely to fit the lower end of the illocutionary force scale, but  this really depends on the number of softeners used. The directives were thus further classified into one of four groups according to the number of softening or mitigating elements they contained. The least forceful directives are likely to be those containing the greatest number of softeners.

**Mitigators**  After the initial classification, a count was made of the number of mitigators in each message that were relevant to the directive. These classifications were as follows:

•None – no mitigating elements

•Low – 1-2 mitigating elements

•Medium – 3-4 mitigating elements

•High – 5 or more mitigating elements.

•

**Please** : Although *please* which is a requestive marker (House 1989, Lee Wong 1994) is also considered to be a politeness marker or softener (Brown and Levinson 1987,) it has been excluded from the list of softeners as, on closer analysis, it turned out to be somewhat problematic. The limited amount of research that has looked at *please*, has been mainly done in the context of spoken interactions. Much of this has been of an elicited nature (House 1989, Lee-Wong 1994, Pedlow et al 2001) and /or looked at requests made by children rather than that found in naturally occurring interactions.

*Please* is widely used in workplace email directives and appeared in 45% of the directives. However, when these directives were looked at in terms of softeners and boosters, *please* seemed to boost rather than soften many of them. To find out how other people perceived its function, the directive was isolated from its co-text and thirteen colleagues were asked, informally, to state whether they saw *please* as softening or boosting the directive. *Please* was thus considered purely on the basis of whether or not it seemed to be strengthening or softening the directive force. When the results were collated, *please* was generally perceived to soften only about half (49%) of the directives and to boost about a third. In any particular directive its role was often viewed quite differently. For example, in 18% of the directives, opinion was equally divided as to whether it was boosting or softening. *Please* appears to be chameleon-like changing its function and illocutionary force according to the context in which it is used. In that group of emails where it was perceived by over 75% of the respondents to be acting as a softener, all but one used it in conjunction with other softeners to reduce the illocutionary force. Similarly, in the emails where *please* was perceived by a 75% plus majority to be adding coercive force, a number contained another booster. In all of these direct bald on-record directives where *please* was seen as increasing the illocutionary force, it was placed immediately before or after the command verb and softeners were virtually absent.

In email directives, *please* thus seems to take on the role of softener or mitigator only when used with other mitigating features. Where these are absent, as for example with a direct bald on record imperative, it seems to act more as a booster emphasising the coercive force.

**Coding for sociolinguistic variables**

A four category classification was used to code the messages for both power and social distance. The four categories for each are as follows:

**Power**

LXXVIII.        directive to an equal or near equal

LXXIX. directive to a superior

LXXX.  directive to a subordinate


LXXXI. directive to a group. This latter was further subdivided depending on whether the message was going to a mixed group or a group of equals, superiors or subordinates.

**Social Distance**

LXXXII.        message to a friend

LXXXIII.       message to a close colleague

LXXXIV.       message to a distant colleague

LXXXV.        message to a group

The gender of the message writer was also noted.

See Chapter 3.4.2 for a fuller discussion on the coding scales used.


**Rating of imposition**

"Imposition refers to the relational burden placed on the reader by the request." (Bargiella-Chiappini et Harris 1996: 652)


There are few guidelines in the literature on how an imposition should be ranked. Thomas (1995: 130) discusses the size of imposition in terms of Goffman's (1967) concept of 'free' and 'non-free' goods. 'Free goods' or 'free services' or 'free information' are those things which are freely available e.g. salt in a restaurant or asking someone the time (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Requesting these requires a minimal level of indirectness. In their discussion on this Brown and

Levinson see the ranking of impositions in proportion "to the expenditure of:

(a)      services (including the provision of time), and

(b)      goods (including non-material goods like information, as well as the expression of regard and other face payments)." (1987: 77)

These are however affected by "whether actors have specific rights or obligations to perform the act, whether they have specific reasons (ritual or physical) for not performing them, and whether actors are known to actually enjoy being imposed upon in some way." (Brown and Levinson 1987:77).

In the work situation, a person's role and job description determines whether they have obligations to perform what it is they are being asked to do. Role largely determines power and, to a lesser extent, social distance work relationships, and the extent to which it is felt necessary to restore the imbalance that the debt incurred by issuing a directive creates. Spencer-Oatey (2000:36) comments as follows:

> In the commercial world costs lead to debts if the bills are not paid. In the world of social interaction there is also a sense of indebtedness and a need for book balancing. For example, if someone does a favour for someone else, a slight disequilibrium results with a greater favour leading to a greater disequilibrium. Balance needs to be restored.

A common way of restoring this balance in email is through the word *thanks*

Bargielli-Chiappini et Harris (1996), who looked at written work directives, based their ranking of an imposition on rights and obligations. Based on the assumption that if the reader is able and obliged by his/her job description to perform an action and the writer has the right to ask for it by virtue of his or her power and rank in the organisation, they imputed an impositional rating only when one factor(obligation or willingness)was known to be absent.  A maximum rating occurred when both willingness and obligation were likely to be absent.

It can be argued that if the reader is able and obliged by their job description to carry out a directive and the writer has the right to make it (what House 1989:115 terms a standard situation), there is

no real imposition placed on them. However, there would still seem to be some differences in the imposition and some value in distinguishing between different types of directives. With this in mind a 1-3 coding system has been used to rate each directive. The main criteria used have been time, the degree of face threat involved for the reader and the nature of the task, i.e. is it a routine task covered by the person's job description or a task of a more extraordinary nature that they would not normally be doing. (See Appendix 1V for details of this categorisation). Taking these things into consideration a 1-3 rating system was used:

1.  small imposition
2.  medium imposition
3.  large imposition

The following email illustrates the problems that can arise when trying to rank the degree of imposition in an email.

**IPS 23H**
Subject: Re: ESOL &TC4
Nothing springs to mind immediately, but I'll mull over it!! I'm sure we'll come up with something. One thing that will help is for ESOL to do a purge of their records/resources. That can be done anytime between now and the shift…………..the sooner the better.
I'll be in touch.
Shaun

The email, from Shaun, the Corporate Manager and a member of the Central Management Team, is directed to Alan who has the job of overseeing the restructuring of one section and the movement of resources from one area to another. In a previous email Alan had told Shaun that he did not think there was room on Level 4 for both the staff and these ESOL resources. A cc of the email has been sent to Carol, the person in charge of the ESOL section, as a directive to her to start 'purging' records and resources straight away. For Alan, this probably does not represent a major imposition – he will just have to liaise with Carol and make sure that the job is done. However, for Carol the imposition is a much greater one as it means that she or her staff will have to go through all their resources and decide what to keep and what to discard….and the sooner the better. The imposition could be considered even greater given that the restructuring that this was a part of had already created a stressful situation.

To overcome the problem of how to code this for degree of imposition, I treated this as two directives: one to Alan and one to Carol and gave each a different ranking.

On hindsight it may have been better to have asked the writers of the emails to assess the rating they felt their request should have as this could have added more accuracy and given a larger spread of ratings. Ideally the person carrying out the directive should also be asked to rate it.

**Weighting of FTA**

The weight of the face-threatening act (FTA) was calculated using a modified version of Brown and Levinson's formula. Politeness theory suggests that the degree of face threat is crucial in determining the level of politeness which a speaker will use to an addressee.

How face-threatening a directive is, is dependent on how well the two interlocutors know each other, their role relationships i.e. do they have rights and obligations in respect of each other or are they equals and the nature of the task itself. Brown and Levinson (1978) offer the following formula for computing the amount of face threat as a function of the situational parameters of Social Distance, Power and Rank of Imposition:

$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$

Where $W_x$ is the numerical value that measures the weightiness of the FTA, $D(S,H)$ is the value that measures the social distance between S and H, $P(H,S)$ is a measure of the power that H has over S, and $R_x$ is a value that measures the degree to which FTA is rated as an imposition in that culture. Brown and Levinson assume that each of these values can be measured on a scale of 1 to *n*, where *n* is some small number.

Brown and Levinson's formula gives an equal weighting to social and power distance. To calculate the weightiness of the face threat involved in each of these directives it was felt necessary to modify their formula for a work setting. According power and social distance an even ranking would weight it too much towards these variables which, in the workplace, are often closely related. Hence the two combined were given a rating on a par with that of the nature of the imposition. The following are the scales for each variable assuming the email is going from writer to reader.

Power

| | |
|---|---|
| To a superior in your reporting line | 3 |
| To an equal or near equal or superior but not in your reporting line | 2 |
| To a subordinate | 1 |

Social Distance

| To a distant colleague | 3 |
|---|---|
| To a close colleague | 2 |
| To a friend | 1 |

The formula used for arriving at a rating out of 3 using the above numbers is thus

**X=(P + SD/2) + (RI )/3**

In words this is:

(Status + social distance/2) + (size of imposition)/$3$ = Weight of FTA

e.g. making a big request of a distant colleague who is a superior would give a weighting of 2 calculated as follows:

X= (3 + 3 /2) + (3) /3 = 2

This method of ranking attempts to include both the imposition demanded by the task and the status of the addressee in relation to the person making the request in deciding on the weightiness of an imposition. It acknowledges the fact that if making a similar request of a subordinate and a superior, the weight of imposition is higher if made to a superior because a subordinate is under a greater obligation to meet the request than a superior is.

**Coding for structure**

Using Iedema's typology the directives were coded for the enabling strategy used and structural form. Iedema (1997) argues that the way a directive is structured indicates status. Some directives do a lot of enabling work  before they get to the point in terms of:

•orienting the reader to what is to follow, e.g.To let you know that I have had to change B's flight details to NZ in April.

•legitimizing or providing reasons and or background, e.g...In the absence of anyone being in charge of IPS at the moment, I want to request that these changes be made to…,

•conciliating, e.g. I am aware…,

•

Iedema uses the term backgrounded to describe these directives. A backgrounded directive suggests a text that is written by somebody presuming lower status and 'writing up' to higher level officials trying to generate a collegial atmosphere. A foregrounded directive, on the other hand, is one that has the command first followed by legitimation. Such a directive  suggests the writer is not

concerned with mitigating the text and tends to construct and signal higher status.

Iedema does not specifically define what he means by enabling strategies but under this lists the following:

> orientation
> facilitation
> conciliation
> legitimizing
> backgrounding

In many instances what is legitimizing and what is backgrounding is not very clear-cut. For the purpose of the analysis an attempt has been made to separate them by asking the question, "Is this the reason for the directive?" or by inserting 'so' or 'because' before or after the command as appropriate. However, these strategies really form part of a continuum with, at one end, back-grounding and at the other, legitimising.

Iedema identified three different structures based on these patterns each of which is a reflection of status:

• serial structure - A text structured in this way is a series of commands, none of which is mitigated by reasons, consequences, judgments or conditions. "Serialisation suggests that the speaker/writer has no need for exemplification, specification, explanation or justification, and in that sense serial directives realise a large status difference." (Iedema 1997:88)

• orbital structure – In an orbitally structured text the nucleus or the directive is surrounded by one or more satellites or optional elements which are statements of legitimation, conciliation, facilitation or orientation. "These directives tend to be found especially in post-Fordist organisations with shallow hierarchies and whose structure is less subject to internal segregation and more open to negotiation. Orbitality either foregrounds or delays extra 'work' allowing subtle mitigation or authority and emphasis on solidarity." periodic structure or a wave trough pattern - This kind of text is concerned with elaborating and specifying the relevance of meanings for the benefit of the reader. "This tends to involve beginning, middle, end structures (thesis, arguments, conclusion) which foreshadow what is to come, present their point, then again rephrase that point making use of generalisation (construing distance) and interpersonality (construing solidarity). The periodic principal tends to prevail in situations

where speakers or writers lack power and where considerable work is required for the text to be seen as appropriate." ((Iedema 1987:.88).

- 

**Coding for syntactic form**

Finally, the emails were divided into three major syntactic categories: imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives (after Holmes 1983). The interrogatives were further divided into three sub-categories: modal interrogatives with can, other modal interrogatives and non-modal interrogatives. The division between can and other modal interrogatives was made because can is such a conventionally indirect form that it could be classified as a direct non-modal form. This certainly seems to be the case when it is used in email.

### 8.4.3    Problems of quantification

Brown and Levinson (1987:22) raise the very pertinent question of whether, in fact, politeness can be quantified. This study, by looking at the extent to which directives are softened or boosted has made an attempt to do this, but any analysis is only as good as the criteria used and a different system of rating and formula used may well have produced very different results. The division of the emails into four categories depending on the number of mitigating elements used in the relevant part of the email message is somewhat arbitrary. The category of low was decided on by considering what is the least amount of mitigation needed to begin to soften a directive. In the case of email, the addition of the addressee's name and a greeting and close would do this or the adoption of an interrogative as opposed to an imperative form.

There was also the problem of what to do about greetings and closings. These were counted as softening elements but a greeting plus a person's name would seem to have a much more softening effect than just a greeting or the person's name. However, to count both the name and the greeting as separate softening elements would seem to weight the count too much especially as the same needed to be done for closings. Finally it was decided that each would count as half a softening element so that a greeting plus a name was counted as one softener whereas the name itself was just half.

Using this scale, brief, to the point emails are at somewhat of a disadvantage because they do not allow for the inclusion of as many softening features as longer messages. Also, emails that are part of a thread may include fewer softeners as the initiatory message is likely to do much of the face-work. Yet, in the context, these two kinds of emails may be just as polite if not more polite than a longer message which has a higher count of softeners. The context is very important when assessing the linguistic politeness of a message. As Thomas (1995:157) says:

> it is not the linguistic form alone that renders the speech act polite or impolite, but the linguistic form + the context of utterance + the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

When time is at a premium, a brief to the point message may show more consideration to a reader pressed for time, than one that is wordier in its attempt to be 'polite'. Similarly, a direct command issued in a 'low context' culture or to someone you work with very closely is likely to be perceived differently to one issued in similar circumstances in a 'high context' culture or to a distant colleague. Hence counting the number of boosters and softeners used, while useful for comparative purposes and to see relationships in terms of sociolinguistic considerations, can only go so far in assessing linguistic politeness. Qualitative data in the form of the messages themselves and their contextual background is needed to assess the 'politeness' of any given email directive.

Quantification reduces everything to numbers. This is both its strength and its weakness. On the one hand, if the analysis is well done it enables patterns and overall trends to be seen. However, to enable this and to keep the data manageable, it has to be pigeon-holed into certain broad categories. With quantification the temptation exists to slot everything into categories determined by the analyst, categories which are based on his/her presumptions about the relationships between the different elements. The patterns that emerge are thus based on what the analyst has decided to count and how they have decided to weight the different variables. Many subjective judgements are built into this so that while appearing to be objective quantitative data is in fact not. Quantitative analysis thus has limitations not the least of which is that it masks the richness of the data hidden behind the very vulnerable figures. To support, enrich and supplement the quantitative data, qualitative data is included. Its role is to unpack what lies behind the numbers produced by the quantitative data. It is only qualitative data that is able to show the complexity of email messages

and some of the interesting strategies that people employ to make their directives less face-threatening.

## 8.5    Findings

### 8.5.1    Types of directives

The least ambiguous and most direct way of asking someone to do something is by means of an imperative command. Any deviation from this form means that the directive loses some of its illocutionary force and carries with it the risk that it may not be understood. Yet, imperative directives make up only six percent of the total number of directives in this corpus. Given the risk, why are directives realised in so many other forms? Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson (1987) argues that this is done for reasons of expediency. By being polite or showing consideration to the face needs of others the directive is more likely to achieve its goal, which is of benefit to the speaker. In the workplace, communicative goals may conflict: in spite of role responsibilities and obligations, the need for example, to accomplish certain tasks may conflict with the need to develop, maintain or enhance harmonious working relationships. The indirect way in which many email directives are realised seems to reflect an effort to balance these two conflicting goals.

Of the 190 directives analysed for type, nearly all (94%) were mitigated in some way and nearly two-thirds (64%) backgrounded. The percentages in each category for both the manufacturing plant and the educational organisation were very similar. The most common type of email directive, and accounting for over a third (37%) of the total number, was the directive that was both mitigated and backgrounded. The next most common type was the mitigated and backgrounded directive which contained boosters as well. These made up 20% of the total.

This suggests that in general in the two organisations, which provided the data, writers of email messages were at pains to modify the illocutionary force of their directives and make them less threatening.

### 8.5.2    Mitigating and boosting the force of an email directive

### Mitigation

The force of a directive can be reduced by many linguistic, pragmatic and other means such as modal verbs and particles, hedges, interrogatives and negative and positive politeness strategies. (Brown and Levinson 1983; Blum-Kulka, House and Kaspar 1989; Holmes 2003). In addition, the force of a spoken directive can be reduced by such auditory and visual cues as tone of voice, hesitation, rising intonation and body language, devices not available to someone writing a directive. However resourceful writers are able to take advantage of the possibilities the medium of email offers and exploit it in highly creative ways to reduce the illocutionary force of their directives. The email sequence below provides a good example of how these mitigating features are used in email messages and illustrates the effect that the FTA, status and social distance can have on the way in which the message is written.

In AC31a below Petra, a teacher, is writing to Colin, her superior and a key person in the organisation, with a fairly major request. She knows him only in his formal capacity. The email is very correct and formal. It is one of the very few in the corpora which uses Dear, considered a formal usage in email (Suler 2000), as a term of address and a first name and surname closing. This formality is a negative politeness strategy.  Petra states her request directly and unambiguously but softens it by using the modal *would like* and then goes on to state the reasons for her request, a further mitigating feature. She shows a willingness to be co-operative by offering to discuss it further, and consideration for his time by supplying her telephone number. Finally, she concludes politely with a formal *Thank you*, which is a way of repaying the debt created by her request, and identifies herself and her location. This is also being considerate as it implies that she assumes that with such a large staff, Colin can not be expected to know automatically who everyone is. Because of the power distance between the two and the nature of her request, which is an extraordinary one with various staffing implications, Petra has had to negotiate her way very carefully.

**AC31a**
Subject:  Request for permanent part-time hours of work.

Dear Colin
I would like to request a permanent reduction in my hours of work from full-time to 4 days per week. My reasons for this are personal ones. I have undertaken some part-time extramural study this year and I would like to have enough time to devote to this in order to make it worthwhile.

I also have a 90-year-old mother who is becoming more frail and I would like to have more time to take care of her.
 I would be happy to discuss this with you by phone if necessary. My  extension is 8470.
 Thank you.
 Petra Johnson
English Dept.

This contrasts with her email below to her direct boss Alan, who is also a close colleague. Petra uses what appears to be an information-seeking question, to make an indirect request to Alan to follow up her earlier email with Colin. Her statement that she wants to know *asap* marks her message as a directive. Colin's response (see AC31e below) indicates that he has certainly interpreted it in this way. The style of this message is very different to the preceding one reflecting, primarily, the difference in social distance. The formal *Dear* has been replaced by the casual *Hi* and the four typos show that there is no longer the same concern with grammatical and orthographic correctness. Petra starts her message with a sentence ending in an exclamation mark, which here, creates an informality as also does the hyphen and the exclamation mark at the end. This is further reinforced by the closing, *Cheers*. While adding her first name, she foregoes the use of her surname. In contrast to the negative politeness strategies used in the previous email, indirection and positive politeness strategies which create solidarity, have been used to reduce the directive force. While the email is quite informal Petra puts herself in a deferential position with her statement that she realises *it's* [her request] *not top of people's priority*.

**AC31d**
Subject: Request for part-time
Hi Alan,
I seem to keep issing you when you're in! I wonder if Colin Aing had spoken to you yet about my request for dropping down to 4 days a week I'm ket to find out one way or the other asap. – I realise it's not top of people's priority but just thought I'd ask!
Cheers
Petra

Alan's reply provides an example of one way in which the medium can be exploited to mitigate a directive and increase its indirectness. A directive to one person is inserted in a message written to another.

Colin is Alan's superior and a close colleague. While Petra is the addressee, the message is written as much for the benefit of Colin who is the cc recipient as it is for Petra. Alan uses his response to Petra to send a directive to Colin couching it as if it's part of his message to Petra. By telling Colin when he is available, he is indirectly asking for a meeting. In the one message he is able to let Petra

know he is actioning her directive and send a softened directive to his superior. He minimises the time imposition to Colin by his use of the verb '*sneak*' suggesting that it is not going to take very much time.

**AC31e**
To Colin Aing
cc: Petra Johnson
Subject: Request for part-time

 Hi Petra
 No we haven't yet talked about it. Perhaps Colin will have some time this week when he might be able to sneak me in
. It's easier thatn usual as I'm on Floor 1 at Portland most of the time & can be contacted onb 8310
*Alan*

The above  example illustrates the complexity of workplace relationships and how, in their workplace directives, people are balancing many different considerations as they construct themselves as more or less socially distant or deferent to their addressee.

As Table 8.4 shows, mitigation, including the strategy described above, is not just used by subordinates writing to superiors. Albeit to a slightly lesser extent, it is also used by superiors writing to their subordinates. The numerous examples of this found in the corpora indicate that politeness is found at all levels in work organisations and is an important lubricant in managing the transactional work of an organisation.

**Boosting**

Just as there are ways of softening the force of an email directive, so also can its illocutionary force be increased by such things as the use of some modal verbs, *ought to, must, need to*, time intensifiers such as *asap*, the repetition of the directive and so on. Giving the rationale for a directive may also serve as a booster.  In addition, in email, messages can be made high priority or orthographic marks such as exclamation marks, underlining and capital letters used to strengthen the illocutionary force. In a workplace setting, where things are often required to be done 'yesterday', time intensifiers are frequently used to stress the urgency of a task. IPS27b, as well as showing the relationship work that gets done in an email directive or, in this case, several directives, also shows how both softening and boosting features can be used in the same message and how in the same interaction many different things can be going on at the same time. On the one hand there is the need to get things done and quite quickly, and on the other the need to pay attention to people's

face needs.

**IPS27b**
To: Alan Peters
Cc: RM BC
Subject: IPS Preference Form on the slow train

Not so sure about the slow train. Thanks for the work and speed with which you got this to us on Friday.
If it is possible, I'd like the staff to identify what additional training they feel they may need as these changes take place.
Could they be asked to handwrite these on the sheet under Other Comments/////
Please gather in by close of play tomorrow and can we meet asap after that to work our way through to the term 2 target.
It would be very helpful to - unless you've done this already - to identify the actions/decisions necessary for term 2.
Can we discuss these as well please?
No need to reply till we meet this week.
Colin

The message starts with an acknowledgement of work already done. Then there is a preparatory softening move *If it's possible* followed by a conventional indirect request *Could they be asked…* The passive, which has a distancing effect and leaves unmentioned who is to do the asking, is a further softener. The next request, *can we meet,* softened by the use of *we* which emphasizes solidarity, is boosted by the time adverbial *asap*. *It would be very helpful* seems to give the addressee an option, and also the *unless you've done this already…* , while the next request *Can we discuss these as well* makes it quite clear that there is no option as the *these* can only be discussed if they have already been identified. *It would be very helpful* seems then to be a positive politeness strategy asking for the addressee's cooperation. The requests are further softened by the last sentence which, by allowing time, attempts to minimise the imposition but seems to be somewhat at odds with the *asap* meeting.

The above examples also show that email is far from being a 'lean' medium. The form of greeting or closing chosen, the way the message is laid out on the page, the lexical and syntactic choices made, all send messages to the reader so that along with the transactional message a powerful affective message is also being sent.

### 8.5.3 The form of email directives

The three basic forms in which directives are realised are the imperative, the interrogative and the declarative. However the percentage of each of these varied in the two workplaces and there was

also some variation in the forms of each that were used. (See 8.5.7. for a discussion of these differences.)  There was not a great deal of difference between the percentages of directives issued as interrogatives (42%) and as declaratives (38%).  Between them these two forms accounted for 80% of all the directives issued.

*Table 8.1*
*Percentage distribution of different forms of directives*

| Form | SCT corpus | Revelinu corpus | All corpora |
|---|---|---|---|
| Imperatives | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Modal interrogative with can | 14 | 39 | 22 |
| with other modal | 18 | 14 | 17 |
| Non modal interrogatives | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Declaratives | 44 | 25 | 38 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 154 | 49 | 203 |

**Imperatives**

Imperatives are the most direct and explicit form of directive. While an imperative violates Leech's Tact Maxim(Leech 1983:117-123) by commanding the reader to do as requested, it is not necessarily impolite. Brown and Levinson give two reasons for its choice (1987:95ff). The first is when maximum efficiency is important and both writer and reader recognise this :

**e.g. AC31f**
Give me a call tomorrow after 9 should be ok.

and the second is in situations where the focus of interest in the speech event is task-oriented related to routine duties and the need for face redress is minimal, e.g in giving instructions.

**e.g. UL25a**
Please prepare a formal offer….
Please notify the unsuccessful applicants tomorrow.
Please put up a replacement Genesis Mfg Team member role…

Only one fifth of the directives isolated in the corpora were imperatives, far fewer than the percentage that has been found in spoken data but a figure that equates very closely with what Yli-Jokipii (1994:150) found in her study of directives in British, American and Finnish business writing. (see 8.3).

There was little variation in the form of imperative used. Eighty-eight percent of these comprised

the base form of the verb of which just over half (56%) were used with *please* suggesting that *please* is used as an attempt to mitigate the illocutionary force although whether it does in fact do this is very arguable.

**e.g. AC6**
Please do so immediately.

In the above example *please* signals that a directive will follow and seems intended to reduce the illocutionary force of the imperative which is increased by the addition of the post-posed booster *immediately*.

There was only one example of a <u>noun imperative</u> in the data *Advice please*. and three examples of <u>embedded imperatives,</u> or an imperative included in another clause or sentence. All three examples were in the IPS corpus, the issue-related corpus from SCT.

**e. g IPS34h**
Please let me know any more problems so that we can air them tomorrow.

## Interrogatives

An interrogative is a form involving the reversal of the subject and verb and using an auxiliary etc. which may function as a directive in certain social contexts,e.g. *Can you file these papers?* Interrogatives are considered the least face-threatening form of directive as they leave the addressee more freedom of action. However, this is arguable as, in the sense that they explicitly require a response (Labov and Fanshel 1977:98), they could be seen to have considerable face-threatening force. Holmes (1983) divided interrogatives into two categories: modal and non-modal interrogatives. As modals other than *can* have a more softening effect, I have further subdivided this category into:

•modals using *can*

•other modals

This division has proved useful; particularly when comparing the two different workplaces. (See 8.5.7 below.)

For the corpora as a whole, interrogatives made up the largest percentage of directives (42%). This

is at odds with what Yli-Jokipii (1994:160ff) found in her written data which comprised real life and textbook company letters. The interrogative request, which in her data included information-seeking questions, was the least common requestive form used, accounting for only about 10% of the total. She attributed this to the time lag between issuing the interrogative and receiving the response. However, this time lag does not apply in email as, although it offers the addressee the choice of delaying a response, there is the expectation of a prompt response. (See 5.1.1.) The elicitative function of an interrogative in email is thus more typical of that of spoken data.

The vast majority of interrogatives were modal in form and of these the *can* form predominated. Although considered to be conventionally indirect, *can you*…is a relatively direct interrogative form as, after an imperative, it is the most minimal form that can be used and, in the absence of a suitable imperative form being available, is the most minimal form.

 **e.g. IPS 34**
Can we meet with them on Monday?

It implies a greater degree of familiarity than modal forms such as *could you, would you, might you,* which Brown and Levinson (1987) consider as negative politeness strategies as they are less compelling than *can* and express pessimism about a person's ability to do the said action.

*Please* collocates more frequently with modal directives than with any other form of directive, possibly in order to make the interrogative clearly a directive as opposed to being a question about willingness or ability to do something.  Thus, while it may also be intended as a politeness marker, it clearly contributes to the illocutionary force.  Seventy-one percent of these directives were used with *please*. The percentage was higher with the modals other than *can*; 77 percent compared to 65 percent for the *can* modals. However, the issue of whether or not please acts as a further softener or boosts the directive force is, as has been suggested above,  somewhat problematic.

Non-modal interrogatives serving as directives made up only three percent of the total.

**Declaratives**
Declaratives are generally considered the least face-threatening form of a directive although they can be quite compelling as in AC26b below. The use of a declarative allows the speaker/writer to

put forward an opinion about whether something should or should not be done rather than ordering someone to do something. It also allows the writer to suggest that persons other than the addressee should do something.

Declaratives took a variety of different forms and ranged from the quite explicit to the very oblique. Three explicit forms were identifiable:

• Embedded agent  "Declaratives in this category can be identified by the fact that the agent and usually the required activity are expressed explicitly in an embedded or subordinate clause." (Holmes 1983: 105) Holmes, citing Ervin-Tripp (1976) states that in the transactional work setting, these forms occur where who is to do what is very clear, and a statement of need (or desire) by a superior implies an obligation on the part of the subordinate.

**e.g. AC26b**
Suggest Barbara goes to Far North with Marianne – important for the Principal to be seen.

About one third of these contained a modal.

 **e.g.UL 8a**
I hope you can find me a good facilitator.

The data generally bears out Ervin-Tripp's statement. Fifty-four percent of these embedded declaratives were written by people in a superior position to their addressee compared to 36% written by subordinates. There was no great male/female divide. Embedded declaratives accounted for 17% of the directives written by males, and 15% of those written by females.

•non-embedded modal declaratives: Their structure is pronoun + modal + main verb or noun + modal + adjective.

**e.g. AC1b.**
You and I and X need to discuss these relationships.

 **e.g.AC122**
Your comments would be helpful

Directives of this nature accounted for 9% of the directives. In both of these forms the agent and

usually the required action are explicitly expressed and in these contexts their illocutionary force is virtually as authoritative as that of an imperative.

## Non modal declaratives

These made up about 11% of all directives. The less explicit forms ranged from those where the action but no agent was specified, to those hints (about 50% of the declaratives in this category) where neither the action nor the agent were specified (see AC22c below), or where both were very indirectly alluded to (AC13e).

**AC13e**
Subject line: Re: PhD email pilot
Rosemary is best placed to find a time for us.

I had asked Colin for a meeting to discuss what my research involved. His reply to me with a cc to Rosemary left it unclear as to who needed to take the next step and made no reference to the (implied) meeting. Presumably it was for me to contact Rosemary.

Amongst the non modal declaratives were two examples of relayed directives, both from the manufacturing plant.

**UL3a**
Hi Flynn,
Here are the targets for payroll (targets follow)
I found these in Audrey's file and confirmed them with Pam. Pam also said that she was waiting to get a written response from you to an email she had sent you earlier in the month……

The writer is relaying a comment from a third person and by so doing suggesting that Flynn should be responding to Pam's email. Presumably because of their previous correspondence, Flynn knew the email referred to. By presenting a directive, so that it appears as if a message is just being passed on, the writer is able to distance her/himself from the directive.

**Hints** are the most oblique and least face-threatening form of directive. Because the information needed to correctly interpret them is to be found in the structure of shared knowledge rather than in the utterance itself, they can be other interpreted if so desired, thus allowing both parties the freedom to opt out. As they require a lot of inferencing work if the communication is to be

successful, they can only be used where writer and reader share a lot of knowledge as in the following example:

**e.g AC22c**
Subject: Re: Shelf
No luck with Beatrice's area Colin.
Marg

Marg appears to be just conveying to Colin that she has not been able to find a shelf. However, in view of the context - she has just moved into a new office and has been trying to get herself set up - she is in fact asking Colin to find her a shelf. Colin interpreted it in this way and acted on this interpretation as the following email shows.

**AC22d**
Subject: shelf
Charlie//Mark
In Cath Lingard's office space in science is a shelf unit. I know this is a bit unusual but would you be able to assist by moving it with the shelves to Margaret Chamber's new office on PC03 please?
If you can't can you please assist by getting someone to do it for us please.
Thanks
Colin

This is another example of Colin enacting his managerial role. The repeated use of *please* makes it quite clear that this is a directive and his authoritative tone suggests very strongly that he has the right to issue it. However, as he is addressing two department heads and asking them to do something which is not in their usual line of work, he has to negotiate carefully. He softens the directive force by acknowledging that this is not part of their job, and by making them feel as if they would be being helpful by carrying out the action (*would you be able to assist).* Also, as they may feel being asked to move furniture is demeaning, he offers them the option of delegating the task while still making it quite clear that he wants it done. Some of the debt incurred by his directive is repaid by his use of *thanks* at the end.

The Revelinu data contained only three examples of hints two of which were in the same email.

There was no pattern in the use of hints. Of the eleven, two were to groups, four were to distant colleagues and five to close colleagues. Likewise four were to equals and five to people of lower status.

**The passive voice:** Just six or three percent of the directive emails were in the passive voice. The passive voice is used when the writer wishes to stress what needs to be done rather than who is to do it, or when the person to do it is not known. It is also possibly the best way of avoiding reference to the people involved in the FTA.

**e.g.AC33**
…..These are the things that need fixing, [a list of staffing changes follows]

It is not actually stated in the above directive who is to do the fixing. In this case this form may have been used because it is not certain whose actual duty it is. The message was addressed to a senior person in the section who, if it were not her responsibility, would pass the message on to the person whose role it was. In another example, while the agent is not directly specified, it is quite clear who it is:

**AC31g**
Fay and the Deans will also need to know when you intend to be on site.

The examples given above show that directives in email are realised in many different ways.  The high percentage written in the interrogative or declarative form indicates that, even amongst managers, requestive mitigated forms are preferred and suggests that there is a very conscious attempt to balance the competing demands of getting the work of the organisation done and maintaining effective personal relationships.

### 8.5.4   Comparisons with spoken and other written data

The findings from studies of the form of directives in spoken and written discourse are shown in the table below for comparison with those found in this email data. The form of email directives clearly resembles that of directive requests in letters more than that of spoken directives or the directives found in notes and the memos from which email is derived. This may suggest that, stylistically, workplace emails tend towards a more formal style.

*Table 8.2*
*Percentage of directives by **form** in spoken and written studies*

| Form | Face –to-Face | Written | Email |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

| | Factory Floor | Policy Unit | University Office | University Office | Business Letters | Business Letters | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Imperative | 57 | 38 | 47 | 72 | 11 | 21 | 20 |
| Interrogative | 17 | 12 | 16 | 19 | 30 | 10 | 41 |
| Declarative | 26 | 50 | 37 | 9 | 59 | 67 | 39 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 259 | 276 | 32 | 32 | 47 | 1882 | 203 |

**Spoken data**

Pufuhl Bax (1986) Brown (2000) and Vine (2001)have all undertaken studies of spoken workplace directives. Brown's work was done in a factory, Vine's in a government policy unit and Pufuhl-Bax's in a university office.

More direct forms are preferred in face-to-face communication but the degree of directness was greater on the factory floor than in white-collar areas. Imperatives were by far the preferred form of directive on the factory floor and were the main form of directive used in the university office. In Vine's data the dominant form, and making up half of the explicit control acts, was the declarative. Imperatives, however, still made up over a third of her explicit control acts. The high use of the imperative in the manufacturing plant noted here is consistent with what Bernsten (1998) found in her study of language use on an auto factory floor. Unmitigated language was the unmarked code choice for all the players. In this situation a new manager who used mitigated directive forms was seen as being ineffective. Bernsten gives three reasons for the general use on factory floors of this kind of language. Firstly, clear orders and directives are mandated by union contracts. Secondly the factory environment is often so loud that it is difficult for workers to hear embedded directives and thirdly, according to Ervin-Tripp (1976) unmitigated directives can be expected when people are asked to do something generally expected to be their responsibility. As she observes "each speech community has its own set of norms and its own set of choices which will be viewed as marked or unmarked within given contexts (180ff). In general, direct forms would thus appear to be more acceptable in a blue-collar than in a white-collar area where subordinates may have similar educational levels to their superiors and where there can sometimes be ambiguity about role obligations. In white-collar areas, where there are likely to be more shared understandings, there is also less likelihood of embedded directives being misunderstood. What is appropriate discourse in any given interaction is very much context dependent.

**Comparisons with written data**

Studies of written directive forms have been undetaken by Pufuhl Bax (1986),Yli-Jokipii (1994) and Bargiela- Chiappini (1996). Bargiela-Chiappini's data consists of thirty-two letters containing forty-seven requests written by and to the managing director of a joint venture occupying a high power and status position. Yli-Jokipii's was a very extensive study. She looked at 375 company and 150 textbook letters and faxes containing 1882 requests.

Pufuhl-Bax's data shows a high preponderance of imperatives but this may in part reflect the nature of her data which was a collection of short notes or office memos usually placed on the addressee's desk. She comments that the situational context already identified them as orders thus defining the interpersonal relationship as non-reciprocal. Her finding, that written work directives are more direct than spoken directives, is not supported by any of the other studies of written directives in all of which imperatives made up fewer than 22% of all directives issued.  In the email data, interrogatives and declaratives each accounted for about 40% of the requests while, in the two studies of business letters, declarative forms dominated. Because the data in each case is very different it is difficult to make valid comparisons but it would appear that in more formal written communication less direct forms are preferred. In the emails in this data, this certainly appears to be the case, even when role obligations are clear-cut.

In terms of the directive forms used, the data in my email corpus shows email sitting between face-to-face and written discourse. The email writers of these messages used fewer imperatives than face-to-face speakers but more interrogatives than either face-to-face speakers or letter writers. Because there is an expected immediacy about email and the addressee is often a close colleague, email writers can be more direct than the letter writers in the two above-mentioned studies where this was less likely to have been the case. This may account for the relatively high percentage of interrogative directives in email, the next most direct form after the imperative. However, the lower use of the imperative compared to face-to-face communication suggests that more face work needs to be done in an email message which does not have physical and verbal cues to mitigate the force of the directive.

The studies described above strongly suggest that in written interaction there is a decided

preference for more indirect and softened forms.

## 8.5.5    Directive structure

This part of the analysis looks at the structure of email directive messages in the light of Iedema's argument that the way a directive is structured indicates status.

It was hypothesized therefore that the foregrounded messages found in the data i.e. those that give the directive first followed by legitimation, would mainly be written by people of higher status than the addressee, while those that were backgrounded or did 'enabling' work before presenting the directive, would be messages written to equals or by writers of lower status than their readers.

In many instances what is legitimizing and what is backgrounding is not very clear cut.

Although for the purpose of the analysis an attempt has been made to separate them by asking the question, "Is this the reason for the directive?" or by inserting "so" or "because" before or after the command as appropriate, these strategies really form part of a continuum with, at one end, backgrounding and at the other, legitimising.

 The number of foregrounded and backgrounded directives found in the email corpora of both organisations was relatively similar as the table below shows.

*Table 8.3*
*Percentage of directives foregrounded and backgrounded*

| Enabling strategy | AC corpus | IPS corpus | Combined white-collar corpus | Revelinu corpus |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Backgrounded | 61 | 83 | 67 | 64 |
| Foregrounded | 17 | 8 | 14 | 20 |
| Bare directive | 22 | 10 | 19 | 16 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 113 | 41 | 154 | 49 |

It is perhaps not surprising that the AC corpus had the highest percentage of bare directives as over 40 percent of these were written by a senior manager. However, given the discrepancy in numbers

between this and the other two corpora, the difference is too minimal to be of any significance. The preponderance of backgrounded directives suggests that in both organisations there is a concern with generating a collegial atmosphere.

Status does, however, play a role. Compared to messages written to superiors, a higher percentage of the directive messages written to those of lower status consist of either just the bald command or are foregrounded.

*Table 8.4*
*Percentage of foregrounded and backgrounded directives by status*

| Structure | SCT corpus | | | Revelinu corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Up | Down | Equal | Up | Down | Equal |
| Command only | 15 | 25 | 6 | 0 | 29 | 0 |
| Foregrounded | 18 | 18 | 6 | 0 | 29 | 37 |
| Backgrounded | 67 | 57 | 88 | 100 | 42 | 63 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 33 | 73 | 16 | 2 | 7 | 11 |

Even so, more than half (56%) of the directives written to lower status people were backgrounded suggesting that in the main, higher status writers are concerned with mitigating their text. In the SCT corpus while there was a lower percentage of bald commands written to people of higher status, the percentage of foregrounded commands was the same as for those written to colleagues of lower status. A corresponding higher percentage of the messages going to higher status people were backgrounded than vice versa but the highest percentage of backgrounded directives were in those messages going to people of equal status. This further reinforces the idea that most face-work needs to be done in those situations where role obligations and rights are least defined.

**Groups**
More clear distinctions are seen in the messages to groups. In the educational organisation seven of the eight messages sent to groups containing people of lower status than the writer were backgrounded in some way. This contrasts with the manufacturing plant where three of the five messages sent to groups of lower status people were bald commands while the other two were foregrounded. This again suggests that in an organisation where people have similar education levels, lower status people also expect to be given reasons and explanations.

The majority of messages sent to groups of mixed status in both organisations were backgrounded; 79% in the educational organisation and 82% in the manufacturing plant. In the manufacturing plant both messages sent to groups of equal standing were foregrounded whereas in the educational organisation only one of the four was foregrounded.

The directives were also examined to see if task complexity had some bearing on whether or not they were foregrounded or backgrounded. For this purpose they were categorised into one of three groups depending on the nature of the request:

1. simple requests requiring either no or very little explanation, e.g.

> **UL7a**
> Hi Tam
> Can you provide me with what payments Martin Robertson will receive when his contract is terminated. The likely termination date will be 5$^{th}$ April.
> Thanks
> Flynn

2. requests requiring follow-up action after an update or a briefing eg UL1a – this email updates the addressees with the changed flight details of an Australian colleague who is visiting New Zealand and includes the following directive:

> Could transfers please be arranged for X?

3. requests requiring follow-up action to be taken by

•a the addressee in response to a question they had asked

> **e.g. AC90a**
> Subject: Training 2001
>
> Colin
> I would like to know how confidential this document is. I am placing,in a folder, information that will be needed by Katherine Greg for updating. I would like to make a copy of this available to her. I would also like o use this to talk with Colleen Tripman on Tuesday.
> Did Dominik leave you an electronic copy of this report? I have searched his system and it not there.
> Regards
> Meg

•a third person in response to a question asked by the addressee as in the following sequence:

> **AC41d**
> To: Colin Aing
> Time of departure
>
> Colin

I don't know if this has been dealt with yet. Is there any reason why Charlie should not leave at then end of this term?
Thanks
Cecilia

**AC41e**
To: Cecilia Dana
cc: Rae Dalton

Subject: Re: Time of departure
This is an HR ruling. I don't actually know how the $$ calculations have been done.
Rae can you please pursue Charlie's request please?

What immediately became evident from this examination of the emails was that the great majority of email directives are quite straightforward.  Seventy-seven percent of those from the SCT corpus and 88% of those from the Revelinu corpus fitted into the first category of straightforward directives requiring little or no explanation. In both corpora another 12% were emails requiring some action to be taken after updating or briefing information was given. Even though the background information in several of the directives in the Revelinu corpus was quite lengthy, these directives were also, in general, quite straightforward. The remaining 11% of SCT directives requested some action in response to a question being answered. None of these Type 3 directives were found in the Revelinu corpus.

However, the nature of the task was shown to have some effect on whether directives were backgrounded or foregrounded. On the basis of this data it is true to say that foregrounded directives are basically issued only when the request is a very simple, straightforward one. They give predominance to the nature of the task to be performed rather than the reasons for it. All but one of the foregrounded directives were coded as type 1, that is simple straightforward directives requiring little or no explanation. In 50% of the foregrounded directives the command was followed by some kind of legitimation while another 28% provided  some background. In the remainder there was either some facilitation or a combination of one or more of the above.

**Iedema's typology of structures**
 In terms of Iedema's three structures only three examples of serial directives were found, two in the manufacturing plant data and one in the data from the educational organisation. All three were delivered by high status people in their organisations. There were no emails periodic in structure.

The great majority were orbital indicating that in both organisations the dominant culture is one of collegiality.

### 8.5.6　The effect of the sociolinguistic variables

**Writing email directives downwards**

Apart from the comments above about the relationship of directive structure to status, other findings show that inherent status does have some effect on the way in which directives are written. People in positions of legitimate authority over others were more inclined than other writers to use bare, unmitigated directives and to use fewer mitigators when they softened their messages. They also used more boosters, backgrounded their messages less and made slightly more use of the imperative.

Nine percent of the directives written by higher status people were bald and unmitigated compared to three percent for lower status people writing up and six percent for those writing to equals.

*Table 8.5*
*Relationship of directive type and status relationships of interlocutors*

| Directive type | Down % | Equals % | Up % | Group % | o NV % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bare | 9 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Softened | 40 | 12 | 32 | 25 | 40 | 30 |
| Softened & backgrounded | 28 | 38 | 47 | 39 | 50 | 37 |
| Softened & boosted | 10 | 12 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 7 |
| Softened, boosted backgrounded | 13 | 32 | 18 | 27 | 0 | 20 |
| Bare & boosted | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 67 | 34 | 34 | 45 | 10 | 190 |

Down - message written to a person of lower status
Up- message written to a person of higher status
Equal - addressor and addressee of equal status
Group- message written to two or more people
No value - status of interlocutors not known

When they did soften their messages higher status people in general used fewer mitigators. Only 28% of the directive messages written to people of lower status contained three or more softeners compared to 53% of those written to people of higher status, 44% of those addressed to a group,

and 35% of those addressed to an equal.

*Table 8.6*
*Relationship between the number of mitigators used and the status relationship of the interlocutors*

| Softeners | Down % | Equals % | Up % | Group % | NV % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 9 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 6 |
| Low (1-2) | 63 | 59 | 44 | 52 | 70 | 56 |
| Medium (3-4) | 27 | 29 | 44 | 39 | 30 | 34 |
| High 5+ | 1 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 101 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 67 | 34 | 34 | 44 | 10 | 190 |

When the figures are viewed in perspective and in context, two points need to be made. The first is that while they show that in general higher status people writing down use fewer mitigators and tend to boost their messages more than lower status people writing up, the difference is not as great as might be expected. Just as there are a relatively large number of messages written up containing only one or two softeners  (44%) there are also a considerable number written down containing three or more softeners. This may again suggest that in the New Zealand context collegiality may be more important than status which people are not overly concerned with. The second point is that the more direct messages do not necessarily entail impoliteness. The context is all important.  If we look at the type of directive message containing few softening elements sent by a superior to a subordinate, over 70% of them were short and nearly two-thirds (62.5%) were sent to close colleagues. Off these short messages almost a half were replies to a previous message giving an action to be taken. The message below sent by a manager to his Personal Assistant (PA) is a typical example.

**AC18b**
To: Rowena Maddison
Subject:  Re: Re TUANZ - there is a spot for Ripeka in Gisborne - confirmation being sent here.
Ok will need another cheque from Louise - can you pse attend to automatically??

Seen out of context the above message looks abrupt although it has been softened to some extent by the use of the acknowledgement *OK,* the interrogative form, the addition of *pse and* the two question marks if these are intentional and not just a typo.  However, this is probably not the way the addressee sees it. She knows her manager is a very busy person, who, when he is not seeing people in his office and attending meetings, is trying to deal with the 60 plus emails he sends and

receives on average each day. Although the messages of superiors to subordinates may be less mitigated, for many managers, the reason for this may have as much to do with the many competing demands on their time as with the exercise of power, particularly when social distance is close, as in the case above. Also managers are expected to manage and that entails giving directives. In this message we can see Colin enacting his identity as a manager. *OK* is used quite commonly by people in charge to show that they've understood what's gone before and are about to move things on. Colin does this by stating what action is needed and issues the directive needed to carry it out.

Higher status people were also much more likely to boost their messages than vice versa. Forty-five percent of all the boosted messages were written by superiors to subordinates compared to just 16% of the messages written to people of higher status. Nearly two-fifths of the boosted messages though were written between people of equal status.

A similar pattern in terms of mitigators was seen in messages sent to groups. The least amount of mitigation was found in messages sent to people of lower status than the writer. Sixty-seven percent of these messages either had no softeners or fewer than two. The highest percentage of softeners was found in those messages sent to groups of higher status than the recipient although numbers are too small for a valid comparison to be made. Four out of the five messages in this category had more than three softeners. Fifty-seven percent of the messages sent to groups of varying status in relationship to the sender had three or more softeners, while of the five messages sent to groups of equals three had no softeners and two had more than five.

Status also has some effect on the form of directive used. People writing to those of lower status or subordinates made slightly greater use of the imperative form and used fewer interrogatives than people writing to superiors. This is not surprising given that imperatives are the most direct and explicit form of directive. "People typically use explicit and direct forms when they hold a higher position in the institutional hierarchy than their addressees(s) and the addressee's obligations are clear; i.e the required action is a routine part of their responsibilities, or when the degree of imposition is low." (Holmes: 2003:34). As it is an authoritative form, the imperative can also help reinforce one's identity as a manager. For example the following message leaves no doubt that the writer has the authority to issue this directive and that the various addressees have the obligation to

carry it out. The language is direct and unequivocal.

**UL24**

Colleagues,
please ensure that all staff who work in Powders Mfg. are briefed on this message.

Neil,
please place on the Control room noticeboard.

Ross

Safety & Hygiene
The Powders Factory is NOT A TOILET.
These facilities are provided elsewhere.

The Code of Conduct requires that all Staff act according to Revelinu standards of Safety & Hygiene
People who don't act like this are negligent & may be given a formal warning for misconduct

People who don't act like this when they have been told to are acting wilfully. You have now been told.
Wilful misconduct is serious misconduct & these people may be summarily dismissed.

However, the fact that people writing to subordinates made much greater use of the interrogative and declarative forms than they did of the imperative also suggests that in email where visual and auditory cues are absent, people of higher status do not wish to appear too face-threatening.

Only two imperatives were written to equals. The declarative was the most favoured form of directive writing to a person of equal status.

*Table 8.7*
*Percentage of directives of each form written to people of different status*

| Form | Imperatives | Interrogatives | Declaratives | Total % | No. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| To superiors | 15 | 44 | 41 | 100 | 34 |
| To subordinates | 20 | 37 | 43 | 100 | 82 |
| To equals | 7 | 30 | 63 | 100 | 27 |
| To groups | 33 | 47 | 20 | 100 | 49 |

Of the five imperatives sent to superiors all were short messages and with one exception were sent by a close colleague which again suggests that familiarity allows for greater directness. The data suggests, however, that it is mainly higher status people who issue imperative directives to people they do not know well. Amongst the several imperatives issued to distant colleagues all but one were from a superior to a subordinate.

Forty-eight percent of the 49 messages written to groups were to mixed groups, that is some of the people in the group were of higher status than the writer, some of lower status. Two thirds of the messages written to groups of higher status than the writer used the interrogative, the rest were evenly divided between the declaratives and imperatives. There were no declaratives in messages written to groups whose members were of lower status than the writer. These messages were fairly evenly divided between imperatives and interrogatives. Messages written to groups of mixed status to the writer were fairly evenly divided between interrogatives (41%) and imperatives (36%) with declaratives making up the remaining  messages.

While the imperative is used more by higher status people writing to subordinates than vice-versa, this is not the case with the conventionally direct form *can* used as an interrogative. This form was found in almost equal numbers in directives written from a subordinate to a superior (18 %) in directives written to groups and in directives written from a superior to a subordinate(20%). Interrogatives using modals other than *can* were more favoured in messages written to groups than in messages written to people of higher (18 percent) or lower status (16 percent).

Politeness theory predicts  that in unequal social relationships more face redressive strategies are employed by the lower ranking participant. While the findings do provide some support for this, there were, however, a considerable number of messages written from subordinates to superiors which were in the imperative form and/or which, contained no softening devices apart from the addressee's name. On the other hand, over a quarter of the messages written by superiors to lower ranking colleagues, contained three or more softening elements. Because Politeness theory does not consider the context of the interaction, it is not able adequately to explain this. Also possibly playing a role here are New Zealand egalitarian attitudes. In a society where Jack is believed to be as good as his master, status does not command the deference it does in many other societies.

### Does gender matter?

Women wrote just over a third of the directive messages (35%). The findings show that gender does seem relevant in the distribution of different forms of written directives. Women were more likely than men to soften and background their directives. Forty-three percent of their directive messages contained three or more softeners and 66% were backgrounded. The corresponding male

figures were 35% and 53% respectively. A statistical Chi-square test was applied to the data in Table 8.8 to see if there was a statistically significant difference between the males and females. There was none. ($x^2$ =2.7, 2 d.o.f.). However, see Section 3.3.1 Treatment of quantitative data.

Compared to status, gender had far less effect on the number of boosters used: 24 percent of female messages were boosted compared to 30 percent of the male ones.

*Table 8.8.*
*Relationship between the gender of the addressee and the number of softeners used*
*by percentage*

| Softeners | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| None | 7 | 3 |
| Low (1-2) | 58 | 54 |
| Medium (3-4) | 32 | 37 |
| High 5+ | 3 | 6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 123 | 67 |

Women also made slightly higher use than men of less direct forms as Table 8.9 shows. However, there was little difference between men and women in the use of the modal forms.

*Table 8.9*
*Male and female use of directive forms by percentage*

| Form of directive | Female use | Male use |
|---|---|---|
| Declaratives | 40 | 38 |
| Interrogatives | 44 | 40 |
| Imperatives | 16 | 22 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 75 | 128 |

Overall there is some limited support in these findings for other research (James and Drakich 1993, Holmes 1995, Herring 1996) which has shown that in cross-sex interactions, in their use of language women tend to emphasise the affective or interpersonal functions more than men do.

**Social distance**

*Table 8.10*

*Relationship between the number of mitigators used and the social distance of the interlocutors by percentages*

| Softeners | Friend N=8 | CC N=66 | DC N=53 | Group N=45 | NV N-18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 0 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| Low (1-2) | 37 | 61 | 54 | 43 | 64 |
| Medium (3-4) | 63 | 29 | 32 | 40 | 26 |
| High 5+ | 0 | 1 | 8 | 13 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 8 | 66 | 53 | 45 | 18 |

As the number of directives designated as being to a friend (8) was too small to produce any meaningful data, only three categories are considered here: distant colleague, close colleague and group.

In the corpora as a whole, it was the directives issued to groups which contained the greatest number of softeners. Fifty-three percent of these directive emails contained three or more softeners. On average directive emails sent to distant colleagues attracted slightly more softeners than directives issued to close colleagues, forty as compared to thirty percent. Overall, the tendency is to include more softeners in the messages sent to groups and distant colleagues as opposed to close colleagues. This may be because in writing a message to a group, which may contain people of varying power and social distance relationships to the writer, the safest course is to err on the side of politeness, while at the same time making the  message relatively direct. As Table 8.11 shows, only about one fifth of the messages sent to groups were declaratives.

On average the more indirect and formal declarative form is used with distant colleagues. Very few imperative directives were sent to distant colleagues. Whereas these made up 22% of the directive messages sent to close colleagues, they comprised only 9% of the messages sent to distant colleagues. Distant colleagues were most likely to be sent directive messages in the form of declarative statements, while the most common type of directive message sent to a close colleague or a group was an interrogative.

## Table 8.11
*Percentage of directives of each form sent to addressees of different social distance*

| Form | Close colleague No=75 | Distant colleague N=53 | Group No=58 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Declaratives | | 53 | |
| Interrogatives | | 38 | |
| Imperatives | | 9 | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 75 | 53 | 58 |

 Modal interrogatives using *can* were used slightly less in directives to distant colleagues (17%) than in directives to close colleagues and groups (21% each.) Modal interrogatives other than can were more favoured in messages written to groups (30%) than in messages written to distant colleagues (17%) or close colleagues(13%).

In that the findings show that more softeners and indirect forms are used in messages to distant colleagues than to close colleagues they support politeness theory in its claim that social distance is one of the crucial factors in determining the level of politeness.  One limitation of politeness theory shown here is that it considers linguistic politeness in terms of individuals interacting with each other in one-to-one relationships. It does not make any predictions about linguistic politeness when an individual is interacting with a group comprised of individuals of varying status and social distance relationships to the Speaker or Writer or even to any group. The findings from this data tend to suggest that in terms of face redress strategies, a higher number of these is used with a group than with individuals, even with individuals at the high end of the social distance scale.

**The rating of the imposition**

A further problem with applying politeness theory to this kind of data is the difficulty of rating the imposition of a workplace directive when , for nearly all of the directives issued, the addressee is bound by his/her job obligations and role to carry out a directive that the writer has the right to make. Thus, it can be argued as House, (1989), has done that, in this case, there is no real imposition. In addition, as already shown, the workplace email directives in this data nearly all

involved relatively straightforward and simple requests. Although an attempt was made to rate the imposition on a 1-3 scale, very little differentiation could be shown and over 90% of the directives were imputed a low imposition rating. Because of this no meaningful conclusions can be drawn by looking at the rating of the imposition and its effect on the number of softeners. However as two thirds of the fifteen requests which attracted a rating of two or three, (medium to large requests) included three or more softeners compared to one third of the small requests, it does suggest that the higher the ranking of the imposition, the greater the number of softeners used.

**The weight of the FTA**

Table 8.12 shows how the weight of the FTA, calculated using the formula described in 8.4.2 affects the number of mitigators used. The minimum possible FTA rating is 0.67 which equates to making a small request of a friend who is in a subordinate position. Asking a close colleague who is an equal to do a task that is part of their job description would attract an FTA rating of 1.0. The highest possible rating of an FTA using this formula is 2.

*Table 8.12*
*Relationship between weight of the FTA and number of mitigators*
*Figures are in percentages*

| Mitigators | 0.67 N=9 | 0.83 N=34 | 1.00 N=30 | 1.16 N=41 | 1.33 N=7 | 1.5 N=2 | 1.66 N=2 | 2.0 N=1 | Total N-126 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 0 | 9 | 13 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Low (1-2) | 33 | 71 | 53 | 59 | 57 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 57 |
| Medium (3-4) | 67 | 17 | 34 | 37 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 33 |
| High 5+ | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 50 | 100 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 9 | 34 | 30 | 41 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 126 |

The combined corpora gives 126 directives written to individuals for which an FTA weighting could be calculated, using this formula on the basis of knowledge about the social distance and power relationships of the writer and reader. Of these, 83 or approximately two thirds had a rating of one or higher. Thirty-three or 39% of these directives included three or more softeners compared to 13 or 30% of those with lower FTA ratings, a difference of 9 percent. However, if 1.16 is used as a benchmark, the comparison is between 30 percent for those directives with ratings of less than 1.16, compared to 58 percent of those rated 1.16 or over.

Politeness theory predicts that "rational face-bearing agents will choose ways of doing face-threatening acts that minimize those threats, hence will choose a higher-numbered strategy as the threat increases." (Brown and Levinson: 83). While the strategies used have not been analysed, the table above suggests that there is a tendency for more mitigators to be used with directives that are more potentially face threatening.

### 8.5.7 Different workplaces, different styles

The two workplaces differed in the percentage of email directive messages that were boosted. Although 44% of the directive messages in the IPS corpus were boosted the percentage for the educational organisation as a whole was 25 percent. This compares to 36% for the manufacturing plant. Time urgency could be a factor here. The issue-related corpus was related to restructuring so there were clear deadlines to be met. In the manufacturing plant there were also deadlines that had to be met while the other SCT corpus, the AC corpus, was dealing mainly with everyday administrative matters. In both organisations nearly 60% of all requests were backgrounded and some 40% contained three or more mitigating elements. All of the manufacturing plant requests were mitigated in some way compared to 93% of those from the educational organisation.

However it was mainly in the form of directive that the different cultures of the organisations manifested themselves.

*Table 8.13*
*Percentages of directives by form in two workplaces*

| Workplace | Imperative | Interrogative | Declarative | Total | Number |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| Workplace | Imperative | Interrogative | Declarative | Total | Number |
| White-collar | 20 | 37 | 43 | 100 | 153 |
| Blue-collar | 20 | 55 | 25 | 100 | 49 |

While the percentage of imperative directives in the data was exactly the same for the manufacturing plant and the educational organisation, the proportions of interrogatives to declaratives varied considerably. The manufacturing plant showed a decided preference for interrogatives, the educational organisation for declaratives. The issue-based corpus, that related to the restructuring, contained the highest percentage of these. Just over half of all the directives in

this corpus were declaratives. A number of these were in the form of suggestions, e.g *Can you suggest a way?*….worded somewhat tentatively, e.g. *I wonder then if we can see the staff    I think I need one from…..*or avoided stating who was to carry out the directive. *Someone should tell X I guess that…*Others invited collaboration, e.g. *I have met with X and suggested you have a meeting next week.* Reading them gives the impression that people are still somewhat uncertain about their relationships one to another and so negotiating new role relationships very cautiously at the same time as they try and work in a collaborative way through the issues that arrise.

In the educational organisation, where the numbers were considerably larger, status did not seem to have a great effect on whether the interrogative or declarative form was used. Forty-four percent of the directives sent to higher status people were interrogatives compared to 41% for declaratives. A slightly larger percentage of declaratives were sent to lower status people (43 %) compared to interrogatives (36 percent).

The most common form of directive used in the manufacturing plant and accounting for nearly two fifths (39%) of all the directives was the interrogative with *can*, the most direct form of interrogative. Of these *Can you* + verb accounted for 27 percent.  In contrast the modal interrogative with *can* made up only 14% of the directives from the educational organisation with the form, *Can you* + verb accounting for a mere six percent. Equally as frequent as the *Can you* form in the white-collar data was the form *Can we+* verb. In terms of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, *we* is a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson: 1978). By suggesting the reader is on a similar level with the writer *we* softens the directive. In the thirteen examples found in the SCT data *we* often, but not always, seemed to have this function and serve as a mitigator.  It was mainly used by a senior person writing to someone under him (seven instances), in four instances it was used to write to people in higher positions than the writer and twice it was used in emails between equals or near equals. There were no instances of we being used to "invoke institutional over personal identity." (Drew and Heritage 1992:20 cited in Brown 2000) In four of the examples, *we* means *you*.

 **e.g. AC36b**
Could we push some external results at N please?

In the other examples, which are to do with organising meetings at which both parties are to be

present, it is used as an inclusive term inviting collaboration as in these examples:

 **IPS 27b**
..can we meet asap after that to work our way through to the term 2 target?
Can we discuss these as well please?

**IPS340**
can we meet with them on Monday?

In the two latter examples, the use of *'we'* makes the reader's presence essential to the meeting and thus has more directive force. The use of *you* e.g. *Can you come to a meeting with them on Monday?* would have implied that the meeting would go ahead regardless of the reader's presence.

Similarly in the one example found in the Revelinu data from a high status person to her team, *we* means *you* and seems to serve more as a boost and to have a somewhat imperious tone about it. The writer also seems to be hyper-correcting, that is overextending the use of *we* to imitate what she considers to be a more prestigious form of language. Many observers (cited in Wardhaugh (1998: 206) believe that women  in particular, use hypercorrection as a way of accommodating to those who are more socially powerful. If so, it may reflect a woman manager competing in what is essentially a male-dominated world.

**UL11a**
Subject: Parity across site roles
HI,
When we are looking at grading/regrading positions, could we please ensure that we abide by the rules of the WL1 structure rather than creating grades for positions because of salary constraints.
We shoulud ensure that similar roles such as Supervisory positions in Production and Quality will not always require the same grades due to differing levels of responsibility ie., people numbers.
If we do not grade appropriately then the responsibility for the grading system for WL1 will go back to Remuneration and we will have to ask for a grade for each role change. This is not a position that either I nor Remuneration would like to see happen.
Thanks
Baska

Interrogatives using modals other than *can* accounted for 17% of all the directives used. A more negatively polite form than *can*, they had a higher level of occurrence in the educational organisation (18%) than in the manufacturing plant (14%.) but while the manufacturing plant use of these modals was with one exception confined to the modal + *you* form, in the educational organisation there were nearly as many examples found using a name or pronoun other than *you* as there were using *you.* Two examples of these are:

**e.g. AC25b**
May we discuss please who/how they should be managed in the future.

**AC30b**
In due course, could Mary please have a speaker phone.

Using the name of the beneficiary of the action increases the indirectness as it avoids naming the person who is to carry out the directive.

The percentage of directives in the imperative form was the same in both organisations. However, if to these are added directives using *can you*, more direct forms were used in the manufacturing plant. Imperatives and the relatively direct *can you* form made up 47% of the manufacturing plant directives compared to 26% of those from the educational organisation. The workplaces thus appear to have a very different email directive style.

A reason for the greater incidence of more direct forms in the manufacturing plant data may be the need for greater directness in this workplace. With its multi-cultural staff coming from many varied backgrounds, it may not be as possible to rely to the same extent on mutually shared linguistic knowledge as in the educational organisation with its high percentage of tertiary and largely university educated staff who are more at ease with more subtle uses of the language. These more direct forms are associated with a high degree of familiarity between the parties involved and correspond to Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategy. Declarative forms, which show varying amounts of indirectness in their use of more formal language, are more distancing and realise negative politeness strategies. Indirect language provides a means of not being caught out by your own utterances. In times of insecurity both reader and writer can shelter under the cover that ambiguity provides. Different forms of language are also class dependent. More direct forms of language tend to be associated with blue-collar workers. However, while many of the emails in the manufacturing plant were written by staff working in the management and administrative areas, it may be the total work environment that is important. Language recorded on the factory floor shows their talk to be straight and direct. Where there is high solidarity, the same culture of directness can be expected to infuse the written language albeit to a much lesser extent because of the differences in the characteristics of the two media, face-to-face and email.

Politeness theory suggests that one reason why people diverge from direct and clear communication is to protect their face needs and take account of those of their addressees. Indirect language forms are thus considered more polite than direct forms. This, however, does not allow for different cultural contexts. As Bernsten (1998) has shown in her study, the converse can be equally true. On the auto factory floor unmitigated talk was used by both management and workers to protect their face needs by asserting and maintaining equal power. If management used indirect language its ambiguity was exploited to make them ineffectual. While extensive use of direct forms might have been considered impolite in the educational organisation that certainly did not appear to be the case in the manufacturing plant where they seemed to show higher levels of solidarity.

## 8.6 Summary and conclusions

The findings generally support politeness theory that states that the greater the face threat of a speech act the more mitigating elements will be used. The impositional ratings showed too little spread to lead to any firm conclusion but did suggest that the number of mitigating features used does increase with the rating of the imposition.

Politeness theory has provided a useful methodology for quantifying the facework done in workplace email directives and has thus made it possible to identify certain patterns and make comparisons between the two organisations. However, politeness theory with its emphasis on the three sociolinguistic variables of status, social power and the rating of the imposition, has not been adequate in itself, to account for people's use or non-use of face-saving strategies. What has come through in this data is the strong influence of contextual factors. While status, social distance and the rating of the imposition do undoubtedly influence the presence or absence of face-saving strategies used, the workplace culture, the length of the message, the type of message, i.e. whether it is an initiatory one that has to prepare the ground or a follow-up one, the audience for the message i.e. individual or group and the type of group, have also all been shown to be of significance. To this list can also be added gender and the nature of the genre. As the comparison with spoken and other written data shows, people's linguistic behaviour in email is different to what it is in these other modes. In its application in this analysis, politeness theory has thus had to be modified by the addition of these other variables. What this all highlights is the complexity of

people's interactions with each other. Out of the often subconscious balancing of many different considerations emerges a discourse that is deemed by the writer of the message to be appropriate in any particular situation. Almost every email directive has its own particular conditions and to more fully account for these a more complexified theory is required.

There were also difficulties in applying Brown and Levinson's formula to this particular dataset. The lack of distinction in many cases between status and social distance, and the difficulty of imputing impositional ratings, when so many of the directives were simple and straightforward, have already been alluded to.

In summary then politeness theory has provided a very valuable starting point but has not proved sufficiently complex to adequately explain linguistic politeness in workplace emails.

This study of email directives has produced the following answers to the questions posed.

LXXXVI.     The email directives in this corpus did differ in their surface form and the strategies used from both the spoken and written directives cited in other studies with the exception of the rather specialised data of the Pufuhl-Bax study. Email directives would appear to lie somewhere between the directives of spoken discourse and written letters. Compared to studies of spoken data, the emails in this data set made much greater use of requestive interrogative and declarative forms and a much lower use of imperative forms. They showed a similar low use of imperatives to those found in overseas studies of business letters, but demonstrated a greater use of interrogative forms than these studies. This suggests that email directives tend to be more direct than those of letters and faxes but less direct than those of spoken discourse. A reason for this may be that the immediacy of email and the writer's knowledge of many of the addressees tends to lead to greater use of direct forms but that this is countered to some extent by the lack of visual and auditory cues which encourages the writer to use fewer direct and unmitigated forms.

LXXXVII.     Writers of email messages engage in a wide range of strategies to mitigate the force of their directives, the great majority of which are softened in some way. In this corpus 94% of

the directive messages contained at least one softening element and well over a third included three or more softening elements. Email writers use a wide range of the syntactic and lexical resources available to writers and speakers to make messages less face threatening but, in addition, creative writers are also able to exploit the medium to this end. Two such strategies are using a message to one person to indirectly convey a directive to another message recipient, and relaying a message from a third person. Email writers can also boost their messages in additional ways by making them high priority or by enclosing in a message to a group of people, specific directives to individuals.

LXXXVIII.     Status and to a lesser extent gender and social distance are enacted in the language of email directives just as they are in other forms of written and spoken language. People of higher status than their addressees were more likely than others to write bare, unmitigated directives and to boost them. They made greater use of the imperative and used fewer interrogatives. They also used fewer softeners in their mitigated directives. However, this may in part be explained by the fact that most of their messages were short and written to close colleagues. Many were also replies to previous messages. These latter points may also explain why nearly 50% of the directives written to higher status people, similarly contained few softening elements. Hence politeness is very relative and context dependent, a fact not accounted for by politeness theory.

LXXXIX.     Of the three social distance categories compared, messages to close colleagues, messages to distant colleagues and messages to groups, the greatest degree of mitigation was found in messages to groups, and the least to close colleagues. Why more face-saving strategies appear to be used when addressing groups, is also not accounted for by politeness theory but it may be that when addressing a group, depending on the nature of the group and its relationship to the writer, individuals may wish to construct either greater solidarity with the group or greater social distance through the use of more positively or negatively polite forms than they use to individuals.

XC.     Messages written by women by and large made use of more politeness features than those written by men. On average women used more softeners and backgrounded their messages

more than men did. They used a slightly lower percentage of imperatives and a correspondingly slightly higher percentage of interrogatives and declaratives than males. They were also less likely than men to boost their messages.

XCI.    Workplace culture is a factor, along with status, social distance and gender, that correlates with linguistic variation. The percentage of unmitigated directive messages and those containing three or more softening elements was virtually the same in both workplaces. Also fairly similar were the relative percentages of foregrounded and backgrounded messages. However, the analysis has shown that directives are realised in different ways in the two workplaces. In the educational organisation, the directives showed a greater degree of indirection. The percentage of direct forms found in the Revelinu data was considerably higher than that found in data from SCT where the declarative was the preferred form.   More direct forms show greater familiarity and solidarity. These findings and those from the study of greetings support data from the workplace culture survey, which indicate that people at Revelinu construct a friendlier and more united culture than those at SCT. However, the more direct forms used at Revelinu may also be a feature related to its being predominantly a working class as opposed to a middle-class work environment. In this culture there is a greater appreciation and expectation of directness than in the middle-class culture of SCT where a more indirect and subtler use of language is valued and where it would, for the most part, be expected that a rationale be given for a request. In both workplaces the great majority of directives were straightforward and requiring little or no explanation.

XCII.   The data provides some  support for Iedema's claim that foregrounded directive messages tend to signal higher status while backgrounded messages suggest a text written by somebody presuming lower status and trying to generate a collegial atmosphere.  However, this support is limited as, at SCT, a third of the messages written to higher status people were either bald or foregrounded.  If Iedema's claim is correct, the fact that over half of the messages written by higher to lower status people were backgrounded indicates that in both organisations there is a greater desire to construct collegiality than status. This is in keeping too with the nature of New Zealand society which is not very status conscious. While email directive messages play a role in the construction of power relations in the workplace, the messages in this data set also

show that the most of the writers, regardless of their status, are concerned with constructing effective interpersonal relationships. Thus, in many of the messages there is a fine balancing of the transactional and affective functions.

XCIII.   Far from being a 'lean' medium this study of email directives has shown that rich communication can be realised through email. The syntactic and lexical choices made by the writer all send messages which are interpreted consciously or subconsciously by the reader drawing on his or her own knowledge of the context, issues and people involved.

# Chapter NINE

## Email and knowledge creation: a case study to illustrate the affective and cognitive role of workplace email communication

### 9.1    General introduction

Chapters five and six have described the communicative functions of email and its role in the overall communication pattern of the two organisations; chapters seven and eight have focussed primarily on the construction of interpersonal meaning in email through the use of greetings and closings and the wording of directives. This chapter draws these transactional and affective roles of email together using a qualitative approach and focussing on a specific case study. The context is the working through of an issue resulting from restructuring.  A thread of emails is analysed in some detail to show how email contributes to the creation of new knowledge. The case study explores the cognitive role of email and describes how this is integrated with the transactional and relational functions surveyed in previous chapters. As those involved work through the problem and jointly construct new knowledge they use email transactionally and affectively. Information is sought and given, directives are issued, commitments made and feelings expressed. At the same time, through the relational practices they engage in, in their emails, relationships are constructed and maintained.

A general introduction to the topic of knowledge creation follows. The difference between knowledge and information and the two types of knowledge that are often distinguished in writings in this area, tacit and explicit, are first discussed. Then, after some contextual background, a dataset of twenty-three emails collected over a six-week period from the educational organisation is analysed, using Nonaka and Takeuchi's framework (1995), to show how email assisted in 'building a prototype'. This is the fourth phase of their five-phase model of knowledge creation. The analysis also shows the role of email in the 'knowledge enabling' process, by looking at how conversations are managed, the process of creating the right context and the globalisation of local knowledge.

### 9.1.1   The twin faces of knowledge

"*Knowledge is experience. Everything else is just information*" (Einstein)

In an important follow-up work to Nonaka and Takeuchi's seminal work, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, (1995) Nonaka et al define knowledge as justified true belief: "When somebody creates knowledge, he or she makes sense out of a new situation by holding justified beliefs and committing to them." (Von Krogh, Ichijo, Nonaka, 2000:6)

Like Einstein, these writers see knowledge as being something more than just information. McDermott defines the distinction between information and knowledge and the experiential nature of knowledge in the following way. (1998: 7)."Knowing is a human act, whereas information is an object that can be filed, stored and moved around. Knowing is a product of thinking, created in the present moment, whereas information is fully made and can sit in storage. It is a kind of 'under the fingernails' wisdom, the background know-how from which we draw." While information is acquired by reading, observing, or otherwise absorbing it, knowledge is acquired "by participating in a community – using the tools, ideas, techniques and unwritten artifacts of that community." The heart of knowledge is "a community in discourse, sharing ideas." (McDermott 1998: 7)  The distinction between information and knowing is in large measure the distinction between explicit (information) and tacit (knowing) knowledge. This distinction is important to an understanding of the knowledge creation process.

The twentieth century Hungarian scientist and philosopher, Michael Polanyi introduced the notion of 'tacit knowing' with these words: "We know more than we can tell and we can know nothing without relying upon those things which we may not be able to tell.". The concept of 'tacit knowing,' introducing as it did, the very personal element in knowledge, challenged the prevailing objectivist view which saw that knowledge as being most certain which had the least amount of personal contamination. In essence, tacit knowledge refers to the undocumented, hard to express knowledge, the "knowing more than we can tell." Whereas explicit knowledge is "very definable and very objective" tacit knowledge is "the knowledge that lives in people's head and in their practices. It is the knowledge that hides itself from their consciousness even though they put it to

use every day. Tacit knowledge manifests itself only through the practice in which it is used." .
Explicit knowledge is easy to transfer. It is the knowledge that, in an organisation, is found in such
things as procedures, protocols, rules and instructions. Tacit knowledge on the other hand, residing
as it does in individuals, is difficult to transfer. It is 'know-how' as opposed to 'know-what". It can
be described by terms like 'gut feel' 'insight' 'intuition' 'judgement' and 'a feeling for things'.
Polanyi gives as examples of tacit knowledge, the knowledge that enables us to ride a bike or
recognise a face in a crowd.

Largely due to the writings of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) in the area of knowledge management
and creation, the concept of tacit knowing has been picked up in business and organisational circles.
However, as tacit knowledge, it has been interpreted in different ways and developed a certain
ambiguity.  Whereas Nonaka, for example, uses Polanyi's concept to mean particular knowledge
that is difficult to express and which can include embodied skills such as the skills involved in
making bread, Polanyi speaks of tacit knowing as the backdrop against which all actions are
understood. For Polanyi an individual's tacit understanding or personal knowledge is the result of
the interplay between his or her personal experiences and interests and the understandings gained
from the knowledge tradition in which he or she is socialised.

### 9.1.2   Knowledge creation

While some scholars would argue that explicit and tacit are two distinct forms of knowledge, and
that one form cannot be made out of or changed into the other, (Cook and Brown 1999 cited in
Stenmark), for Nonaka and Takeuchi, knowledge creation involves converting tacit knowledge to
explicit knowledge in a cyclical process. Knowledge creation is not just something that resides in
research and development but is an overall organisational activity. They emphasize that new
knowledge creation begins with individual tacit knowledge. This emerges through socialisation as
people in a shared field of interaction share experiences, mental models and technical skills.
Observation, imitation and practice are an important part of this process. As tacit knowledge is
difficult to express, metaphor and analogy are often the means by which this happens. Once
displayed, this knowledge can then be combined with existing explicit knowledge to create new
knowledge. The internalisation of this new knowledge and the addition to it of reflection and

experience creates new tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is thus explicit knowledge internalised.

Nonaka et al describe the process of organisational knowledge creation and outline a five-phase model of it. These phases are:

•sharing tacit knowledge

•creating concepts

•justifying concepts

•building a prototype

•cross-levelling knowledge

•

In the sharing tacit knowledge phase, team members pool their knowledge, ideas and insights. New concepts, such as the description of a new organisational structure, emerge out of this sharing. In the next phase, the team justifies the new concept(s) by using, for example, focus groups, market studies, and the organisation's vision, to build arguments for and against it. In the phase following on from this, a concept that has been justified is converted into something tangible or concrete, a prototype. This prototype is built "by combining newly created explicit knowledge with existing explicit knowledge." (Nonaka and Takeuchi1995: 87) Nonaka and Takeuchi describe what happens in this stage as follows:

> To build a model of a new organisational structure, people from the affected sections within the organisation, as well as experts in different fields (e.g. human resources management, legal strategic planning) are assembled to draw up a new organisational chart, job description, reporting system, or operating procedure. In a way, their role is similar to that of an architect – they are responsible for developing the blueprint as well as actually building the form of an organisational concept. Because this phase is complex, dynamic co-operation of various departments within the organisation is indispensable. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 88).

Finally this new mutually constructed knowledge needs to be shared with the organisation at large to get feedback. While the first three phases of knowledge creation are more likely to involve face-to-face communication, email also has a role to play particularly in phases four and five.

Knowledge creation can be facilitated. According to the writers, the knowledge enablers that are most important in enhancing the knowledge creating potential of an organisation are:

- instil a knowledge vision. An organisation needs to know what knowledge it should seek and create. For this it needs to look at the current situation as well as back to its traditions and forward to its future.
- manage conversations. This involves encouraging open-ended thinking and a higher level of care in the organisation. Both of these are necessary for the vision to be realised.
- mobilise knowledge activists. Knowledge activists are the new converts spreading the message to everyone. They act as initiators, motivators and co-ordinators and can be managers or team members.
- create the right context – The right context is "one that fosters emerging relationships within microcommunities, across group boundaries, throughout an organisation, whatever it takes to unleash tacit knowledge." (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 178).
- globalise local knowledge. This emphasizes breaking down the physical, cultural, organisational and managerial barriers so that knowledge can be spread throughout the organisation.

Nonaka and Takeuchi's model provides a useful framework for examining the role of email in organisational knowledge creation. The previous chapters have shown that it performs important transactional and affective functions. These functions enable it to play an important role in knowledge creation as it can be used to manage conversations, create the right context and globalise local knowledge. By using Nonaka and Takeuchi's model and adopting a discourse analysis approach to study individual email messages, it becomes possible to focus more precisely on exchanges and see the knowledge creation process in action at a micro level. For the purposes of this study, tacit knowledge is viewed as a continuum. At one end, is the personal knowledge which can be relatively easily expressed given a suitable stimulus and enabling context; at the other, the 'knowing more than we can tell' knowledge which is so personal and complex that it is not accessible to words, Polanyi's "tacit knowing." In between is that knowledge which is difficult to express but which may surface in the form of metaphor and analogy.

<div align="center">The Tacit Knowledge Continuum</div>

| relatively accessible | accessed with difficulty (use of metaphor and analogy) | inaccessible |
|---|---|---|

Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka view knowledge creation as a social dynamic. "Knowledge is dynamically created in social interactions and has a subjective nature deeply rooted in individual value systems. Knowledge is essentially related to human action and the knowledge creation process depends on who participates and how they do so." (2000:49) The emails analysed below show this social dynamic of knowledge creation and illustrate three of the knowledge enablers: the management of conversations, the globalisation of local knowledge and 'the right context'. Von Krogh et al (2000:49) use the Japanese context of *ba* 'place' to describe an enabling context which is "a place in which knowledge is shared, created and used." This enabling context goes beyond physical space to include aspects of virtual space such as email and mental space (shared experiences, ideas and emotions). "More than anything, it is a network of interactions determined by the care and trust of the participants." (Von Krogh et al 2000: 49). Tuomi (2002:120) conceptualises this field of knowledge creation as "a dynamic space of mutual construction." *Ba* operates on four different levels:

- originating ba: This is the space of social interaction where new knowledge in the form of tacit-to-tacit conversion occurs.

- interacting or dialoguing ba: This is the space of tacit to explicit conversion where individuals' mental models and skills are converted into common terms and concepts. It is a more conscious 'space' than the originating ba and often organised as cross-functional teams and task forces.

- cyber or systemizing ba: Here explicit and implicit knowledge are combined together to create new knowledge. This is the space supported by email and other technologies.

- exercising ba: In this space explicit knowledge is converted to tacit knowledge. The explicit knowledge communicated, in written manuals and the like, is internalised by individuals.

- 

Von Krogh et al's concept of *ba* is in a way complementary to Wenger's concept of a Community of Practice (CofP). A CofP are a group of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. In the course of this endeavour certain beliefs, attitudes, ways of doing things and ways of talking emerge. These are the group's practices (Wenger 1998). These practices thus express embedded knowledge. Ba, or an enabling context, helps create new knowledge which, over time, becomes incorporated into the embedded knowledge and practices of the CofP. While *ba* operates in a cognitive phenomenological domain, CofP operates at the level of recurrent

collective activity. (Tuomi:135) Hence a CofP provides an ideal environment for knowledge creation.

What follows is an example of how email was used over a three month period in the fourth phase of organisational knowledge creation, that of building a prototype.

## 9.2    Background to the dataset

### 9.2.1    The organisational context

The emails used in this dataset are a subset from the IPS issue-related corpus of the educational organisation.  As previously mentioned (4.2.1) a new management structure was in the process of being put in place in this organisation. In terms of the stages of knowledge creation, phases one, two and three had been worked through. The concepts had been justified and now needed to be operationalised.

The emails discussed below relate to the restructuring of what had been an autonomous department, the Individual Programme Section (IPS) and its merger with other departments in the school. This restructuring and the building of a prototype meant that a number of issues had to be worked through. Many were of a fairly sensitive nature and required careful handling.

The IPS Section looked after those students who, for a variety of reasons, did not fit into the mainstream group of the school's students. They included students at all levels, from pre-school through to secondary, and of all ages including a large number of adult students. IPS students could be enrolled in one or a number of different subjects. Each student was assigned a specialist teacher who looked after his or her entire learning programme. As part of the restructuring, it was decided to disestablish this section. Students were either to be mainstreamed or placed in the Specialist Services Section. This meant that secondary level students would be allocated different subject teachers. The IPS teachers were to be allocated either to the primary division or to a secondary teaching department or to Specialist Services. Figure 9.1 shows the effect of the restructuring on the administration of this group of students.

*Figure 9.1*
*Teaching departments before and after restructuring*

**Before**

Early Childhood                Primary           Secondary         IPS

Gifted primary aged students
and students who had
learning or special needs

**New**

Early Childhood               Primary                Secondary     Specialist Services

now to include students with moderate      students with high
learning needs                             learning or other special
needs and
gifted primary students

While the IPS section, as a whole, comprised a Community of Practice it contained two subgroups, the primary teachers and the secondary teachers each of which formed its own CofP. Wenger (1998) identifies three crucial dimensions of a CofP, all of which were evident in this section:

●mutual engagement which typically involves regular interaction and is the basis for the relationships which make the CofP possible. Teachers, working with these students and their support staff, worked within a designated area and in the course of their work engaged with each other frequently through the day. They met regularly as a group for formal meetings, and also interacted informally with each other. Many of them also met socially and there were some very close friendships. Because a number, particularly in the primary section, had worked together for many years, they had bonded into a very closely-knit group.

●joint negotiated enterprise – this is not just a stated shared goal but a negotiated enterprise involving the complex relationships of mutual accountability that become part of the practice of the CofP (Wenger, 1998: 80). The IPS teachers were very committed to and protective of their students, largely perhaps because of the nature of the students they dealt with. Over time and as a group, they had evolved their own set of practices that were different to the standard

procedures and practices. As a group they were viewed by other teaching sections as being a bit different.

•a shared repertoire of resources accumulated over time – this includes linguistic routines and resources such as a group's own specialised vocabulary and acronyms, pictures, social activities and the like which have become part of the community's practice. As an example, the primary group had a bell. This was rung at a certain time each morning on which signal, the group as a whole would go down to the tea room. The secondary group would frequently go outside the building to a local café for their morning tea.

The IPS practices and learning resources, which had been mutually negotiated and developed over time in response to the particular needs of their students, were now to be brought into line with those of the rest of the organisation. Understandably the disestablishment of the section created stress and anxiety for the staff involved.

### 9.2.2    Email as an enabling context

The messages give some indication of how email can be used to break down personal barriers and create the good relationships that are a key enabler of knowledge creation regardless of the phase. "Knowledge creation has to happen in a caring atmosphere, one in which organisational members take an active interest in applying the insights provided by others. " (Von Krogh, Ichijo, Nonaka 2000: 9)  Care among organisational members is seen as being the key lubricant in any knowledge creation process and effective conversations as being essential for developing a powerful prototype. " (Von Krogh, Ichijo, Nonaka 2000: 49). We see how the tone of the emails establishes good working relationships and the role that friendly greetings and closings play in doing this. A key person here is the middle manager who is charged with driving this restructuring. In order to create the prototype he has to allay people's apprehensions and create an atmosphere in which people work constructively to deal with the problems that arise and make the new structure work.  His relational practice thus becomes very important. We get some idea of this from the excerpt from an interview with him (see 5.2.3) and his emails.

Effective relational practice means maintaining connections with co-workers in a way that helps preserve the future growth potential of these relationships (Fletcher 1999).  Because email allows

for no auditory or body language cues, what is written and how it is written on the page can have an effect on working relationships. Using appropriate face strategies is an important way of establishing or enhancing an harmonious relationship. (See 7.2 for a discussion on the role of greetings and closings in relational practice.)

In relation to the above, we can note a stylistic difference in the emails which introduce a new issue that arises and those that follow on from these. The initiatory scene-setting emails tend to be more formal and expansive and use more negative politeness strategies. These messages serve a dual role: they have to both pass on knowledge and do the relational work that is going to facilitate the co-operation of the actors involved so that new understandings can be jointly constructed and the issues resolved. This was particularly important as at the start of the restructuring process, many of the key players were distant rather than close colleagues.

Email was just one of the forms of communication used in this phase of knowledge creation. However, its role was an important one as the extract from an interview with the key person, Alan, (quoted in 5.2.3) shows. His comments also give some insight into how the email conversations are managed. The participants seem to have been willing to share their ideas, and these were accorded the respect of being discussed. Being able to talk freely and share one's personal beliefs with others is an important part of the knowledge creation process. For this to happen the conversation manager needs to be a 'caring expert'.

### 9.2.3    The dataset

The twenty-three emails in this dataset show the role of email in knowledge creation as it is used to work through one of the issues that arose in the restructuring of the section, namely, the mail ordering process. These were chosen for analysis because this was the issue which generated the largest number of messages. The messages were exchanged over a six week period and show how people from several different sections of the organisation co-operate and pool their knowledge to work through the problems that are associated with developing a prototype for this newly integrated group of students so that the mail order system for them is the same as that used for other students in the school.  Unforeseen negative consequences arise as the solution to one

problem creates another that then needs to be worked through. To solve these problems the staff involved piece information together, reflect on their experience and generate insights. McDermott (1998:3) describes this process as the art of professional practice.

### 9.2.4    The key players

The key people involved are Alan, the middle manager and the recipient of most of the emails, Cath, the former head of the IPS section, Marianne who was one of the two senior teachers in the section and the person whom Alan has been liaising with most closely in the restructuring, Lionel who is the Manager of the Student Resource Centre, (SRC) and Sue a supervisor.

| IPS | SRC |
|---|---|
| Alan– manager | Lionel – manager |
| Marianne – senior teacher | Sue - supervisor |
| Cath – former head of IPS | |
| other IPS staff | |

### 9.2.5    The issues

The SRC is the holding centre for nearly all of the learning materials despatched to students. All student work passes through the SRC and is scanned in and out. Each learning resource item has its own unique barcode enabling this to be done. One of the anomalous practices of the IPS section was that it looked after its own learning resources. As part of the restructuring its learning resources were centralised.

Prior to the communications that follow, people in each section shared certain explicit knowledge not held by people in other sections of the organisation. Also many of the individuals had worked in their respective areas for many years and had a lot of tacit knowledge. It was this explicit and tacit knowledge that needed to be made known to the other people involved so that knowledge gaps could be closed and new understandings emerge. Problems can often arise at knowledge boundaries. People working in different areas may have different mindsets and talk about things in different ways. Knowledge embedded and invested in practice means that it is accumulated in the experiences and know-how of people engaged in a given practice and in the doing of the activity.

This can make it difficult to express and recall. People also have a certain investment in the knowledge they have. All this means that communication across knowledge boundaries can be difficult. To alter current knowledge and create new knowledge, individuals have to be willing not only to share the knowledge they have, but also to alter their own knowledge. IPS and SRC were two very different areas.

The knowledge residing in one section but not in the other represented a knowledge gap that had to be bridged so that the following issues could be resolved:

XCIV.  What was to happen to IPS secondary work when it came into the School now?

XCV.    How could the work going out to students best be labelled so that

- schools would know what work was for what student

- incoming student workbooks could be distinguished from supervisor's booklets

- primary work could be distinguished from secondary work?

XCVI.   What resource items needed cover sheets?

XCVII.  How should resources for the RTLB project be ordered?

XCVIII. How could non-scannable items be sent out to students?

In order for communication to proceed along the appropriate channels, role responsibilities also needed to be sorted out.

In the messages which follow we see that the IPS staff shared the following understandings which other staff probably did not share:

- incoming IPS student work was distinguished by a large blue dot on a white card and went straight to the teacher without being scanned in. Some people in the Student Resource Centre also knew this but may not have realised that this work could have come from either a primary or a secondary level student.

- the meaning of the different codes on their learning resources, and that for their maths courses, there were both supervisors' booklets and students' booklets. They knew that a W identified the latter and that sometimes, but not always, the supervisor's booklets would be returned with that of the student. This latter was tacit knowledge based on their experience. IPS staff also knew that their resources were many and varied and they would have known the ones that

did not need to be scanned out.

- that primary and secondary level work all looked the same when it arrived in the section while at the same time knowing which teachers handled primary students' work and which secondary.
- the new role responsibilities of people involved in the old IPS section
- what the RTLB project was and how resources were despatched for this project.

As someone coming in from the outside, Alan may have been unaware of a number of these understandings.

Staff in the SRC also had certain shared understandings that those in IPS did not have. As the emails unfold we see what these were. SRC staff knew about cover sheets, the function that they served and the resources that needed them. They knew the procedures for the scanning in of student work, that there were different procedures for primary and secondary work and that the work of each student in a school had to come in, in a different plastic bag, They also knew through experience, that considerable extra work was created when these procedures were not followed.

As the messages show, email helped facilitate the sharing and pooling of knowledge held in one area but not in the other and the advance of new ideas.

## 9.3    The messages and new knowledge creation

### 9.3.1    The new process for IPS secondary work

In this first message, IPS32a, Alan is calling on Lionel's knowledge to develop the prototype as it will apply to the group of affected students doing secondary level subjects. In the process he passes on to Lionel two things he knows but that Lionel may not: some of the material that IPS staff send to their students may be difficult to identify and Special Needs are not his concern. In the exhange he hints that Lionel should contact Cath, who is now the person in charge of this area, if there are any problems with this group of students.

At the same time as these messages are being conveyed, Alan is using the email to build a positive working relationship with Lionel, a distant colleague. While this is important in any work situation,

it is perhaps even more so here where the dis-establishment of the IPS section has given a substantive amount of extra work to the Student Resource Centre staff.Alan's email combines both formal and informal styles to do its work and uses both positive and negative politeness strategies. He starts with a friendly greeting. His subject line is in the form of an apology and foreshadows the imposition, while the exclamation marks at the end are intended to keep a light tone. He shows in an informal and friendly way that he is mindful of the fact that he has already troubled Lionel. He makes his request in an indirect way and while hinting that they could use a response by the next day, shows respect for Lionel by stating that a response the following week would still be OK. A further sign of his respect is his signoff, *Regards* and his name. By using these politeness strategies he stresses the common ground between himself and Lionel while at the same time he avoids imposing on Lionel's freedom of action and gives him choices. Being an initiatory email, the message is a relatively long one, as there needs to be some backgrounding of the issue.

**IPS32a**
Subject: Sorry to be sending another one so soon!!
Hi again Lionel,
This one is about the new system for IPS Secondary when student work arrives. The special Needs students will not be a problem as there work won't need to be opened but will go straight to the teacher. (I guess it will have a card which identifies it… but this isn't my brief really as Cath is in charge of how Special Needs is established.)
I'm wanting to establish what happens to the IPS students who are going to departments. If the bag comes in will it need any special treatment? Or will it be treated like a normal secondary bag and broken up by your staff and then despatched in separate bags to the respective departments (with ID labels stuck on). This is what we think will happen but there could be materials in the bags that are difficult for your staff to identify where they should go.eg readers and the like.
Could you give this some thought and let me know what you think please. We are having a formal meeting with IPS staff at 2 tomorrow if you have a chance to respond before then. Don't worry of you don't have time to respond until next week though.
Regards
Alan

### 9.3.2    The scanning in and out of resources and the issue of cover sheets

In the next sequence of messages we see the two groups, the IPS section and the Student Resource Centre bringing together the explicit knowledge that each group has to work through a glitch that has appeared in the sending out of materials.

In Message IPS32b Sue alerts Marianne to a problem that has arisen, the computer won't accept the W code on the workbook, and asks her to do two things to get it sorted. The friendly greeting and respectful sign-off have to do the work of softening the fairly direct command. Although giving a

reason for a request usually serves to soften it, here Sue's rather blunt, *We cannot type these all in and out by hand* serves rather to add extra force as it lets Marianne know that the current situation is creating a lot of extra work for her staff.

**IPS32b**
Hi Marianne.
We tried to scan out some IPS resources today It was a work book and the computer would not accept the W.
Can you arrange with the computer people to have this facility available to Despatch.
We can not type these all in and out by hand.

Also there is no cover sheets on the sets can you organise this too please.

Regards

Sue

Marianne forwards this message on to Alan (Message IPS 32c) who needs to be kept in the loop. By keeping him informed she is also showing respect for his position.

**IPS32c**
Thought you should see this

Marianne feels she needs to call on the knowledge of the person who previously headed the IPS section and so has discussed Sue's email with Cath, who then responds to Sue while also passing this information on to Marianne (Message IPS32f). Cath now has a new role but is being brought into the conversation.

In her reply to Sue, Cath passes on some of the background knowledge she has about the situation and asks Sue to draw on her tacit knowledge in preparing a list of the difficulties which can then be passed on so that the IT people can apply their knowledge in sorting them out. New participants are thus being brought in as their expertise is needed. Cath asks Sue why cover sheets are necessary. In the old system IPS had sent out packs of work to students containing several different items. Teachers kept a record of what went into each pack and the packs were simply labelled in

numerical order. While, on the face of it, Cath seems to be asking Sue to share her knowledge of cover sheets with her so that she can have a better understanding of how the centralised mail processing system work, she also seems to be politely challenging the assumption about why cover sheets are needed. The explanation marks at the end of the sentence would seem to be a paralinguistic device conveying this attitude. Many of the IPS learning resources are very small. As they also have a code number on the front and so can be identified, staff working with the former IPS students find it difficult to understand why an item of only two or three pages also needs a piece of paper with this same information on it, attached to the back. The relationship side of the exchange is maintained by a friendly greeting, the use of the fairly familiar *you folk* an assurance to Sue that help has been promised (active empathy) and by the *Thanks* at the end.

**IPS 32f**
Hi Sue,
Marianne has discussed your email with me.
I did discuss the issue of your scanning in and out with Lionel and he said any problems you came across would need to be dealt with by us working with Sean.
I think if you list the things causing you difficulties we will need to go to Jonathan  and Sean all of us, and get these changes you need, done as high priority. They were not able to be made for IPS staff who have always had to manually enter this data, but perhaps they may now be done if the material is to be sent in and out by you folk. We were given the assurance that if this was causing extra work for your staff the case could be made to bring in temps/relief till it was sorted. I have asked Jonathan and I will get back to you.
Could you explain why cover pages are needed as well as the front cover? I'm not sure I understand that bit!! Thanks,
Cath

Marianne also responds to Sue (IPS32d) and updates her on personnel and other changes that are occurring. A copy is sent to Alan. While Cath is no longer in charge of IPS, Sue still appears to be under the impression that she is, and is directing communications to her that should properly now go to Alan. Marianne feels the need to clarify for Sue the new role responsibilities and changed state of the former IPS section. In this email she also passes on to Sue knowledge she has about some of the IPS learning resources and signals a potential problem in relation to the IMX booklets. Marianne does the work of relationship building through her greeting, her thanks to Sue for drawing attention to a problem, her acknowledgement of the extra work being created for Sue's section and her invitation to a face-to-face meeting. By so doing she validates Sue which should help keep their relationship in good order. Using a phrase which expresses a degree of reluctance *(I guess…)* she asks for a list of the resources that will need a cover sheet. The IPS resources had been sent to several different areas so Marianne would not have been aware of which ones now resided in the Student Resource Centre.

**IPS32d**
Hello Sue
I passed your query on to Cath as she does, of course, have lots of knowledge of IPS resources and I wanted her input. However she has now taken over her new role as Gifted Co-ordinator and is no longer working in
IPS.Alan is now acting HOD of IPS secondary. As you are probably aware the teachers in this department are going to move either to the Special Education area or to other departments. Alan and I are working
together on the changeover and this includes the new way of sending out and scanning in IPS resouces. We did anticipate that there would be some problems in the transition period - so thank you for letting us know of
some of them.

I have passed your response to Cath on to Alan. I guess we need a list of resources that will need the cover sheet. Re the IMX books - they have two parts to them. The supervisor book has the code you need - e.g. IMX102 while the workbook has the W attached. I guess it would work scanning out as IMX102 but coming in could be a problem as they don't always send back the supervisor book.
Thanks to you and your team for all the work you are doing. We do realise that it is putting extra pressure on you.
Do we need to meet some time to talk about the issues?

Marianne


Marianne again lets Alan know what is happening in Message IPS 32g.


**IPS 32g**
I forwarded Sue's email to Cath – did not expect her to reply but she did!!


The knowledge sharing continues with Message IPS32h as Sue passes on to Cath the information about the cover sheets she has requested and uses her explicit knowledge of procedures to let Cath know what needs to be done to rectify the cover sheet problem for the IPS learning resources, both long term and in the interim. The request to do something about the cover sheet is put into the passive and leaves vague who is to follow this request through, thus distancing both the sender and receiver from the required task.


**IPS32h**
Hi Cath,
Sets /booklets which are scanned in by Despatch staff now have a cover sheet attached to the back when they are printed. When the students work is scanned in the incoming label is attached to the cover sheet.

As you are aware the IPS sets/booklets do not have this cover sheet. Arrangements will have to be made with Larry Bigham to have a cover sheet printed and attached to any future sets/booklets being replenished.

In the interim to enable these resources to be scanned in to the school, I would suggest that you ask Larry to have some cover sheets printed urgently . And the incoming team will enclose these sheets with the student's work.

I have sent you a sample set with a cover sheet . Also a work book IMX102W which is just one of the work books which won't scan out / in.
Regards
Sue


Marianne's message to Alan (IPS 32i) suggests that it is not just Sue who was under the impression

that Cath was still in charge of the IPS students, but Cath as well, as she still seems to be very actively involved in the communication exchange pertaining to her old section. As Alan is now in charge of the secondary students in the IPS section, information should be going through him so Cath needs to be made aware of this. *Who is going to do this?* The agent is not specified (*Someone should*) Marianne seems to be suggesting that it is Alan who should do this but the use of *should* rather than 'must' and the *I guess* plus the use of *someone*, considerably reduces the force of this directive. (Marianne lets Sue know of the change in this arrangement in Message IPS32d, discussed above.)

**IPS 32i**
And here is the next bit. Someone should tell Cath, I guess, that you are now in charge of IPS.

Lionel also appears to be unaware of Cath's new role and addresses his email (IPS32j) to her rather than to Alan when he passes on 'explicit' knowledge about coding workbooks. Lionel solves the conflict between imposing on the other person, by stressing the urgency of the task, and maintaining politeness by the use of a number of softening devices. He addresses Cath personally, says we would appreciate, states the reason for his request, offers her assistance and thanks her at the end.

**IPS32j**
Cath as discussed this morning, to enable us to scan in the work book the code with the 'w' must be entered into extend. I have discussed with Jonathan and it needs to be done by your staff. (I'm sure Jonathan's staff would be able to assist if required) We would appreciate if this could be actioned as soon as possible as it is creating quite a headache here
many thanks.

### 9.3.3    Ordering resources for the RTLB project

The knowledge, both explicit and tacit, that resides in the Student Resource Centre also needs to be applied to develop a procedure for sending out the RTLB resources. This is the subject of Marianne's email to Lionel below. In order to be able to suggest a procedure, he needs to know what the situation is and this is the information that Marianne supplies him with. Explicit knowledge will need to be combined with newly created explicit knowledge (these resources now go through the Te Peno Mail Centre) to create the new procedure. The message is circulated to other key people who need to be kept in the loop. Marianne's email is polite: there is a semi-formal greeting and a close and the request is made indirectly.

**IPS32e**
Hello Lionel
We are involved with a project working with Resource Teachers of Learning
and Behaviour in schools chosen by the Ministry of Education. This involves sending resources
 for students who are not on the  SCT roll. Now that we are ordering the bulk of our resources
 through Te Peno this has presented problems. I presume that we can still order them on the resource sheets
that we have used in the past and they can come to the teacher. Time is important though, as part of our committment
in this project is to provide a speedy service. Can you suggest a way that this could happen, please?…
Thanks
Marianne

### 9.3.4    Distinguishing primary and secondary work

In the next message, Monika, a senior teacher in the primary section, is informing all the parties involved about a problem that has surfaced in relation to the work of the primary students. Previously all the work that came into the school for IPS students was scanned in as a numbered pack and then delivered to the respective teachers. It was the pack as a whole that was scanned in and not the individual items. Now primary work is being subjected to the same scanning in of individual items as secondary work. Monika's email is quite formal and the message very much to the point. She signs off formally with her name and surname thus lending weight to her position. Given the context, and that this is an initiatory email, this formality is appropriate.

**IPS 32k**

Hello

You will have noticed that staff at Te Peno are now scanning in and out all the work of ex IPS students,
This change was intended for secondary only, however there is a difficulty as secondary and primary IPS work
looks the same - it has a large blue dot on a white card

Because IPS work is being scanned in at Te Peno it is arriving with cover sheets for each booklet and the booklets will
already be on your work awaiting action screen

Monika Adams

Denise's message to Marianne (IPS 32m) highlights a negative consequence resulting from the scanning in of all work and reveals a knowledge gap that exists in the Student Resource Centre. Work for the primary school students is now also going to the subject departments instead of to the primary school teachers.

Denise's message begins with a phatic comment showing positive politeness. Her comment is what Laver (1975: 223) terms an 'other-oriented linguistic token.'  He sees the use of an 'other

oriented' remark to someone of a higher status as having a slightly intrusive air, "of tacitly demanding entry to momentary solidarity."(Laver 1975: 225)  As Marianne is senior to Denise, in Laver's terms, Denise runs the risk that her overture will be declined. However, because Denise and Marianne are both part of this closely-knit CofP the fact that Denise makes this comment may just indicate that in this group, status takes second place to group solidarity. After establishing this solidarity link, Denise then moves on to the business part of the message.

**IPS32m**

Good morning - are you puffed and out of breath from all that dancing!??
It now appears that some/all of our maths is going directly to the math dept!!
I have had a couple returned to me via mx people upstairs.
Yet another glitch.
D

Monika's email (IPS32k) brings forth a response from Cath. It can be assumed that Cath's suggestion has arisen from her tacit knowledge. What seems to be happening in this email is what has been described in the following way. "Every time someone is confronted with new sensory input-whether it is a colleague's statement, a plant tour, an email message or a musical tune, that person approaches the new stimulus with his or her experiences and beliefs about the world." (Maturana and Varela, 1987, cited in Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka 2000:20) In this exchange, email has created a context in which tacit knowledge emerges.

Monika's next message sent to all those concerned, IPS32l, implies that Cath's suggestion is now to be the new procedure for dealing with the work from primary students. This email is much less formal in tone than her previous one. We have here an example of 'exercising *ba*'. The individuals involved are now to internalise this explicit knowledge.

**IPS32l**
Hi there
Cath has suggested that you don't put blue spots on IPS work but instead label them as IPS PRIMARY
many thanks
Monika

## 9.3.5  Ensuring schools know what work is for what student

Of the remaining eight messages in this sub-set, seven deal with two other problems that have

arisen in relation to work going out to schools. Some students do not seem to be getting their work and because the work going out to a school is all being put into one bag, teachers in the schools have no way of identifying what work is for which student. Previously the teachers in IPS wrote the student's name on their new work. Now, because the work is being centrally despatched this is no longer happening. One message details the outcomes of a meeting attended by all of the key people. The knowledge sharing that occurred at this meeting led to the creation of new explicit knowledge, in the form of a new set of procedures. In message IPS 32t (reproduced below) Sue refers to a meeting she has had with her staff. Mutual interaction has led to the sharing of tacit knowledge and the joint construction of new explicit knowledge in the form of a new procedure, to be adopted instantly. The new process shows that thinking has moved on. Sue conveys this new knowledge to Alan for passing on to the rest of his team which he does in a later message. Her question hints that he should check that his team know what they need to do. Email is being used here for phase 5 of the knowledge creation process: the cross-levelling of knowledge. Sue has also become aware that Alan is the appropriate person to convey the information to. The tone of the message is friendly and respectful.

**IPS 32t**
Hello again Alan,
I have had a talk with the staff and we have had a few ideas on how we can
get this work out to the students.
When we get an address label for the school as you are aware it has Principal and the address of the school.
We will now from this minute write the student's name at the bottom of the address label.
This will be time consuming but it will ensure that the student's work can be identified.
However when the school is returning the student work for marking they will
have to use the correct card for the student or cross out the student name on the card
Are teachers aware that it is only one student per bag
Regards
Sue

## 9.3.6  Sending out non-scannable items

The final message in this dataset seeks answers to the question of what was to happen now to the resources that were previously not scanned out. It also deals with a range of related issues. To answer the questions asked, Alan had to again consult the Student Resources team and work out a solution with them. The resolution of the matters raised in this email effectively brought to an end

the joint construction of the new procedures for dealing with the despatch of work for this group of students.

At the end of the six weeks in which this exchange of emails occurred, the emails presented above reveal that the following new shared understandings and new reality had emerged:

• cover sheets would be added to all IPS resources issued by the SRC

• the W code on the student's workbooks in maths was to be entered on the computer so that these resources could be scanned out.

• work for students going to schools would have the student's name written at the bottom of the address label

• teachers needed to be made aware that they must put only one student's work in each bag.

In addition to the above points, it is likely that other shared understandings, some of which are alluded to, developed in the face-to-face meetings, that were ongoing during this period.

## 9.4     Conclusion

Nonaka et al's model of knowledge creation has provided a useful framework for looking at the role of email in the knowledge creation process in a large organisation.

At the outset each group had certain tacit and explicit knowledge which the other group needed to draw on in order for the issues that arose to be satisfactorily resolved. The expression and sharing of this knowledge enabled the creation of new jointly constructed knowledge which was made manifest in the solutions to the problems associated with the new mail ordering system.

As the staff involved work through the issues we see the extent to which knowledge is localized, embedded and invested in practice, (Bourdieu 1977, Lave 1988, cited in Carlile: 2002) and how "it is created by a community of  individuals who have a shared practice or problem and share in its consequences." (Carlile). We see too, how a CofP can provide an enabling context. "Because they enable person-to-person interaction and engage a whole group in advancing their field of practice, communities of practice are ideal vehicles for leveraging tacit knowledge." (McDermott 1998 )

In its important function as a transmittor of information, email contributed in no small way to the resolution of the above-mentioned issues and the creation of new shared understandings in the organisation. In this string of messages, there are several instances of email being used to transfer knowledge from one section to another, thus making it available for transformation into new knowledge. Email also played a role by prompting individuals to display their tacit knowledge. Cath, for example, is prompted by Monika's message, to input a solution which enacts her tacit knowledge (IPS32K and IPS32l). While the emails hint that the face-to-face meetings, the 'interacting or dialoguing *ba*,' played a much greater role in engaging tacit knowledge, email was frequently used to set up the meeting where this happened or to make known the new knowledge that was the outcome of such a meeting.

The messages also show the role that email can play in developing the positive and caring working relationships that are a key ingredient of successful knowledge creation. While the main function of the messages was transactional, they also had a very important interactive function. Both positive and negative politeness strategies have been used in this work of relationship building. The positive politeness strategies used, such as acknowledging the difficulties of others and showing appreciation of what they have done, giving reasons for requests, using humour and friendly informal greetings, helped to build a friendly, co-operative professional working relationship. By using these politeness strategies, members of the two main teams involved were able to show closeness, solidarity and rapport. By making use of negative politeness strategies such as, using respectful greetings and indirect forms of request many of which were softened, the group members involved showed respect for the face needs of the other person and minimised the imposition posed by the requests they had to make in order to get their professional work done and establish new working systems. Through this relational work these email conversations became part of the enabling context, the *ba* referred to by Van Krogh et al. The emails indicate that participants felt able to contribute freely, conflict was avoided and harmonious working relationships established in a period of considerable stress and anxiety. They demonstrate the importance of effective interpersonal facework for facilitating knowledge creation. When this effective interpersonal facework exists, email is particularly useful in supporting the processes of combining existing explicit knowledge, facilitating the manifestation of tacit knowledge and ensuring ongoing collaboration.

# Chapter TEN

## *Summary and conclusions*

### 10.1    Summary of the research

The aim of this research was to find out the extent to which the workplace culture influences the use of email in everyday workplace communication, the functions for which email is used, the reasons why it is or is not chosen over other forms of communication and the way in which emails are written.  A further purpose was to explore the relationship of status, social distance, the nature of the imposition, gender and email style.

To answer the research questions, a comparative study has been made of two very different workplaces, one a manufacturing plant which is part of a multi-national corporation, the other an educational organisation.  An ethnographical methodology was primarily used for the collection of the data which has been interpreted from a social interactionist, social constructionist standpoint. Politeness theory and discourse analysis have been the main theoretical frameworks applied to the analysis of the data. As interactional sociolinguistics gives primacy to the context in which interactions occur, an important focus of the research has been a study of the workplace culture of each organisation. The workplace culture has been seen as something an organisation *is* rather than something an organisation *has*. This viewpoint sees the workplace culture as being socially constructed through the interactions of its members and thus constantly evolving and not unitary. However, the culture of each workplace that has been described is that of the dominant culture.

The research findings are based on a corpus of 515 email messages, of which 394 were sourced from the educational organisation and 121 from the manufacturing plant, 28 recorded and transcribed interviews, 52 email survey questionnaires, 23 workplace culture survey questionnaires, a workplace climate survey, two diaries of reflective practice and four recordings of people's interactions over one work day in addition to copious observational notes and material collected from the two organisations.  Both qualitative and quantitative data has been presented. Qualitative data has been used to enrich, explain and unpack the quantitative data tables based on

the frequencies of occurring items.

The thesis has been divided into two parts. The first three chapters provide general background to the research while chapters four to eight detail the findings. Chapter One outlines the aims of the research and the organisation of the thesis. Chapter Two is a review of the literature pertinent to the present study. It pinpoints several hitherto unanswered questions related to the role, status and style of workplace email which have formed the basis for this research. In Chapter Three the theoretical frameworks and methodology are described and briefly critiqued as well as some of the issues related to the coding of the emails and how these were resolved. A detailed description and comparison of the workplace cultures in Chapter Four makes up the first part of the findings. Schein's three levels of culture have been used as the basis for this description. Chapter Five examines email use in both organisations and its relationship to other forms of communication. To illustrate the reasons for people's communicative choices, two case studies are included.  After examining email use in general, Chapter Six focuses in on four individuals providing a case study of their communication use in a working day to see where email fits into their overall communication pattern.

After reporting on how and to what extent email is used at work, attention then shifts to some of the linguistic features of workplace emails to explore the relationship of the sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance, the ranking of the imposition, gender and email style. Exploring these dimensions, Chapter Seven reports on people's use of greetings and Chapter Eight on how directives are issued. Politeness theory forms the basis for this analysis which largely concerns people's relational practice.  Again comparisons are drawn between the two workplaces and reasons suggested for the differences that are observed.  Chapter Nine  addresses a hitherto relatively unexplored aspect of workplace email, namely its role in knowledge creation. It describes a study which used discourse analysis to show an issue being worked through using email. By showing the cognitive, transactional and affective functions of email working together in tandem this chapter brings together some of the findings of the previous three chapters and illustrates the dynamic of email at work in the workplace.

## 10.2 Discussion of the research questions

### 10.2.1 What role is played by email in workplace communication?

*XCIX.   What communicative functions does email serve?*

*C.   Do managers make a conscious choice about what particular means to use for communicating information to their team?*

*CI.   How often do managers choose email as opposed to other forms of communication to convey messages to their team?*

*CII. Do they select different means of communication for different recipients?*

*CIII.   What role is played by email in organisational knowledge creation?*

To answer the first part of this research question, the email corpora were analysed using Speech act theory. The results showed that email in these organisations is predominantly used for the transmission and seeking of information. This is not surprising given its inherent advantages of speed, multiple addressability and freedom from space and time constraints.  These two uses accounted for over half of the speech act functions. The next most important use of email and accounting for some 20% of all speech acts was the making of requests. The figures for both organisations were remarkably similar. Although there was some minor variation in the percentages for each function, these three communicative functions made up 77% of the speech acts of the SCT corpora and 78% of the Revelinu corpus. Invitations, commissives and expressives made up the remaining speech act functions.

Email has given managers another communication media choice.  The research has shown that their choice of media to use for any given communication is a strategic one. It is consciously or sub-consciously influenced by a multiplicity of factors including the nature of the interaction, who the addressee is and the status relationships of the writer and addressee, the number of addressees, and constraints of time and distance. The sender's personality and the workplace culture are other factors governing media choice.  For example, one of the managers involved in the research is a very people-oriented person. She prefers face-to-face contact wherever possible whereas, in some similar situations, her predecessor was more content to send an email. All other things being equal, email is the preferred medium in both workplacesfor communicating messages to groups or

overseas. It is also used to send attachments, if a written record is desired, to ensure that the message gets through and to allow an addressee to reply at their leisure. Face-to-face communication is preferred for dealing with sensitive or personal issues and in some instances to show authority and that the message is important. It is used too if there is a danger of misinterpretation, and often if the addressee is in close proximity, especially if a quick answer is desired.  In the manufacturing plant managers used face-to-face communication with people on the factory floor not only to avoid problems of miscommunication but also because they knew that this was the addressees' preferred choice. Although not widely used by the managers involved in this research, it was reported that the telephone is the first choice of medium if a quick response is required of someone physically distant or to impress urgency.  Overall the research suggested that managers choose the mode of communication which best suits their personal style and which they consider the most effective for getting the job done.

While the primary role of email is in dealing with much of the "administrivia" of a workplace, email also has an important role to play in knowledge creation. It does this through its role as a transmittor of information. By transferring the knowledge of one section to that of another in  an organisation it makes this knowledge available for transformation into new knowledge. Email is also used to set up meetings at which new knowledge is created and to transmit around an organisation the new knowledge that has been created. An email message can also act as a prompt to the release of an individual's tacit knowledge. In addition, through the relational work that goes on in email, it becomes part of the enabling context or *ba* which is an essential component of knowledge creation.

### 10.2.2  What is the status of email in each organisation?

*CIV.What status is email accorded in each organisation compared to other communication media?*
Email was introduced into both workplaces in the 1990s. However, it is accorded a much higher status in the educational organisation. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that email is essentially a white-collar mode of communication and operates best in a high-context culture where meanings do not need to be spelled out as they are found in the shared context and understandings. At SCT it has experienced rapid growth because it fits well with the IT image the organisation is fostering, its highly literate staff and the fragmented physical space of the workplace. In the

manufacturing plant its use is mainly confined to the managerial and administrative staff and even here it is not universally widely used. When computers need to be shared,  people often see other modes of communication as being more efficient and as this is a relatively closely-knit and friendly workplace with diverse racial groups and a wide spread of literacy levels, face-to-face is more likely than email to be the strategic choice. However, in both workplaces, if people are physically available, face-to-face remains the preferred mode of communication. In terms of time spent communicating, the four people surveyed over a one day period all spent considerably more time engaged in face-to-face communication than in any of the other forms of communication and with the exception of a senior manager, they all interacted with more people face-to-face. The research has shown email coming second to face- to-face as the mode of communication used in these two workplaces and supports other research which has indicated that media choice is influenced by social as well as rational factors. (See 2.1.2)

### 10.2.3  How does the style and form of email communication vary within each organisation?

a)        *What use is made of greetings and closings?*

b)        *What strategies do email writers use to*

   •*negotiate workplace relationships*

   •*make their messages less face-threatening?*

c)        *To what extent are a and b above affected by*

   •*status*

   •*social distance*

   •*gender*

   •*the workplace culture*

Greetings and closings are much more widely used at Revelinu than at SCT. At SCT 60% of the messages came without a greeting and 37% had no closing of any kind compared to 17% and 10% respectively at Revelinu. The difference in greeting use between the two organisations reflected the findings of the workplace culture survey. It showed Revelinu as being a friendly workplace with a management culture that values its staff and the work they do. The wide use of greetings is reflective of this while the informal terms of address used indicate strong feelings of solidarity. At

SCT on the other hand, the lack of greetings seems to reflect the social distancing and lack of solidarity that was evident in the culture survey, and may be in part an outcome of the mistrust and uncertainties created by the restructuring.

The choice or lack of greetings and closings are one way in which writers can negotiate their workplace relationships. The way in which directives are worded is another. Writers use many strategies to make their messages less face-threatening. The great majority of email directives are requests and mitigated in some way. In addition to using many of the syntactic and lexical resources available to writers and speakers to make messages less face-threatening, creative writers are also able to exploit the medium to this end. In this corpora 94% of the directive messages contained at least one softening element and over a third at least three softening elements. A high percentage of directives were backgrounded, a strategy which Iedema (1997) interprets as the writer suggesting collegiality. This mitigation was also found in directives from high to low status people suggesting that in these workplaces the writers were more concerned with showing collegiality than status.

Status and to a lesser extent gender and social distance are enacted in the language of email directives just as they are in other forms of written and spoken language. People of higher status than their addressees were more likely than others to write bare, unmitigated directives and to boost them. They made greater use of the imperative and used fewer interrogatives. They also used fewer softeners in their mitigated directives. In general more indirect forms were preferred when writing to distant colleagues. Of the three social distance categories compared, messages to close colleagues, messages to distant colleagues and messages to groups, the greatest degree of mitigation was found in messages written to groups, the least to close colleagues. A possible explanation for this is that when addressing a group, people err on the side of politeness. More surprising perhaps, was the large number of messages written to higher status people which showed little evidence of mitigation. This was partly because a number of these messages were written by close colleagues so that low social distance neutralised to a large extent the effect of status, and partly because some of these messages were short quick responses. However, it may also be in part a reflection of the informal and relatively egalitarian nature of New Zealand society where there is less sensitivity to status than in many other cultures.

The research supports other findings, which show that women place more value on the affective content of messages than men. Messages written by women, by and large, included more politeness features than those written by men. On average women used more softeners and backgrounded their messages more than men. They used a slightly lower percentage of imperatives and a correspondingly slightly higher percentage of interrogatives and declaratives than their male counterparts. They were also less likely than men to boost messages.

In terms of the forms used, the email directives in this corpora were analysed as lying somewhere between the directives of spoken discourse and those of letters and faxes in the studies cited. Compared to spoken discourse they used far fewer imperatives. They showed a similar low use of the imperative form to business letters and faxes but a higher use of interrogatives. Email directives thus seem to be more direct than those of letters and faxes but less direct than those of spoken discourse. This may be because, on the one hand, the immediacy of email and the writer's knowledge of many of the addressees encourages direct forms but on the other, the lack of visual and auditory cues leads the writer to use fewer direct and unmitigated forms than in spoken discourse.

Politeness theory states that the greater the face threat of a speech act, the greater the number of mitigating elements that will be used. The imposition ratings showed too little spread to lead to any firm conclusion but did suggest that the number of mitigating features used does increase with the rating of the imposition.

Apart from the considerable difference in the use of greetings and closings in the two organisations there were other notable style and form differences. Directives are expressed in different ways in the two workplaces. In the white-collar workplace, the directives showed a greater degree of indirection. As more direct forms tend to indicate greater hierarchy or familiarity and solidarity, given that status consciousness is not greatly marked in either organisation, these findings further suggest that the manufacturing plant has a friendlier and more unitary culture than the educational organisation. The more direct forms used at Revelinu may also be a feature related to its being predominantly a working class as opposed to a middle-class work environment. In this culture there is a greater appreciation and expectation of directness than in the middle-class culture of SCT

where a more indirect and subtler use of language is valued and where it would for the most part be expected that a rationale be given for a request. Politeness must then be viewed as being relative to the culture in which it is found. Watts (2003) making the distinction between politic and polite behaviour says: "Polite behaviour is therefore behaviour beyond what is perceived to be appropriate to the ongoing social interaction, which says nothing about how members evaluate it. The definition implies that linguistic structures are not, per definition, inherently polite. Impolite behaviour will be behaviour that is perceived by participants to be inappropriate behaviour. " Using this definition the language forms and language used in both organisations is equally polite. In the manufacturing plant, the higher degree of directness which politeness theory would see as being more face-threatening and hence more impolite, is entirely appropriate, and, given the context, is polite behaviour. Similarly, the less frequent use of greetings in the educational organisation, while indicating less solidarity, does not inherently mean that the writers are less polite as, here, this behaviour appeared to be the norm. While most of those surveyed indicated that they preferred messages to have greetings and closings because this made them friendlier, they did not find the absence of these'marked' in any way.

A further difference was noted in the length of messages. On average, those in the Revelinu corpus were 25 percent longer than those in the SCT corpora. This difference is attributed to the different types of business being done in the messages and to the different cultures of the organisations. Many of the SCT messages were short announcements or quick responses to a question. The Revelinu corpus contained a higher percentage of multi-functional emails. However, because of the greater educational and cultural diversity of the staff in the manufacturing plant, more explicit language needs to be used. An interesting difference is that whereas in the SCT corpora women's messages were on average about twenty per cent longer than those of men, the average male message at Revelinu was about nine per cent longer. When women are in a position of numerical strength and are almost equally represented with men in management, as is the case at SCT, they may feel more empowered and able to participate more fully and actively.

### 10.2.4 How does email enable one organisation to be distinguished from another?

*CV. How does the type of organisation affect the use made of email?*

The research clearly shows that email patterns differ in the two organisations although email is used for the same communicative functions in both workplaces. SCT being an educational organisation which is becoming more IT focussed and which has a highly literate staff, uses email extensively. At Revelinu with its multi-cultural staff with varying degrees of literacy, email has not made the same inroads and its use is mainly confined to the administrative and management areas. In the workplace email is essentially a white-collar communication mode. White-collar workers can do much of their real productive work by email, factory floor workers cannot.

## 10.3    Implications of this research for organisational communication

Previous research (Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire 1987) has shown that it takes CM groups longer to reach consensus than face-to-face groups. The interview data gathered from some of the managers involved in this research project, however, goes one step further and indicates that it is difficult for issues to be resolved using just the email medium and that over dependence on email is likely to cause problems. Some of the reasons advanced for this are that people may be 'hearing' different things at different times and that email makes it difficult for the various stake-holders to see where other people are coming from. Apart from this, which makes it more difficult to get everybody on board, email also has the potential to lead to communication breakdown and conflict. It would thus seem to be desirable for team leaders to ensure that in any discussion being carried on through email regular face-to-face meetings are also held to provide an opportunity for people to hear the same things at the same time, and to share points of view.

This research also draws attention to what Weisband and Reinig have called 'the larger social consequences' of email and which Markus (1994a) also mentions. While perhaps not major issues in themselves, the accumulated effect of the downsides of workplace email can increase worker stress and create conflict and feelings of alienation. These downsides include the information overload that email has encouraged, the ease of miscommunication, the expectations of a quick

response and the frustration that is felt when messages requiring a response are not responded to. Over reliance on email communication can lead to managers becoming isolated from their teams. In addition while many of the respondents appreciate the 'fun' emails that can lighten up a work day, the most mentioned source of annoyance in relation to email were non-work related messages and messages that were of no relevance to the receiver. These effects can however be minimised if workplaces follow good email practice. Data from the questionnaires and interviews indicates that the messages which are likely to be most effective in achieving their transactional aims and in constructing and maintaining good workplace relations are those which acknowledge and show respect for the reader, are carefully targetted to the appropriate recipients, have a clear subject line and clear references, are concise and unambiguously written and avoid the use of typographic devices, such as underlining and uppercase, which could suggest anger. Because there is the expectation of a prompt reply, it is important to respond promptly to a message if an answer is expected or required and suggests also that people should use automated replies when they are away. It is important also to ensure that only essential information is transmitted and that email is never allowed to replace 'the human moment'. Markus (1994a) cites the examples of managers who carefully worded their email messages and used the telephone from time to time to avoid negative social outcomes. Even better if possible, is the example of several of the managers at SCT who made a point of making regular face-to-face contact with their staff and of the staff in the administration area at Revelinu who went into the factory to communicate with people working on the factory floor. The importance accorded face-to-face interaction in the manufacturing plant may be one factor contributing to the higher levels of solidarity here compared to the educational organisation where email plays a more important role.

The analysis of greetings, closes, directives and email messages, further debunks the idea that email is inherently a 'lean' medium and supports the findings of Abdullah (2003) who found it 'a rich repository of relational communication'. The focus in this study has been on showing how the type of greeting or sign-off used sends a message of distance, solidarity or expectation, and how people construct and perform their institutional identity through the linguistic choices they make in this and in issuing a directive. It is important to be aware that this relational communication can be both positive and negative. The analysis of email messages also supports the claims of Williams (1999) and Huang, Watson and Wei (1998) that readers draw on their own situational knowledge

to interpret meaning.

The study of some of the stylistic features of workplace email messages has shown that while there is no one email style, it is possible to distinguish the emails of one organisation from those of another. The 'minimalism' that Mulholland (1999) noted as seeming to be developing as the preferred style, and warned about because it meant that politeness data tended to be placed in final rather than initial or medial position, was more in evidence in the educational organisation than at Revelinu where messages were often quite wordy. The style differences noted between the emails of the two organisations suggest that it is the culture of the workplace and the nature of the task that influences this and that Mulholland's fears may not be justified particularly as the findings also show that most of the writers who provided their emails were aware of the need to think carefully about the wording of their messages and were careful to mitigate the force of their directive messages. At least two of the respondents, one a senior manager, had someone else check their message before sending it if they had any concerns about its tone. Even if they did not always use greetings themselves writers were aware that these contributed to making an email more friendly. The schizophrenic character of email noted by Baron (1998) was in evidence in these corpora. While many of the messages reflected the more informal and personal voice in writing that Danet (2001) has commented on, (See AC91a-c :5.2.1) others were more formal.

An important finding is the high percentage of email directives issued in the form of requests and which were backgrounded. This suggests that managers are aware that without the auditory and visual cues of face-to-face communication, directives in the form of imperatives, and issued without explanation, may work against building positive workplace relationships.

The extent to which gender differences are reflected in email also seems to be influenced in some respects by the workplace culture. While the research supports other findings, (Herring 2000, Holmes 1995), which show that women place more value on the affective content of messages than men, there was a discrepancy between the two workplaces in the average length of male and female messages. The answer to the question, "Who dominates the discourse time? may be that it is the group which feels itself to be the dominant one in terms of numerical and hierarchical strength. Clearly more research is needed to test the validity of this hypothesis.

## 10.4    Contribution of this research

Applied linguistic research in the area of workplace email is as yet quite limited and has been largely concerned with defining the characteristic features of this new medium, and its use in various contexts. (e.g. Crystal 2001, Rice 1997, Mulholland 1999, Pogner and Soderberg 2003) while Abdullah 2003 has studied the role of email in relational communication.

The contribution that the research described here has made has been to apply, in an adapted form, some of the methodological tools of the discipline to a study of this area of linguistic behaviour to explore in particular the relationship between the workplace culture and the patterns of usage and style of email. Speech act theory, which has most often been used in studies of spoken discourse, has, in this study been applied to an examination of the communicative functions of workplace email. Politeness theory has provided a useful framework for examining the relational work done in workplace email, However, because it does not adequately take account of cultural and contextual factors influencing people's email discourse, it has had to be modified and complexified for the analysis.  In close conjunction with these frameworks, the research has also used frameworks from other disciplines to help explain the patterns shown and answer the research questions where appropriate. Thus for example, a knowledge-creation model has been used in combination with discourse analysis to explore the cognitive role of email. Similarly ethnomethodology has been used to examine the workplace cultures of the two organisations. Just as the frameworks and methodologies of applied linguistics can and are making valuable contributions in other disciplinary studies, so also can their frameworks and methodologies enrich studies in applied linguistics.

As well as providing support for previous findings which have shown some of the negative outcomes of organisational email, this study shows the valuable role that email plays in organisational communication particularly in dealing with the day to day administrivia, the reasons for its choice and how it is used alongside other forms of communication. By quantifying the communicative functions of email, it has been able to confirm the importance of email in the transmission of information and to give some indication of the extent of the other communicative functions it performs. The research has extended the study of directives to workplace email. Two important findings about these that emerge from the corpora analysed are that they are more

indirect than spoken directives but less direct than other written directives which have been the focus of study, and that the great majority of them are mitigated and in the form of requests. The analyses of greetings and closings, directives and email messages presented in this thesis have highlighted other very important and not so immediately obvious roles that email plays, namely its contribution to relationship building, to the construction, maintenance and performance of institutional identities and to knowledge creation. The study has also shown where and how email fits into the total communication pattern of two organisations while individual case-studies have indicated how individuals use it.

By exploring the relationship between the culture of a workplace and one communication media, the research has produced findings suggesting that workplace culture and media use are inter-related. The nature of the workplace influences the choice of communication media while the latter in turn appears to have some influence on the culture.

## 10.5   Suggestions for further research

The research described here is a case study of two workplaces in a New Zealand context. It is essentially qualitative. While quantitative data is included, the emails on which many of the findings are based comprise messages, for the most part received and sent by two people in each organisation. It is possible that these are not representative for each organisation, let alone for other organisations. Hence no statistical tests have been carried out. This study should therefore be regarded as exploratory and the conclusions and findings as suggestive only. Further research based in different workplaces and in different contexts needs to be carried out to see the extent to which these findings hold for other workplaces and can be generalised.

In addition to this, there are a number of other areas of research which suggest themselves from this study. One of these is channel switching. Amongst other things the aim of the research described

here was to construct a broad general picture of organisational and individual email usage. While it has shown that email is used with and alongside other communication media to work through issues, channel switching has only incidentally been touched on. A fruitful area of enquiry would be to examine at a micro-level how the different communication media including email, are used in the resolution of an issue to better understand the unique role and contribution that each can make in combination with the others. Such a study could be usefully based on the role of the different media in knowledge creation.

The danger of miscommunication has been shown to be one of the reasons why email is avoided for communicating with people on the factory floor at Revelinu and why a number of the managers interviewed at SCT felt that email communication could only go so far. In addition to misunderstandings caused by people from different language and cultural backgrounds trying to communicate with each other and the over-use of email for discussion, the interviews revealed that communication breakdown can occur with emails that:

• are so truncated that the meaning is lost

•contain incorrect or mismatching dates

•contain a lot of typos

•assume the reader knows what is being referred to even though the previous communication may have been a conversation or telephone call

•have words misspelt

•use jargon or words that may have different meanings to different people

• are so long winded or 'waffly' that the main point becomes lost in all the verbiage

•leave unclear who is required to perform a certain task. This can happen when a message is sent to several people or when the writer expects a message to be forwarded on while the reader assumes that the writer has done this.

•

It was beyond the scope of this research to explore in detail the whole area of miscommunication and communication breakdown in email or indeed of communication repair but because there is a heightened danger of miscommunication and communication breakdown it allows for no on the spot clarification and gives no auditory and visual cues – and because such breakdowns are time-consuming and frustrating, research into this whole area would make a very valuable contribution

to extending our knowledge about workplace email.

# Appendix I

## Victoria University of Wellington
### School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies.

### Workplace Email Questionnaire

*Email here refers to the sending and receiving of electronic messages related to your work.  It does not refer to internet communication even if work-related.*

*Please add any comments that come to mind as you work through the questionnaire either underneath the question or in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire.*

## CVI.    Email Use.

CVII.    In what year (or month if recently) did you start using email in your work?

CVIII.   How often did you attend to your email box on your most recent day at work?
(Circle one of a – e. )
    CIX.            I had my email screen  up continuously or almost continuously and attended to it whenever a new message came up.
    CX.             frequently
    CXI.            several times
    CXII.           once or twice
    CXIII.          not at all

CXIV.   How much time approximately in your most recent day at work did you spend on email communication (reading, responding, writing)? (Circle one of a – e.)
    CXV.            more than two hours
    CXVI.           1-2 hours
    CXVII.          30 minutes to 1 hour
    CXVIII.         0-30 minutes
    CXIX.           none at all

CXX.    How much time approximately in your most recent day at work did you spend on work related face-to-face communication (discussions with colleagues, attending meetings)? (Circle one of a – e.)
    a    more than two hours
    b    1-2 hours
    c    30 minutes to 1 hour
    d    0-30 minutes
    e    none at all

CXXI.   Over the last twelve months has your use of email at work (Circle one of a-c.)
    CXXII.          increased?

CXXIII.     stayed the same? (go to question 7)
CXXIV.     decreased?
If there has been a change, why do you think this is?
CXXV. If your use of email has changed, what has been the effect on the following forms of communication?  (tick in the appropriate column)

|  | increase | no change | decrease |
|---|---|---|---|
| telephone |  |  |  |
| face-to-face |  |  |  |
| fax |  |  |  |
| letters* |  |  |  |
| typed memos* |  |  |  |

*This includes attachments sent electronically but set out in letter or memo format.

CXXVI. What work purposes do you use email for?  (Tick the appropriate point on the line.)

          infrequently            frequently

CXXVII.     passing on information

I_____I

CXXVIII.     requesting information

I_____I

CXXIX.     giving instructions

I_____I

CXXX.     resolving conflicts

I_____I

CXXXI.     collaborating on documents

I_____I

CXXXII.     making a complaint

I_____I

CXXXIII.     offering feedback

I_____ I

CXXXIV.                                                                                 making a request          I_____ I

CXXXV.     thanking

l_____ I

j.   seeking an opinion          I_____I

CXXXVI.   scheduling a meeting

I_____I

CXXXVII.   replying to a previous message

I_____I

CXXXVIII.  other (Please explain.)


CXXXIX.        What are the two or three most important purposes for which you use email?


CXL.   Are there any work purposes for which you would not use email ? (Circle as appropriate.)
       Yes                    No

If yes, what are these?


CXLI.  Did you do any of the following activities related to work, on your most recent day at
       work? (Circle yes or no as appropriate.)

       attend a meeting      (MEETING)                        yes           no

       talk to someone in person (PERS)                       yes           no

       speak on the telephone       (TELE)                    yes           no

       read and write an email      (EMAIL)                   yes           no

       write a letter, fax, memo, written note     (WRIT)     yes           no


CXLII.  Of the answers you've circled, which one did you do the most of? (circle)

        MEETING      PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT


## B. Attitudes to Email
*This next section includes a number of statements. For each of these circle the number that best expresses your feelings. Please add any comments underneath the statement or in the space provided on page 8.*

                    *1=strongly disagree*
                    *2=disagree*
                    *3=neither agree nor disagree*

*4=agree*
*5=strongly agree*

CXLIII. Email wastes a lot of time.

*1* *2* *3* *4* *5*

*strongly disagree* *strongly agree*

CXLIV. There is an expectation in this workplace that we should use email as much as possible.

*1* *2* *3* *4* *5*

*strongly disagree* *strongly agree*

CXLV.  I feel competent using email.

*1* *2* *3* *4* *5*

*strongly disagree* *strongly agree*

CXLVI. I would use email more if I had better typing skills.

*1* *2* *3* *4* *5*

*strongly disagree* *strongly agree*

CXLVII.        I enjoy using email.

*1* *2* *3* *4* *5*

*strongly disagree* *strongly agree*

CXLVIII.        Are there things that annoy you about the way other people communicate with you
    at work using email?  (circle one)
                        Yes                        No
If yes, what are these things.

CXLIX.  Are there things that you appreciate about the way other people use email? (Circle one.)
                        Yes                        No
If yes, what are these things.

CL. I feel happier writing email to people I know well than to people I don't know very

well.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*


CLI.    Email saves a lot of time.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*


21. It is important to start email messages with a greeting and/or the person's name.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*

Please give the reason why you agree or disagree.


CLII.    My fellow-workers frequently use email to communicate.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*


If you have circled 4 or 5 do you think this is a good thing?          (Circle one.)
        Yes            No

Comment:
23. In general I prefer people to email me rather than talk to me.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*


24. Email has made it easier for me to communicate with my boss about everyday matters.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                             *strongly agree*


25. Email has made it easier to communicate with my boss about matters that I would otherwise find it difficult to discuss with him/her.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*strongly disagree*                                   *strongly agree*

26. Email has improved the effectiveness of organisational communication.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

27. Email has meant I now communicate more with people in other organisations about work.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

28. Email creates misunderstandings that a phone call or meeting could prevent.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

CLIII.    Because people are using email more, they are talking to each other less.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

30. It is important to reply promptly to email messages.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

Please say why you agree or disagree:
31. It is important to sign off email messages eg by using a close such as cheers and/or your name.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

Please say why you agree or disagree.

32. Email is more like talking than writing.

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*strongly disagree*             *strongly agree*

### 3.Email Practices

*Indicate how often each of the following applies by circling the appropriate number. Please add any comments you would like to add under the statement or on page 8*

|        |           |
|--------|-----------|
| CLIV.  | *never*   |
| CLV.   | *seldom*  |
| CLVI.  | *sometimes* |
| CLVII. | *usually* |
| CLVIII.| *always*  |

33. I delete some email messages without reading them.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLIX. I think carefully about how I word my email messages.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLX. Who I am communicating with at work affects my choice of form of communication.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLXI. I think about my reader when I write my message.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLXII. I stop and rethink the message before clicking the 'send' command.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLXIII.I try to write a clear informative subject line.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLXIV. I send email messages to people who are sitting physically close to me.

| *1*     | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5*      |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

CLXV. I change the wording* of other people's messages before forwarding them on.

|     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |
| *never* |     |     |     | *always* |

\* This does not include adding your own message or deleting parts of the message.

*Which form of communication do you feel should be used by yourself and others in each of these work situations? (Circle the appropriate word.)*
   *PERS — meet in person*
   *TELE — telephone*
   *EMAIL*
   *WRIT — send a letter, memo or written note*

41. Delivering important information

   PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

42. Delivering good news

   PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

43. Delivering bad news

   PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

Which form of communication do you, or would you be most likely to use in each of the following

situations at work?  (Circle the appropriate word.)

44. You want to make a request of a manager who intimidates you.

   PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

45. You need to discuss a complex matter with a colleague you have had difficulties with in the past.

   PERS          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

46. A colleague's rudeness has made you angry. You want to deal with the situation.

   PERS.          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

47. You want to pass on a "non-negotiable" decision to someone who is likely to argue about it.

   PERS.          TELE          EMAIL          WRIT

CLXVI.  See page 9

*Finally I would like to know a little about your background so I can see how different people feel about the topics about which you've answered questions.*

CLXVII.          What is your current job?

*CLXVIII.* Circle  the hours you work:          *part-time (less than 30 hours per week)*

*full-time  (30 hours or more per week)*

*CLXIX*.  Circle your gender:                 *female*                          *male*

*CLXX*.  Circle your age group:   *16-20*          *26-35*          *45-54*
                                              *21-25*          *36-44*          *over 55*

*CLXXI*.  Is English your first language? (Circle one.)         *Yes*               *No*

CLXXII.          Circle the ethnic group(s) you feel you belong to.

*New Zealand European/Pakeha*                    *New Zealand Maori*

*Other (such as Samoan , Chinese). Please state:*

CLXXIII.          How long have you worked in this workplace? (state in years or months)

CLXXIV.          What is your highest educational qualification?(**Circle one below.**)

        *CLXXV.  no educational qualification*

        *CLXXVI. secondary level qualification (SC, SFC/UE, UB)*

        *CLXXVII.          tertiary level  qualification*

_____

*Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experience of email?  If so, please write your name in the space below.*

**Name:**                                          **Tel Extn:**

*Please add here any additional comments you would like to make about your use of email at work.  If the comment relates to a particular question, please add the question number. Continue on the back of this page if necessary.*

**Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Please return it to the Acting Manager, HR.**

## *Appendix 11*
## *Workplace Culture Survey*

## **Victoria University of Wellington**
### **School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies.**

**The aim of this survey is to find out how you see the organisation you work for.**

## *Section A*

*For each of the statements numbered 1 - 5, rank your workplace on the 1 – 5 scale.  1 means that you agree fully with the statement on the left, 5 that you agree fully with the statement on the right. In this first section (A) workplace means the organisation or factory you work in, not just your particular work group, department or section. It is **your overall impression** that is important.*

**Where I work: *(Circle the number of your choice)***

1. People do only what's necessary.                    People work extra hours
                                   1 2 3 4 5            without pay.

2. Every day is the same.        1 2 3 4 5            Every day is different.

3. People don't like change.                           People are flexible and adapt
                                   1 2 3 4 5            readily to change.

4. Management has a sincere                             Management is only
interest in the satisfaction                           interested in outputs and
and well-being of employees.     1 2 3 4 5            results.

5. Management takes into                               You are expected to
account people's personal                              complete the job
problems.                        1 2 3 4 5            regardless.

6. Important decisions are made                        Important decisions  are
by individuals.                  1 2 3 4 5            made by a group or team.

7. Outsiders find the organisation                     Outsiders are made to
closed and secretive.            1 2 3 4 5            feel welcome.

8. Only certain kind of people fit in.    1 2 3 4 5   Everybody fits in.

9. It takes a long time for                            Newcomers quickly feel
newcomers to feel at home.       1 2 3 4 5            at home.

For each statement below please circle ONE RESPONSE ONLY in the right hand column.  Write a brief comment if you like.

a. There is support for advancement and career
 development within the organisation?
Comment:

             Agree
             Partly agree
             Disagree a little
             Disagree

b. Staff are encouraged to learn Te Reo
and efforts are made to incorporate a
Maori cultural dimension into the
organisation.
Comment:

             Agree
             Partly agree
             Disagree a little
             Disagree

c. I feel it is easy to approach/talk to the CEO.
Comment:

             Agree
             Partly agree
             Disagree a little
             Disagree

d. I feel it is easy to approach/talk to my immediate
manager.
Comment:

             Agree
             Partly agree
             Disagree a little
             Disagree

e. The organisation has clear information and
communication systems at all levels and
between all employees.                       .
Comment:

             Agree
             Partly agree
             Disagree a little
             Disagree

## Where I work: (Circle the number of your choice)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 10. Meeting times are kept very  punctually. | 1  2  3  4  5 | Meeting times are only kept approximately. |
| 11. People are very concerned about cost. | 1  2  3  4  5 | Cost is not considered important. |
| 12. People are uptight and do not joke about the organisation. | 1  2  3  4  5 | People are relaxed and frequently joke about the organisation. |
| 13. Following correct procedures is more important than meeting the client's needs | 1  2  3  4  5 | The customer/client has first priority |
| 14. Quality is more important than quantity. | 1  2  3  4  5 | Quantity is more important than quality. |

15. It's very important to act ethically at all times.

1 2 3 4 5

The ends may sometimes justify slightly unethical means.

16. Managers are decisive, and autocratic.

1 2 3 4 5

Managers are intuitive rather than decisive and strive for consensus.

17. Meetings are opportunities for participants to assert themselves and show how good they are.

1 2 3 4 5

Meetings are places where problems are discussed and solutions sought.

18. Men are the main decision makers.

1 2 3 4 5

Women are the main decision-makers.

## Please complete the following:

CLXXVIII.   The main goal of the organisation is

CLXXIX.   The logo of the organisation means

CLXXX.   The things most valued in this organisation are

CLXXXI.   Are there people who are known for what they have done for the organisation? (Circle one.)

Yes              No

If yes, what have they done?

CLXXXII.   The type of people most likely to get promoted are

CLXXXIII.   The five words I would use to describe the character or culture of this organisation are:

CLXXXIV.   Circle the word which best describes the leadership of the organisation.

consultative              charismatic              authoritarian or bureaucratic

'hands off'                    democratic


On a scale of 1-10 judge your current satisfaction with working for the organisation.
(Circle the number.)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Low satisfaction                    Good                    High satisfaction

## Section B

This part of the survey relates mainly to the particular department/section or group that you work in. Tick the appropriate box.

**Jobs performed by workers in the work area or group:**

| | | | Detail/Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How long have you been working in your present work group? m=month | *0-11m 12-23m 24m+* | |
| 2. | How often do two or more of you work together to do a job? | *Seldom  Occas.  Often* | |
| 3. | Are there certain tasks at work that almost everyone does? | *No     Yes      Don't know* | If yes, give one or two examples: |
| 4. | About how many times during the day do you and your fellow workers • talk socially? • help one another with work? | *0-1     2-5      6+ times* | |
| 5. | Is there a set work schedule? | No        Yes | |
| 6. | Is there a time during the day when you tend to socialize more? | No        Yes | If yes, when? |
| 7. | Are there particular places where you tend to socialize more? | No        Yes | If yes, where? |
| 8. | Do you sometimes eat lunch with your workmates? | No        Yes | If yes, how often per week? |
| 9. | Are there other breaktimes shared with colleagues? | No        Yes | If yes, which times eg daily, weekly or monthly? |
| 10. | Do you know the name of the husband/ wife  or partner of any of your colleagues? | No        Yes | |
| 11. | Do you recognise or celebrate with your colleagues any special | No        Yes | If yes, explain: |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| occasions such as birthdays? | | |
| 12. Did you receive help from a colleague last week to: <br><br> • remember something? <br><br> • finish a task? <br><br> • talk about a personal problem? <br><br> • sort out a work problem? | No      Yes | |
| 13. How often are there staff meetings? <br> m =month <br> < less than >more than | *Never   <1/m   >1m* | Type and schedule: |
| 14. Did you learn your job from <br> • an orientation session? <br><br> • a co-worker mentor? <br><br> • a formal company training programme? | No      Yes | : |
| 15. Is it usual to play tricks on a new employee as a type of initiation? | No      Yes | |
| 16. Is there equipment that many of you share the use of eg fax, printer? | No      Yes | If yes, list. |
| 17. Are there special terms or language used by you and the other people in your workgroup that outsiders wouldn't know? | No      Yes | If yes, give examples. |
| 18. How often do you go to your supervisor to talk over work problems? w=week | *Never   <1/w   >1w* | |
| 19. Is your job performance reviewed by your supervisor? | No      Yes | If yes, how often and format? |
| 20. Does your supervisor sometimes ask you for your opinions or suggestions? | No      Yes | |
| 21 Does the organisation or your section sponsor any social activities for employees like an | No      Yes | If yes, describe: |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| annual picnic? | | |
| 22. In the last year has the organisation sponsored courses or seminars that assist you personally? | No   Yes   Don't know | |
| 23. Were any items issued to you? (locker, key, uniform) | No      Yes | If yes, list: |
| 24. Is your name publically listed, somewhere such as on mail pigeon-holes or doors? | No      Yes | If yes, detail: |
| 25. Do people in your work area personalize their work space with personal items eg photos? | No      Yes | |
| 26. Do you ever get together outside of work with your colleagues? | No      Yes | |
| 27. Do you greet your colleagues when you or they arrive at work in the morning? | No      Yes | |
| 28. Is there a particular code of dress or appearance ? | No      Yes | |
| 29. Does the organisation sponsor or assist with<br><br>• an Employee Assistance Programme<br><br>• car pooling/transport. discounts?<br><br>• special awards or incentives?<br><br>• 'flexitime work schedules/ job-sharing?<br><br>• a wellness/fitness programme?<br><br>• childcare?<br><br>• another supportive programme?<br><br>• work at home? | No      Yes   Don't know | |

(Adapted from David Hagner, Workplace Culture Survey )

# Appendix 111

## Coding: mitigators and boosters

*Each of the following was counted as a mitigator or booster. Also included as mitigators were the politeness strategies listed below.*

| Mitigators | Intensifiers |
|---|---|
| Modal verbs may/might/could/would<br>We/us/lets<br>I was wondering/ I wonder<br>Subjunctive e.g .It might be better if<br>Past tense forms with present time reference eg I wanted to ask you  (cf I want to ask you)<br>Ask for addressee's cooperation – Do you    think you could<br>Subjectivizer – I'm afraid/ I wonder if/ I think/believe/suppose<br>Downtoner–Could you possibly/perhaps<br>Cajoler<br>Appealer eg tag, OK<br>Emoticons | Adverbial modifiers  - eg terrible<br>Modal verbs – must, ought to/shall/has to/will/should/need to.can<br>Commitment indicator eg certainly/ surely<br>Expletive<br>Time intensifier – immediately<br>Lexical uptoner – a marked choice whereby an element of the proposition is given negative connotations eg that mess<br>Determination markers – element indicating a heightened degree of determination on the speaker's part eg that's that<br>Repetition of request<br>Ortographic/suprasegmental eg eg exclamation marks, underlining, caps<br>Emphatic addition e.g. Go and do..<br>Message having high importance or priority |
| **Mitigating supportive moves**<br><br>Preparator – preparing for request .g May I ask you a question<br>Getting a precommitment – Could you do me a favour<br>Grounder – giving a reason/justification explanation of reason for request<br>Promise of reward<br>Imposition minimizer | **Aggravating supportive moves**<br><br>Adding an insult<br>Moralising |

| Positive Politeness Strategies | Negative Politeness Strategies |
|---|---|
| 1. Notice, attend to H's interests, wants, needs<br>2. Exaggerate interest sympathy with H<br>3. Intensify interest to<br>4. Use in-group identity markers<br>5. Seek agreement<br>6. Avoid disagreement<br>7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground<br>8. Joke<br>9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants<br>10. Offer, promise<br>11. Be optimistic<br>12. Include both s and h in the activity<br>13. Give or ask for reasons<br>14. Assume or assert recipcrocity<br>15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation | 1. Be conventionally indirect<br>2. Question, hedge<br>3. Be pessimistic (Assume he is not likely to do A)<br>4. Minimize the imposition<br>5. Give deference<br>6. Apologise<br>7. Impersonalise S and H" Avoid the pronouns I and you<br>8. State the FTA as a general rule<br>9. Nominalise –<br>10 Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting |

# Appendix IV
# Ranking of imposition in email directives

| | |
|---|---|
| • Ranking of imposition in email directives. All those routine tasks that a person can be expected to do in the normal course of their work and that involve less than 30 minutes time<br>• Requests that may not be part of a person's job but require very little effort or time on the part of the person asked.<br>• A request that will work in the hearer's favour e.g. 31g<br>• A request to attend a meeting although it may involve considerable time expenditure, if it is an expected part of a person's job and does not require much individual effort. | 1 |
| • Tasks that require more than minimal time input or personal effort or that are of a fairly sensitive nature e.g. putting the hard word on to some one. e.g. AC28 aseveral different tasks<br>• A task that needs to be done a second time because the Speaker did not get it quite right the first time<br>• Tasks that fall outside the hearer's normal brief and that involve some time expenditure eg the writing of a report or several letters or being asked to chair or speak at a meeting<br>• Requests that ask a special favour e.g. extra leave or reduced hours<br>• A task that involves a face threat to the hearer<br>• A task requiring urgency of execution and more than minimal time input | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Tasks of an extraordinary nature involving very sensitive issues or the making of changes that will involve a number of people.<br>• A task involving a considerable expenditure of time eg more than 2-3 hours especially if it falls outside of a person's normal job description.<br>• A task that imposes a serious face threat to the Hearer | 3 |

## *Appendix V*

### Realisations of email directives found in the data set

Imperative
Imperative + if
Can you + verb
Can we + verb
Can I suggest you + verb
Could you + verb
Could X + verb
Could we + verb
Could I + verb
Could I suggest….
Would you + verb
May we+ verb
May I suggest + verb
I clause + can you + verb
If clause + could you + verb
I want to request
I suggest you/we + verb
I would suggest
We need to + verb
You will need to
I guess we need…
It needs/ must
X should be done
We should ensure that
X has suggested that you…
It is important that you…
I wonder/was wondering if…
Perhaps we could
I/we would like
You might like
I would appreciate it if
I would be very helpful if
I presume you…
We are assuming you
I recommend you
Maybe if X could
I think we need…
One thing that will help is…
I hope you can
Best case is to-----
The last few to check

*Appendix V1*

**Victoria University of Wellington**

# School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

*Consent to Participation in Research*

**Research Topic**:  The role and style of workplace email

I have been given and understood an explanation of this research project.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions.  The answers have given me the information I need to know.

My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project before data collection and analysis is complete without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:                                        Date:

Name of participant
(please print clearly)

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