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**An Exploration of Culture and Change in the Scottish Fire Service: The  
Effect of Masculine Identifications**

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**PhD by Research  
The University of Edinburgh  
2010**

## **Abstract**

This study examines the organisational culture of the Scottish Fire Service, and the political pressures for change emanating from the modernisation agenda of both the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments. Having completed a preliminary analysis of the Fire Service's culture, by examining the cultural history of the Scottish Fire Service and the process through which individuals are socialised into the Service, the study analyses the contemporary culture of the Service through research in three Scottish Fire Brigades. This research concludes that there is a clearly defined Fire Service culture, which is predicated on the operational task of fighting fire, based on strong teams and infused with masculinity at all levels. In these circumstances, the Service's cultural realities attempt to exclude women and are derisive in their regard for other more marginalised males. Following an analysis of Government driven imperatives for change, being applied to the Fire Service, it is further concluded that the resistance to change, evident within the cultural realities of the Service, can be defined as an attempt to defend one of the last bastions of male identification in the workplace.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction: A Starting Point

#### 1.1 Introduction

1.1(a) The Scottish Fire Service is going through an unprecedented period of pressures for change, which have been initiated by current and ongoing changes in the Service's political, social and economic context. At the same time, there continues to be a public expectation that Fire Brigades will carry on delivering an effective emergency service in what can be difficult and dangerous circumstances. The Service, as it exists currently, may be perceived as being traditional, uniformed, white, male and hierarchical in nature. Moreover, and anecdotally, there seems to be a perception at Government level that the existing culture of the Service is resisting these pressures to change.

1.1(b) A superficial analysis may indicate that the current dominant Fire Service culture is regarded by its subjects as unique, as it was originally structured by male/masculine values, which were in turn predicated on the physical task of fighting fire. These values have been accentuated over time by the social role of the Service in carrying out hazardous work and they appear to be reinforced by the professional self-perception and cultural identity of 'fireman as hero'. From this perception, firefighters may see themselves as socially and politically neutral representatives of a noble tradition who deliver a crucial emergency service and who are resisting institutional pressures, which have the potential to undermine their existing culture and deeply-held group identity. Therefore, pressures for gender and racial equality of entry into the Service and the imposition of cost efficiencies may be perceived by firefighters as external and ideological, arising from the agendas of politicians whose objectives cannot automatically be accepted as synonymous with professional firefighters. Under these circumstances, it may be assumed that resistance arises from a view that the Service, rather than being developed, would in effect be undermined by the changes being proposed. However, such a view relies on prima facie evidence,

perhaps interpreted by reference to a political discourse that prioritises the engineering of social equality. Assuming institutional racism or sexism on the part of the Fire Service is not a substitute for a research-based identification of the causes and meanings of institutional resistance.

1.1(c) In a changing society, pressures for institutional change have been exerted on a range of professions – the Armed Forces, the Police Service and the Prison Service – each of which represents both a total culture that has been developed historically, and a collection of organisations through which each service is delivered. The majority of research into cultural change has concentrated on empirical examination of particular organisations, largely commercial entities, which deliver either goods or services into a marketplace, the technical and geographical evolution of which have altered the structures and working practices in order to facilitate efficiency and effectiveness. However, there is no market for an institution such as the Fire Service, which in many ways operates in a monopolistic manner. Publicly funded, the forces of competition and the imperative of survival in product markets do not apply. In these circumstances, the natural inertia of organisations is reinforced, and the only pressures for change result from technological developments, internal managerial requirements or external social and political changes.

1.1(d) The study of organisations should lead to increased understanding, and the purpose of this particular study is to understand the dynamic between the pressures for change from the Fire Service environment, and the resistance to change from within the Fire Service itself.

1.1(e) Even though recent interest in the study of organisational cultures has concentrated on culture as a means of effecting organisational change and increased competitiveness, most studies have taken place in the private sector. This sector has very different dynamics and imperatives to the public sector. Within the current study, it is my intention to argue that on the face of it, the existing Fire Service culture of itself creates resistance to change, and it is, in its existing context, an internalised pressure towards the status quo. In these circumstances, it should prove

productive to develop research that looks at the dynamic between external pressure and internal resistance, in an attempt to understand the effect that the forces for change will have on the Fire Service as it exists today. In theoretical terms, this can be analysed in a way first considered by Lewin (1951) in his classic notion of *force field theory*. This theory suggests that organisations are at any time subject to contradictory forces for and against change, and human interaction shapes or changes organisational development, in a dynamic process of response to these dual pressures. Lewin's theory indicates that all organisational change is the result of changing the equilibrium between two sets of opposing forces: driving forces and restraining forces. Any change that is observed in organisations may therefore be understood as changing the balance between these two groups of forces, resulting in what Lewin himself called a quasi-stationary equilibrium.

1.1(f) Over many years the Fire Service has developed an organisational history, tradition and set of practices and behaviours that have contributed to norms, values, symbols and rites which are deeply embedded in the Service and passed on from generation to generation of firefighters. These factors can be internalised as the current Fire Service culture. This culture and the task of fighting fire have over time, it would seem, attracted men who internalise a specifically masculine identification with 'the job'. These interactions between task, individuals, groups, culture and identity, have potentially resulted in a specifically male view of the Service and those who can be perceived as embodying the ability to continue its heroic traditions.

1.1(g) The driving forces towards change can be perceived as emanating from the Scottish Fire Service's organisational context, in the shape of political, governmental, legal and social pressures. These forces are pushing one way in an attempt to bring about change, whereas the restraining forces, in the shape of the existing dominant Fire Service culture, seem to be pushing the other way in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

## **1.2 The current Fire Service structure in Scotland**

1.2(a) There are eight Fire Brigades in Scotland, created as a result of local government reorganisation in 1975: Highlands & Islands, Fife, Grampian, Tayside, Lothian and Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Central Scotland and Strathclyde (a map of the Scottish Brigades can be found on the final page of this report – pg. 261). Six Brigades came under the jurisdiction of the regional councils as the Fire Authority, while two came under joint boards, Lothian & Borders and Highlands & Islands. In the run-up to the local government reform of 1996, consideration was given to reducing the number of Brigades but in the event this was not taken forward and the existing structure was left unchanged. With the demise of the Scottish regional councils in 1996, only Fife and Dumfries & Galloway are now under single council control. The other six are accountable to joint boards of three to twelve constituent councils. The current Brigade boundaries coincide with those of the Police Forces.

1.2(b) The eight Brigades vary widely in size, both in geographic area and size of population served, as well as the number of staff they employ. They also vary in structure, in part reflecting the nature of the different areas that they cover. Each Brigade contains a differing mix of full-time (often referred to as wholetime firefighters within the Service), retained firefighters and, in some cases, volunteer firefighters. Brigades also employ support staff in areas such as finance, communications, IT, etc. The mix of uniformed and support staff again varies between Brigades. Three Brigades, including Strathclyde, are organised on a divisional/command structure while five, including Lothian and Borders, are organised on a functional basis.

1.2(c) In support of the eight Brigades, the Scottish Fire Service Training School, which is funded by the Scottish Government, provides training facilities for recruits to all Brigades, as well as a range of other courses for the Service.



### **1.3 Roles and responsibilities of the Fire Service**

1.3(a) There has been a Fire Service since Roman times. In the United Kingdom, prior to 1824, Fire Brigades were organised by insurance companies. In 1824, the first municipal Brigade in Europe was formed in Edinburgh, and from that time Fire Services have been locally based, except in times of war. It was not until 1938 that a statutory duty was placed on local authorities in the United Kingdom in order to arrange for an effective Fire Service.

1.3(b) The Fire Service in the United Kingdom was governed primarily by the Fire Services Act 1947, which placed a duty on every Fire Authority to make provision for firefighting purposes, and the Fire Authority had an important function under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. For its part, Central Government has a role in the development and promotion of national standards. It also monitors Brigades' performance through Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services. Pay and conditions of service are matters for individual Fire Authorities, who have agreed that they are negotiated nationally through a National Joint Council for Local Authorities Fire Brigades.

1.3(c) Fire Service delivery was shaped by nationally recommended standards for attendance at fires, known as 'Standards of Fire Cover'. These took the form of specified numbers of fire engines, which were required to arrive at an incident within specified time limits. These standards governed the resources required by a Brigade in terms of fire stations, firefighters, vehicles and equipment as well as how these resources were distributed. In addition to fighting fire, Fire Authorities have a responsibility to provide fire safety advice when requested. Under the Fire Precautions Act 1971, the Fire Authority was also responsible for the certification of certain categories of premises, including offices, shops, factories, hotels, etc. Similarly, the Fire Service had responsibilities in relation to the licensing of various types of premises including public houses, cinemas and theatres. In recent years, the impact of both Health and Safety legislation and European Union directives have significantly affected how Brigades are expected to carry out their work.

1.3(d) Fire Authorities could also employ their Fire Brigades to attend non-fire-related incidents known as special services, although there was no statutory requirement to do so. All Brigades respond to road traffic accidents, lift rescues, rescues from silos and sewers and provide attendance to animals in distress. Similarly, they attend incidents involving hazardous materials or those presenting a risk of harm to the environment, such as flooding.

1.3(e) The Scottish Fire Service differs little from the Service in the rest of the United Kingdom, despite having a different funding mechanism and a separate Inspectorate. Service delivery and working practices have been shaped mainly by United Kingdom legislation and guidance, together with conditions of service negotiated by the National Joint Council for Fire Services. However, most aspects of the Fire Service now fall within the jurisdiction of the Scottish Parliament.

#### **1.4 Fire Service accountability**

1.4(a) Fire Authorities have a statutory responsibility to maintain an efficient Fire Brigade, to provide resources for its effective operation and to promote fire prevention measures. Responsibility for operational matters was delegated, by the Fire Authority to the Firemaster. However, there is some variation in the extent to which non-operational authority was delegated. In turn, Brigades are accountable to the Fire Authority. Brigades also have to give an account for their activities, in a variety of ways, to both Government and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services, as well as to the Accounts Commission. There is a very distinct local emphasis as regards the control of the Fire Service, and the Firemaster was a servant of the Local Authority.

1.4(b) As a Local Authority service the Fire Service is subject to Government imposed 'Best Value' (see Appendix A) as a requirement in the delivery of its services, and this is increasingly impacting on the thinking and practice of Fire Authorities and Brigades. In this way, it would seem that significant pressure for

change is emanating from Government. Therefore, the need to provide efficient and responsible public services, and demonstrate best value in the context of increased scrutiny from the Scottish Parliament, will influence Scottish Fire Brigades, as it will other public services (Eglinton Associates 2000).

## **1.5 Funding of the Service**

1.5(a) Fire expenditure is part of the Government's grant aided expenditure, and arrangements for the revenue funding of the Fire Service are much the same as for other Local Authority services. The Fire Authority is responsible for setting the budget for the Brigade and to a considerable extent this is determined by the size of the establishment required to provide the national standards of fire cover discussed above. In joint Fire Authority areas the Board will set its budget, and then send requisitions for the funding to the constituent authorities. Approximately 80-85% of Fire Service expenditure is accounted for by staff costs. Since 1996, there has been a separate Fire Services Capital Programme. Scottish ministers determine both the overall capital borrowing consent for the Fire Service and its distribution, by a combination of top slice and formula to the eight Fire Authorities.

## **1.6 The current position: A summary**

1.6(a) In summary, the current structure of the Fire Service at grass roots, or station level, was brought about by the study into standards of fire cover of the Riverdale Committee in 1936. The conclusions of this report were implemented after the war when the Service was returned to Local Authority control. Moreover, and despite a number of reviews, these standards have remained basically unchanged up to the time this research was carried out. This position remained relatively unchanged until the 1980s/1990s when external pressures were brought to bear. These pressures were driven by political changes and changing societal expectations (see Chapter 2 for a more complete analysis of the pressures for change being imposed on the Fire Service). The results of these pressures have been considerable and they include:

- Equal Opportunities legislation
- Health & Safety legislation
- Increased litigation
- Financial pressures
- Proposals to change standards of fire cover
- Proposals to change management structures
- Proposals to reorganise the structure of the Fire Service in Scotland

1.6(b) All of this has led to an unprecedented pressure for the Fire Service to change its structures and management style. However, it is argued in this thesis that the main pressure for change is in the Fire Service culture, a culture that has been in place for many years and which is ingrained in the attitude of the existing workforce (the literature on organisational culture is reviewed in Chapter 3).

1.6(c) As could be expected, these changes have arguably been, and are continuing to be, resisted. Evidence for this exists in the fact that there are still very few women or people from ethnic minority backgrounds employed in the Fire Service and the Health & Safety Executive has served a number of Brigades with improvement notices. In addition at the time of this research, the Government was considering major changes in Fire Service structures and management systems, through reorganising the Service and rigorously applying the requirements of ‘Best Value’.

## **1.7 Cultural research**

1.7(a) Organisational culture can be seen as,

*“sets of commonly held cognitions that are held with some emotional investment and integrated into a logical system or cognitive map that contains cognitions about descriptions, operations, prescriptions and causes. They are habitually used and influence perception, thinking, feeling and acting.”* (Sackman 1991, pg. 34).

In this way, culturally based practices affect behaviour in the workplace.

1.7(b) As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, it would seem that a normalised cultural framework within an organisation can form a context that prescribes meaning for organisational members, as well as providing a backdrop for acceptable behaviours in the workplace. Moreover, as the Fire Service can be seen as an occupation that exhibits strong masculine gender symbolism (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997, Ward and Winstanley 2006), it could be expected that the culture of the Scottish Fire Service will be demonstrated through culturally acceptable masculine behaviours in the workplace.

1.7(c) While little culturally-based research has been published regarding the Fire Service, Hassard (1993) following Burrell and Morgan (1979) studied the Fire Service in the West Midlands from a number of theoretical perspectives. He concluded, amongst other things, that with regard to the existing Fire Service culture, the firefighters job possesses relatively modest levels of motivation potential. This does not seem to present a difficulty for Fire Service employees, because Hassard (1993) discovered that whereas the overall motivation potential score for Fire Service employees is low, compared with the US norm, the scores for job satisfaction are normally high. Hassard (1993) believed that there were reasons for this result. The low scores for task identity and autonomy in the Fire Service were not seen as matters of great concern because the low task identity stemmed mainly from firefighters being called out to emergency calls, and low autonomy came from working in a paramilitary organisation. More important to the firefighter in terms of their motivation was that the job offers task significance and wide skill variety.

1.7(d) In the Fire Service, routine events are accomplished within the context of uncertainty and an absence of firm personal control over immediate future events, which stems primarily from the threat of emergency calls. However, this is accepted within a general cultural framework of instability, and Hassard (1993) saw what he called,

*“a web of human relationships which defines how participants create rules for bringing off the daily work routine with personal actions being indexed to a contextual system of meanings”* (Hassard 1993, pg. 101).

1.7(e) Hassard's work, therefore, suggests that in common with organisations in general, the organisation of the Fire Service can be perceived as a cultural phenomenon that is subject to a continuous process of enactment and identification, which is specific to Fire Service workplaces.

1.7(f) Hassard (1993) also indicates that the Fire Service has a military style of culture, reinforced by its training, training that is based on the work of Adair (1968, 1983, 1991). This training reinforces a culture of loyalty, which is common in “*military and paramilitary*” organisations (Hassard 1993). A major function of the training can therefore be seen to establish a commitment and allegiance to the command structure of the Service.

1.7(g) This culture of loyalty can be further intensified when firefighters are posted to their station as the patterns of work allow individuals to interact intensely, with many opportunities for informal action and discourse (Ward and Winstanley 2006). However, in these circumstances the work team or, in the Fire Service context, ‘the watch’ can become more important as a focus for identity formation and loyalty than the organisation (Marks and Lockyer 2005)

## **1.8 Conclusions**

1.8(a) The Scottish Fire Service is currently being subjected to a sustained politically driven period of pressure for institutional and cultural change. In considering the issue of change within a framework provided by Lewin’s (1951) theory of force field analysis, it could be argued that the driving forces for change to the current quasi-stationary equilibrium are emanating from the Government, and the restraining forces towards the status quo are emanating from the Service and its culture.

1.8(b) If Hassard (1993) is correct in implying that the Fire Service culture is a web of human relationships, which allow participants to create rules of meaning that in turn shape personal actions and behaviours, then it will be necessary to generate a more sophisticated understanding of the Fire Service’s culture than that currently

available from the literature. Equally, there will be a requirement for a fuller understanding of the pressures for change to the Service being developed by Government.

1.8(c) The introduction to this thesis does not provide the academic rigour necessary to draw conclusions regarding the complex social processes of change and resistance that are going on between the Government and the Fire Service. However, attention has been drawn to two sets of contradictory forces, related to Lewin's force field theory, Government applied forces for change and culturally driven resistance. In order to develop these two emerging themes it will be necessary to structure research around an appropriate research question within a valid methodological approach. Within this context, the research question I have chosen to give focus and direction to the research is,

***Will the politically applied pressure for change in the Scottish Fire Service be resisted by the Services existing culture, and the masculine identifications of those who provide the service?***

1.8(d) The answer to this question should, if properly researched, enable an academically valid exploration of how culture, masculine identity and change are all interlinked within organisations, specifically in the current context, the Scottish Fire Brigades.

1.8(e) Alvesson and Berg (1992) indicate that in carrying out research into organisational culture there are four levels of analysis that can be relevant: nation, sector (or profession), company (or business) and sub-unit (or department). With regard to the current study, the levels of sector (or profession) and company (or business) can be seen to relate to the Fire Service and Fire Brigades respectively.

1.8(f) In considering the research question across these two levels in the Scottish Fire Service, a number of further issues will need to be addressed. In this respect it will be

important to consider whether or not there is a distinct and identifiable Scottish Fire Service culture and if that culture is the same in all of the Brigade's studied, or if not, what are the similarities or differences between them. This will necessitate an understanding of the effects of masculinity in the cultural realities of the Brigade's concerned. These issues could, in my view, be usefully considered by analysing them through the route of the change process outlined above, comprising an examination of the change pressures emanating from Government, and whether or not the existing culture/s will oppose or be accepting of them.

1.8(g) In order to address these issues it will be necessary to develop a clear understanding of the Fire Service's structures and culture/s, and to generate a clear understanding of the pressures for change on the Service, the motivations behind those pressures and how they are manifest. The following chapter starts to discuss the pressures for change on the culture of the Service in order to contextualise the issues of culture and masculinity within the research.



## Chapter Two

### The Pressures for Change

#### 2.1 Introduction

2.1(a) As indicated above, Hassard (1993), in a study of work behaviour in what he referred to as “a division of the British Fire Service”, suggested that Fire Service work offered little potential for motivation, however it did provide relatively high levels of job satisfaction, due to the job offering task significance and skill variety.

2.1(b) Hassard (1993) found that in the Fire Service, routine work events were accomplished within a context of uncertainty and an absence of individual control over work demands. This he believed emanated from the unpredictability of emergency calls, which was accepted by firefighters within a general cultural framework of instability. As a result of this work, Hassard (1993) indicated that fire service organisation can be viewed as a cultural phenomenon that is subjected to continuous processes of enactment within the workplace.

2.1(c) I would also suggest that in highlighting the firefighters emphasis on the firefighting task, Hassard (1993) starts to draw attention to the potentially masculine attributes of the Service, attributes that Ward and Winstanley (2006) noted when they described the Fire Service core referential values, as those of hegemonic masculinity.

2.1(d) While intending to pursue this strand of analysis further in subsequent chapters, it is my view that the subject of masculinity within the Service could usefully be considered together with my other strands of enquiry. Moreover, this aspect of Service life could be placed in a relevant context by first considering the Government’s view of the Service through an analysis of their demands for change, prior to analysing the change process further in Chapter 9.

2.1(e) In approaching the issues of culture and identity, without getting lost in their complexity and depth, I believe that it is important to find a way into the complex realities of the Fire and Rescue Service. The route I have chosen, based on my knowledge and experience of Fire Service life, is to approach these complexities through a consideration of the pre-existing service change dynamic. Using as a starting point Lewin's (1951) notion of force field theory, where the driving forces for change are Government requirements and the restraining forces are the negotiated systems of meaning that have resulted in the current normalised realities of life within the Service. I believe that in using this approach, the interactions between the pressures for change, the culture of the Service and the effects of masculine identities can be usefully analysed in a way that should lead to improved understanding of the cultural realities of the Service. This should also lead to an understanding of how the adoption of a masculine identity will affect the cultural realities of the Service, in an application of Schwartzman's (1993) view that the presentation of a work culture could emerge from the interplay between those so-called formal and informal aspects of organisational life.

2.1(f) In preparation for data collection through the semi-structured interviews, described in the chapter on methodology below and presented in this chapter, I studied a number of secondary sources. These sources included speeches made by Government Ministers (as part of my role in the Service I personally attended many of the events at which these speeches were given and had access to their written transcripts), published reports into the Service and the three most widely read Fire Service specific journals (*Firefighter Magazine: The Fire Brigades Union*, *Fire Prevention and Fire Engineers Journal* and *Fire: The Voice of Firefighting and Fire Prevention since 1908*: DMG world media).

2.1(g) In order to reinforce the understanding gained from secondary sources I then gathered an ethnography based on semi-structured interviews with fire-related civil servants and Fire Service inspectors in Scotland. This ethnography was based on five core categories of data, which were partially shaped by the original interview schedule, but in the main emerged during the analysis of the collected data. The core

categories concerned were: Government held beliefs, the adoption of identity in the Service, the dominant culture, change and Government imperatives to change. An interpretation of these core categories can be found in sections 2.3 to 2.7 below, following the analysis of service-specific reports and speeches in the next section.

## **2.2 Reports and speeches**

2.2(a) In considering the Government's pressures for change on the Fire Service, it can be seen that while the Service may currently be going through a period of unprecedented pressure for change, some of the current pressures are not new. For example, the pressures on finance, working conditions, and the more subtle cultural pressures regarding discipline and the managerial approach to delivering the Service have echoes throughout the history of the Fire Service. However, what is relatively new is the pressure for equal opportunities and health and safety within the Service and, perhaps more importantly, the way the Government is articulating and driving forward its agenda for change.

2.2(b) The ministerial speeches and governmental reports analysed in preparation for the development of this thesis indicate that the Fire Service was a high performing and well-managed service that met the standards set for it by Government on approximately 95% of occasions. Indeed one minister (Whitehead 2001) said that it was a service where those who were responsible for it could be "*justifiably proud*". This aspect was also reflected in the attitudes of firefighters who were committed to and proud of their work in fighting fires and dealing with other emergencies. It would seem that the public were in agreement with this analysis as reports indicated that the Fire Service was held in high public esteem, with public satisfaction surveys indicating an approval rate of over 90%, an unusually high figure for a public service. In their public statements, Ministers seemed to confirm this when they indicated that the Fire Service was a service that enjoyed high public support and was "*the best in the world for putting out fires*" (O'Brien 2000). Therefore, it would seem that the service was considered by Government as an excellent public service that exhibited a high degree of professionalism (Whitehead 2001), that had an

enviable reputation for delivery and possessed exceptional qualities and values (Wallace 2002). However, there was also a clear view, expressed in both the reports into the Service and subsequent Ministers' speeches, that the Fire Service did not provide value for money and it was considered by the Audit Commission to be an expensive service, which could considerably improve on its efficiency and deliver cost savings. This view was based on two main issues. Firstly, Fire Service staff enjoyed what were described as outdated and expensive employment practices and conditions of service and secondly, despite increasing investment in the service the poor record of fire deaths and injuries had not improved over many years. The Audit Commission (1995) indicated that there were three areas which inhibited value for money in the Fire Service, limited work by the Service in the area of fire prevention, restrictive national frameworks in the area of risk assessment and service standards and conditions of employment for the Fire Service's workforce. Because of this developing view in Government circles, Ministers indicated that there was a Government requirement to improve the value for money that the Service provided.

2.2(c) Therefore, and somewhat paradoxically, despite praising the Fire Service with regard to its operational competence and invariably linking this praise to a specific incident in their public speeches, Ministers always went on to argue that major changes were required. Based on the argument that there was an imperative to drive down the numbers of deaths and injuries caused by fire, the Government developed an impressive and comprehensive list of issues that required to be changed. This list included virtually every aspect of the Service and it could be summarised as a set of imperatives designed to change the national frameworks of guidance and legislation, within which the Service was required to operate. Change the conditions of service for firefighters. Change the tasks firefighters carried out, introducing more of an emphasis on prevention. Change how risk was analysed and managed in relation to fire. Improve the management skills of those charged with leading the service. Improve the training and development of Fire Service staff. Improve the health and safety of Fire Service staff (this was often linked to reducing early retirement and sickness absence rates), and, improve the equal opportunities record of the Service by introducing more women and people from minority ethnic populations to the

Service. Overall, the view from Government seemed to be that the culture of the Service would have to be radically changed, in order to deliver on the Government's politically based social agenda for change.

2.2(d) The issue of equal opportunities in the Service seemed to be seen as a major difficulty by the Government, as Ministers inevitably raised this aspect of the Service in their speeches when discussing their requirements for change. The requirement for increasing the number of women in the Service was often articulated and was linked to the required provision of enforceable targets for improvement.

2.2(e) Having developed these requirements for change in the Service, the Government also outlined the mechanisms through which they intend to deliver the changes they required. Ministers indicated that they intended to develop a vision for the Service and within that vision, they would set a series of objectives and targets, against which the Service would be required to deliver. This series of imperatives would form a Government plan of action, set within a framework of new national standards driven by the Fire Service Inspectorate. The Fire Service Inspectors would also be responsible for ensuring an overview of progress, through a system of public reporting. In addition, there was also a signal that, if necessary, legislation requiring change would be introduced.

2.2(f) In analysing the speeches of Government Ministers and considering the formal reports into the Service it can be seen that the Government had decided that the Fire Service must be changed, had laid out its requirements for change and a plan of action to deliver that change. It also seems clear that the Government, as a powerful entity in the Fire Service's organisational context, considered that even though the Fire Service would be reluctant to change it could require those changes to take place through the pressures it could bring to the service.

## 2.3 Government held beliefs

2.3(a) Data gathered from the Respondents in many ways confirmed the view given by the secondary sources of research into the Government's views on Fire Service culture. Firstly, Respondents believed that, despite additional investment in the Service over a number of years, the additional finance provided had not been well used. Respondents indicated that, in their view, the Fire Service had a poor record of preventing fires, fire deaths and injuries and that this poor record had led to an ever-increasing workload for the Service.

*“The pressures for change, I think, arrived from the simple fact that we have reached a stage where we are not improving the life safety or property safety of our society, and yet there are options of which we are aware that might do that.”* (Fire Service Inspector A).

2.3(b) Secondly, the Respondents believed that while the Service may be good at fighting fires, it was not a particularly efficient service as far as value for money was concerned.

*“Well, I think it is an extremely effective Fire Service in dealing with fires and other emergencies, it is geared up to do nothing else, well sorry not nothing else but its main function obviously is responding to emergencies and I think it functions extremely well. If you raise questions on effectiveness I think you're looking at the things I mentioned earlier. Could it be more effective? In a way, you can stand right back and take an accountant's view of this, it's a grossly, not ineffective, but grossly inefficient service.”* (Civil Servant B).

2.3(c) This inefficiency, it was indicated, resulted from the prescriptive and restricting national frameworks within which the Service was required to operate, which determined over seventy percent of the Services costs. This, it was believed, would inevitably lead to financial pressures on the Service as the Government sought to improve “*value for money*” in the Service.

*“There is a view in Government that we can get more from the money we invest.”*  
(Civil Servant A).

2.3(d) Thirdly, Respondents believed that the Service had been protected from pressures to improve its efficiency, pressures which existed naturally in the private sector and which had been applied to many other organisations within the public sector, but not to the Fire Service.

*“My guess is there would be a perception around that a number of the services, perhaps like Police, like Fire, have been protected and have managed to protect themselves from some of the pressures of resource constraints in the public sector, that perhaps other organisations have not been able to resist.”* (Civil Servant A).

2.3(e) And,

*“Here are a group of people perceived by certain powerful people in the outside world as having quite a cosy closed shop, they’re looking after themselves and they’ve managed to protect themselves over a number of years from some of the rigors of the real world.”* (Civil Servant A).

2.3(f) It was perceived that this protectionism resulted in a lack of pressure to improve performance within the Service, and Respondents believed that the Government could effectively apply pressure to the Service. Pressure that would deliver improved efficiencies and cash savings,

*“how to achieve some kind of continuous improvement in the way that services are provided and in the public services because we have no equivalent of the market if you like, people cannot chop and change where they receive many of their public services, Police and Fire are good examples. Therefore, there is thought to be a lack of pressure on those public services to achieve continuous improvement therefore we create models and processes, like best value, to try to achieve that.”* (Civil Servant A).

2.3(g) There were strong indications that there would be a politically-driven imperative to ‘modernise’ and change the Service.

*“I think it is almost inevitable that the politicians will want to see the Fire Service being very dynamic and progressive”* (Civil Servant C).

## **2.4 The adoption of identity**

2.4(a) Firefighters were seen by the Respondents as adopting a strong masculine identity in the Service, an identity that was based on the operational task of fighting fire. This identity, together with the operational task, was also seen as possibly attracting the “*wrong type*” of recruit to the Service, which would in turn, reinforced the male, macho culture and identity of the Service. A culture that was unacceptable to the Government and a culture that required to be changed.

*“You know, there is no doubt that running round behind fire engines, hauling hoses, and climbing up ladders, and having to go into smoke-filled rooms is very physically demanding, challenging, and I suppose there’s a sense in which that’s what attracts a lot of people to it. I was quite struck by one observation that perhaps all of that can actually attract the wrong kind of person, the kind of white, red-neck macho sort of individual, and maybe that is not in the best long-term interests, of the Service.”* (Civil Servant C).

2.4(b) There was also a strongly held view that the Fire Service saw itself as a “*man’s job*” and that even some relatively young Fire Service managers believed that women and men from a minority ethnic background could not be successful firefighters. These beliefs were not seen as being valid for a modern organisation and were criticised by Respondents for being “*patently wrong*”.

*“What struck me was that the opinions about the role of women and other minorities, let me emphasise that, was that they could not do or be involved in the Brigade not for what we might regard as valid reasons and that might be to do with physical*



*capability but for other reasons that would seem to me to be more of a smoke screen, there was an absence of separate washing facilities for example, now that is a current impediment to having women in the Brigade so I can quite understand that, but it isn't a deep rooted problem – it can be solved. Do you see the kind of difference I'm making, so it was really people being willing to say well we couldn't possibly have women or we couldn't possibly have ethnic minorities in the Service for reasons which were patently wrong.” (Civil Servant A).*

2.4(c) It was also believed that these views, regarding the masculine nature of the Service, would lead to the exclusion of women. As one Respondent put it.

*“It must come particularly hard to somebody who enters the Fire Service with the sort of background thinking that this is a real man's job and women and children are rescuees not rescuers. Having to adjust to having a female on the team must be pretty difficult for people with that mindset. A lot may be very successful at concealing it but it is still I think deeply buried in the human psyche the idea that this is a man's role and that's a woman's role and accepting that men and women can equally do just about anything. In terms of the fire station you know for an all male crew to accept that a woman is coming into their midst is not easy,” (Civil Servant B).*

## **2.5 The dominant culture**

2.5(a) The dominant culture within the Fire Service was therefore seen as being white, male and macho by the Respondents,

*“In a word sort of macho. I've interviewed a lot of firefighters at Leading Firefighter, Sub-Officer level, and I still detect a lot of the sort of you know we'll take on the dragon and expose the big red f'ing so and so. We'll get in there and we'll sort it out.” (Civil Servant B).*

2.5(b) This macho cultural reality within the Service was seen as stemming from the Armed Forces background, which resulted both from the Services history and from the number of current personnel that had previously served in the Armed Forces. The Fire Service was also perceived as being formal, hierarchical and autocratic in its approach to management, resulting in a “*command service*”, with a hierarchy comprising of a large number of managerial levels, where people in authority expected to issue orders and subordinates expected to be told what to do. A set of circumstances resulting in organisational structures that were traditional, and were also capable of being dominated by those in power, particularly those at the top of the organisation, the Firemasters.

*“By traditional, I mean it follows a pattern of a service organisation, service in the context of what the general public might regard as more military-based than, say, a civilian organisation. So the hierarchy that I’m referring to is a dominance by its leader, in our case, the Firemaster and that sort of tradition has been quite strong and I think is still quite strong in some areas”* (Fire Service Inspector A).

## **2.6 Change**

2.6(a) The beliefs held by Respondents regarding the current cultural realities in the Fire Service led to the conclusion that the Service was in need of an agenda for change and modernisation. In particular, the Service’s culture, based as it was on masculine values, would have to be vigorously challenged and changed.

*“I think there are cultural issues that need to be addressed apart from the kind of equality issue for women, it is a very male-dominated culture and it’s very much based on your physical fitness and your ability to do what is a demanding physical job. I think there are also issues around, in a cultural sense, I think there are issues around whether it needs to get away from the kind of very disciplined approach and whether it needs a softer kind of management-type style.”* (Civil Servant C).

2.6(b) However, it was also considered that the Service's culture, based as it was on a very strong historical tradition, a strong masculine identity and deeply held internalised values and beliefs, would be very resistant to change.

*"People talk about securing a change in culture quite glibly as though it is an easy thing to do. I don't think it is easy at all and particularly as regards the Fire Service. There will have to be a cultural change but it is going to be difficult for the Service to get that cultural change implemented in the individual fire stations in the minds of the individuals who are the Service."* (Civil Servant B).

## **2.7 A Government imperative to change**

2.7(a) In my view, following a full analysis of the data, it can be reasonably concluded that Government has developed a negative view of Fire Service culture over recent years. They believe that despite a good record of dealing with incidents when they occur, Fire Brigades were dealing with a rising operational workload and had a poor record in reducing death and injury from fire. For these reasons, the Service should concentrate much more on preventative measures through community safety initiatives. There was also a view that while the Service may be effective, it was certainly not efficient and that financial savings were possible if the prescriptive national frameworks constraining the Service were removed. These savings could then be increased through reducing the number of fires and as a result reducing the number of firefighters necessary to deal with them.

*"I think it is almost inevitable that, as fire safety measures kick-in and become more effective, that the front line firefighting role will diminish. I think if fire safety activity is as successful as we hope it will be, then there should be less emergency calls to answer and, as a consequence, I would think that the primary role might adjust a bit more."* (Civil Servant C).

2.7(b) There was also a deeply held view that the Service had a poor equal opportunities record, particularly with regard to the acceptance of women and

minority ethnic groups. In addition, it was indicated that the Government believed the Service suffered from poor overall management, a view that alluded to the belief that it was the responsibility of managers to manage the required changes to the culture, and instead of carrying out this responsibility, they had opposed change and supported the previously normalised and dominant culture of the Service. Management in the Fire Service was seen in those circumstances to be part of the problem, as opposed to being part of the solution.

2.7(c) Therefore, despite the possible, politically-based, contradictions between holding the view that the Service is particularly effective and at the same time arguing that it should be subject to change, Government had concluded that fundamental change in the Service was necessary. What was required from the Service, in the view of Government, was a focus on fire prevention, improved management and a major improvement as far as the representation of women and minority groups were concerned. A fundamental and far reaching change in all aspects of the Service and in particular a major change to the dominant culture of the Service. This change would be encouraged, required and ultimately delivered through Government setting a vision and direction for the Service, together with setting stretching targets to ensure that this vision was delivered. At every stage, the Service would be subject to increased scrutiny through audit and inspection, potentially through the Fire Service Inspectorate, and this would enforce, through the audit and inspection regime, the Government's requirements for the Service. In this way, change would become an imperative and the Government would maintain control of that change in order to ensure that its wishes were implemented.

2.7(d) The data indicated that in order to achieve its purpose Government was likely to go through a process that it used with powerful groups which have strong public support. This process has a three-stage approach, where Government first invites change, then it suggests change and finally it requires change. As one Respondent stated,

*“The typical model which I’ve seen over many years in Government, when you’re dealing with what you regard as quite a challenging group and a powerful group, a group that has considerable respect in society and therefore you deal with them or challenge them or damage them in any way with great care and very warily, is that you go through a process and sometimes complete it, but the mindset is first of all we’ll invite this group to do something, then we’ll suggest the things that they might do if they don’t respond sufficiently positively to our invitation. We’ll suggest the kinds of things that they might do, if they don’t respond positively to that we will then oblige them to do some of those things that we were thinking of. That might have to do with management, resources and so on, and if they don’t do particularly well with that then we might well go for a more radical change. We might re-organise them in some way, we might change the basis on which they’re financed, because that will give us new levers to work on them and this is all a kind of traditional Government move from a voluntary approach to a legislative approach, a bit like seat belts you know, you should wear your seatbelt, we’d like you to wear your seatbelt, you bloody well will wear your seat belt because now it’s against the law. Do you see what I mean, a kind of sequence” (Civil Servant A).*

2.7(e) The final stage of this process of governmental pressure for change was likely to be a legislative requirement for change and/or the use of financial restrictions to encourage change.

*“The most powerful tool the Government has is the legislative tool, I think the Government can influence policy just by exhortation, by ministerial speeches, by holding debates in the Parliament, initiating debates and saying what it would like, how it would like the service to develop, by issuing consultation documents or vision statements, or White Papers or saying this is how you would like to see the Fire Service move forward. I mean, there are various mechanisms the Government can use but, primarily, short of legislation it’s all exhortation. Obviously, there are financial levers that can pull one way or another” (Civil Servant C).*

## 2.8 Conclusions

2.8(a) In considering the data outlined in this chapter some remarkably clear themes emerge. All of the reports into the Fire Service praised both service management and firefighters for their consistent ability to deal with incidents in a professional manner. Indeed, Ministers always praised firefighters in their public speeches and often linked this praise to a particular incident, such as the Paddington rail crash. This reflected the opinion that Brigades delivered a high performing service, and enjoyed considerable public support. However, both Ministers and the reports invariably went on to outline concerns with regard to how the Service was delivered, putting forward far-reaching proposals for change, and change to the culture of the service in particular. Government saw these proposals as imperatives, which could be enforced through the mechanisms available to them.

2.8(b) In the view of Respondents, despite considerable financial investment, the level of fire death and injury continued to be unacceptable. This unacceptable position was further compounded by the opinion that the Fire Service may have been effective in responding to fires, but due to the restrictive national frameworks within which it was required to operate it was not a particularly efficient service, and this would inevitably lead to financial difficulties. Respondents also believed that the culture of the Service was white, male and macho, due in the main to its militaristic traditions and history and that the Service's historical development had resulted in a hierarchical and autocratic approach to management, a "*command service*". In its realities therefore, the Respondents believed that Fire Service culture was underpinned by a strong masculine identity, firmly intertwined with the operational nature of the Service in the minds of those who delivered it. In addition, all of this attracted the "*wrong type of recruit*" who was very likely to perpetuate and continue the existing masculine realities of the Service.

2.8(c) In this way, it seemed to Respondents that the culture of the Fire Service did not accept women as effective firefighters. Moreover, this had resulted in an active cultural imperative to exclude women from this particular workplace, in direct

opposition to the Government's wishes and in defiance of equal opportunities legislation introduced in the 1970s.

2.8(d) Therefore, it would seem that Government had concluded that the masculine culture of the Service was "*patently wrong*" and that the Service must be challenged, modernised and changed, even though that was likely to be difficult due to resistance based on the strong internalised values and beliefs held by the workforce. Respondents indicated that models were in place for Government to ensure that the desired change process would take place. In addition, it was the intention of Government to set a vision and direction for the Service, underpinned by challenging targets and enforced through systems of audit and inspection. Further pressures could be applied through financial controls and, if necessary, these imperatives could be delivered through the introduction of new and binding legislation.

2.8(e) If, as suggested by one Respondent, Government typically goes through a process of invitation to change, followed by suggestions for change, and then enforces imperatives to change, at the time the data was collected the Government was moving from the position of suggesting change, to imperatives for change, using virtually all of the tools at its disposal.

2.8(f) This chapter has provided an analysis of the Government's agenda for change within the Fire Service in order to understand the pressures for change on the culture of the Service. Moreover, this analysis should provide a way into the research, regarding how the adoption of a masculine identity will affect the culturally framed change process in the Service.

2.8(g) This change dynamic, regarding the Fire Service's culture, will be returned to in Chapter Nine once the culture of the Service has been fully explored in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

## Chapter Three

### Organisational Culture: A Review of the Literature

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1(a) An approach to organisations which sees them as cultural phenomena, or specific types of social systems, has gained influence in the past two decades (Martens 2006). However, this chapter starts with the supposition, in common with the proponents of corporate culture, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, the Government, that organisational culture can be changed. This potentially naive supposition will be further examined as this chapter and the study progress, through a more complete process towards an improved understanding.

3.1 (b) As can be seen from the somewhat limited analysis in Chapter 1, and the more considered analysis in Chapter 2, the Government has decided that it will require many changes in the Fire Service. Those changes will affect almost every area of organisational activities, including the types of service delivered, how those services are delivered, the type of person employed to deliver the service, how those people are managed and the structure of the Service as a whole. Therefore, Government has an agenda for change underpinned by the belief that in order to facilitate change, the culture of the Service itself, together with its masculine identifications, will need to be challenged and amended.

3.1(c) UK public services have been identified by Government as sites for transformative change over the last two decades and as political attention increases, the legitimacy of management in making these changes has been enhanced (Thomas and Davies (a) 2005). In its rhetoric regarding the Fire Service, the Government is attempting to encourage the Service, and in particular its senior managers, to drive forward its change agenda on their behalf. In acting as an agent for change in support of Government imperatives, senior managers of the service are likely to be attracted to a managerially driven approach to organisational development and change. This is



particularly likely in view of the popularity of the corporate culture project, which has been put forward by influential theorists and consultants, and for various reasons has gained considerable popularity with contemporary managers. However, as culture is a social phenomenon (Weeks and Galanic 2003), it remains to be seen if these attempts at cultural change can or will be successful, particularly as cultural change is a multifaceted and multi level process. Moreover, little is currently known about how organisational cultures change over time or what drives the process of change (Rodrigues 2006).

3.1(d) Therefore, in order to start to develop a necessarily more complete understanding of culture, masculinity and change, drawing on critical enquiry as suggested by Whitehead (1999), this chapter comprises a literature review into the subject of organisational culture in three sections: the corporate culture project, more academically rigorous theories of the cultural phenomenon and the processes through which culture can be changed in its realities. Moreover, as it would seem from the analyses contained in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, within a Fire Service context, masculine identifications and culture are inextricably linked. Therefore, the next chapter reviews the literature regarding masculinity and the adoption of masculine identities in the workplace.

### **3.2 Section I: Managerial attempts to use a corporate culture approach as a change mechanism, the corporate culture project**

3.2(a) The current managerial interest in *corporate* culture can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was a time when manufacturing industry in Western societies came under extreme pressure from the Japanese, who had established world dominance in this field. This managerial interest in organisational culture was fuelled by a number of consultancy motivated writers such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982), who promoted culture as a way of achieving new forms of organising work, forms of organising and controlling workplaces in a way that would improve competitive performance. By the mid-1980s the interest that had been generated by consultants, had made corporate culture a very fashionable topic

within organisational studies and with practising managers in particular. The explosion of interest in the subject at that time resulted in the evolvment of the *Corporate Culture* approach to business management. This approach is characterised and vigorously promoted by 'heroic managements' whose role is perceived as being able to devise the correct culture for the organisation and then to impose this new and more appropriate culture on the workforce, in order to improve competitive performance. To achieve this transformation it would often be seen as necessary to change the values of the workforce using the medium of rites and rituals: a change, which usually had to be imposed on a reluctant workforce (Linstead and Grafton Small, quoted in Wright (1994)). From a managerialist perspective corporate culture projects are based on a number of relatively simple assumptions.

1. All organisations have cultures and these organisational cultures affect corporate performance.
2. Organisations are more effective if they have the correct culture.
3. The correct culture creates consensus and unity thus motivating staff.
4. Where necessary, cultures can and should be changed, and
5. It is the responsibility of senior managers to change them.

3.2(b) These 'corporate culture projects' are developed, promulgated and maintained by a variety of managerial practices within the workplace. For example, training courses are used to define and develop the appropriate attitudes and beliefs. Assessment centres are used to appoint and promote people with 'the right attitudes'. Newly defined management competencies are used to distinguish the successful manager and as a benchmark against which the performance of other managers is measured. Reward and appraisal systems are used to reward the desired behaviour of managers. In addition, counselling procedures are used to deal with those employees that are seen by the corporation as somehow delinquent (Salaman 1997). Once the 'right' culture is in place then, it is argued, the organisation will be more competitive and successful within its market place (Casson 1996, Westall 1996).

3.2(c) In the corporate culture project, it is considered that organisational culture is a valuable resource, which directly relates to a company's performance (Chan et al 2004), and senior managers are responsible for ensuring that the culture of their organisation is in harmony with the context within which the organisation operates. They can also help to create shared cultural meanings within the organisation using language and process, and they have a strong role in shaping and legitimising the collective experience of organisational members (Piccardo et al 1990). For these reasons, leadership is given a central role in forming, developing, using and changing corporate cultures (Schein 1992). Organisational leaders themselves have also had an important influence on the growth of the corporate culture project. In this way, senior managers have attempted to control the workforce through cultural processes, and establish a consistency with the secondary features of the organisation. Such as its design and structure, the systems and procedures used within it, the layout of the physical environment, the narratives myths and legends about the organisation and the formal expressions of organisational policies. In this way, it seems, organisational leaders believe that they can directly influence and even determine their organisation's culture, by formulating other people's reality within the organisation and, at the same time, enhance their own leadership position through 'transformational possibilities' (Anthony 1994, Bass 1985). For these reasons, the corporate culture project offers organisational leaders a dramatic and heroic status, indicating that authority and responsibility for cultural propagation and change rests with the senior managers, who lead their organisations.

*"It defines the nature and importance of the senior management role and function, celebrating and glorifying senior management by placing them in a central position as 'transformative' leaders"* (Salaman 1997, pg.263).

3.2(d) In summary, from the perspective of senior managers, the very reason that culture is important is because they can directly influence it, through activities and symbols (Parker 2000). They can use it to promote improvement in the organisation's performance and through its promotion and manipulation, managers can confirm their own heroic image and leadership identity within the workplace.

Even though the cultural change programmes themselves can be somewhat ambiguous (McLaughlin et al 2005).

3.2(e) However, even though the corporate culture movement gained many converts in the 1980s, it also had a number of critics. This criticism grew stronger in the 1990s as writers tested the problems and assumptions that were associated with the corporate culture project. At this time, critiques of corporate culture programmes were articulated, from both a theoretical basis, and for the ways in which the concept was used by senior management within organisations. In fact, the enthusiastic adoption of the corporate culture project by senior managers has often been criticised for its managerial bias and for reflecting the interests of white males in dominant positions within organisations (Martin 1992).

3.2(f) From a theoretical basis, Barley (1983) argues that few organisational researchers study the deep structure of a work setting, instead most study symbolic phenomena at the surface. Therefore, from the managerial theoretical perspective, culture is often reduced to a set of discrete variables, for example values, beliefs and stories that can be documented and manipulated in an instrumental way, and this mechanistic attitude underlies many cultural perspectives. However, it would seem that culture cannot be measured on a scale of this sort, because it is a form of lived experience that is not compatible with this type of measurement (Morgan 1997). Alvesson (1993) argues that most research into values and beliefs relate to values, attitudes and behaviours that are useful in achieving corporate goals *as identified by management* (my emphasis). They are, therefore, largely instrumental in character. This type of functionalist bias can be found in Schein's (1992) work, and it seems especially strong in the study of cultural change. Therefore, even when the focus of managerial-centred research is not on the possibility of manipulation, there is often an implicit preoccupation with questions relevant to managers and a concentration on improving the functioning of the organisation. Anthony (1994) argues that the anthropological view of culture as a complex issue, has therefore been overturned by consultants in,

*“the happy expectation of simple recipes for reaching unified purpose and understanding and their substitution for the irksome complexity of reality.”* (Anthony 1994, pg.97).

3.2(g) It would seem, therefore, that the supporters of the corporate culture project ignore the majority of cultural theories, concentrating only on structural functionalism. In this way, they stress shared internalised social values and the achievement of social order to the exclusion of many other issues such as hierarchy, control, sexism and racism. Therefore, while the corporate culture project emphasises consensus and harmony, this is often at odds with the conception and experience of employees (Salaman 1997). Coming from a similar perspective, Alvesson (1993) argues against the idea of a unique and unitary organisational culture for two different reasons. Firstly, he argues that organisations are products of macro-level phenomena, for example, society, class or industrial sector, and are therefore normally similar in nature to their host culture. Secondly, he believes that internal variations within organisations are much more profound than unitary patterns, because of the diversity of the groups involved within any organisation that employs more than a few people. Sackman (1991) has indicated that although culture in organisations has been widely assumed to be homogenous and leader-centred within the corporate culture project, the reality is that the first is not likely to hold in complex organisations and the second probably reflects the bias of managerial researchers.

3.2(h) Another group of writers focuses on the utilisation of cultural change. This group argues that corporate culture is an ideological project because it is committed to the maximisation of organisational managerial control for the achievement of productive, reliable, compliant behaviour, which supports the existing organisational power structure (Salaman 1997). Because unanimous agreements within any organisation are unlikely, the illusion of consensus within a given work organisation must entail the imposition of individual or group authority over other individuals or groups within the organisation. Integrationist studies can therefore be criticised for ignoring, downplaying or excluding the wishes, opinions or interests of those who

deviate from the supposedly dominant viewpoint, which is likely to be that of senior management.

*“To summarize, integration studies appear objective and politically unbiased from the perspective of those who accept and benefit from established relations of authority. Those who wish to dissent from established relations of authority find their concerns silenced from the integration perspective”* (Martin 1992, pg.61).

3.2(i) Kunda (1992) is concerned that, within the functionalist tradition the structural causes and consequences of cultural forms and their relationship to various measures of organisational effectiveness are dominant. He suggests that bureaucracy leads to the need for increasingly sophisticated forms of control. Arguing that control based on ownership leads to worker alienation, then to conflict and decreased efficiency and then to a managerial search for better control. Kunda argues that in its most recent form, bureaucratic control is coupled not only with a tendency to enforce the rules, but also with a need to internalise them and identify with the company. Having completed a study in a technical company, Kunda concluded that the idea of developing strong cultures is the latest stage in the managerial development of normative control. Within the corporate culture project, he argues, ideological policies are designed to minimise traditional bureaucratic control structures, and encourage in their place, behaviour consistent with the dominant cultural prescription of senior managers. Kunda sees the corporate cultural concept as a subtle form of domination or a cultural trap, where people are submerged in a community of meaning that is monopolised by management. In his book *Brave New Workplace*, Howard (1985) puts forward a comprehensive critique of the managerial approach to managing culture. He argues that the loosening of bureaucratic control brings its own dilemma for those in a dominant position within organisations, quoting Strassman (Vice President of Xerox), who believes that in contemporary organisations it is necessary to replace the crude and increasingly ineffective mechanisms of bureaucratic control with a far more sophisticated alternative.

*“Social history and anthropology point to the exceedingly effective application of social support – as a reward – and social sanction – as a deterrent – to drive towards social stability in the workplace”* (Howard 1985, pg. 108).

3.2(j) In this way the corporate culture approach to the workplace entails inducing workers to participate in, and to take personally, a new system of authority at work. Howard goes on to indicate that as the traditional bureaucratic methods for shaping what Max Weber called the ‘psycho-physical apparatus of man’ proved increasingly ineffective, the managers of the brave new workplace began to define a new set of managerial tools. He argues that a powerful movement is underway to re-examine, and where necessary break with, the old managerial assumptions, rigidity and formalisation of the past. Using these new management tools, managers seek to adjust the contemporary worker to the ‘brave new workplace’. These new tools are primarily psychological and symbolic in nature, and are designed to manage the values people bring to work and the meanings they find in it. Howard argues that in the Peters and Waterman (1982) approach workers have only one narrow choice, ‘buying in’ or ‘opting out’ and if they try to step out of their narrow role, the illusion of control for the workforce is quickly transformed into the reality of its absence. In this context corporate culture has been used to devolve task autonomy, however, this is done in a framework of increasingly normative rules, and the company’s specification of the values and behaviour expected from the workforce. An approach that Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) called *“controlled autonomy”*.

3.2(k) In practice, and despite the best efforts of those supporting the corporate culture project, it would seem that it has been extremely difficult for managers to control the behaviour of employees (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). Efforts to define organisational realities may not be successful because they collide with any alternative views that individuals may have regarding organising and organisational membership (Salaman 1997). Therefore, the managerial imposition of a manufactured culture on an organisation may only be superficial. Alvesson and Berg (1992) argue that there is little evidence that anyone has had any real success in applying the corporate cultural concept in practice. They believe that corporate

cultures are far too complex to be influenced in the short term by specific development measures, and Tayeb (1988) argues that it is a mistake to believe that an organisation is shaped only by the cultural values of its members. This is because both the task and the economic environment may play a significant part in cultural development and change.

3.2(l) It can be seen, therefore, that there are a number of difficulties with regard to the corporate culture approach to organisational management and change. It is not at all certain that employees will share in the organisation's culture, and managerial attempts to ensure individual compliance may be seen as an attempt to control the thoughts, beliefs and values of the individual. As a result, the workforce may well resist these attempts at control.

3.2(m) If these criticisms of how culture is being used by managers to change and improve organisations are indeed reflective of an organisational reality shaped by cultural imperatives, in a process of pressures for change and resistance to it, then it will be necessary to develop a more complete and academically valid understanding of how culture is formed, maintained and lived during this process of change and resistance.

3.2(n) This will be of particular importance because this thesis considers the subject of cultural change, as opposed to the subject of organisational change management, which seems to be the objective of the corporate culture project.

### **3.3 Section II: Cultural reality: propagation and maintenance**

3.3(a) In order to understand and interpret the changing cultural realities of Fire Service life, it will be necessary to understand the propagation, maintenance and change processes that determine the cultural realities of those who are involved in delivering that service. In order to facilitate such an understanding it is intended to start this section of this chapter with a consideration of how individuals enter established groups and how identity and identification with those groups are both



developed by the individual, and encouraged by the established culture of the organisation they become part of.

### **3.4 Individuals into groups**

3.4(a) All but the most simple of organisations are formed from groups of people. Therefore it can be argued that the starting point for a consideration of the culture of the Fire Service should be a consideration of the individuals who come together, either for individual reasons, or to support the Service's objectives. As individuals come into contact with the existing organisation, they also come into contact with the organisational dress norms of the Service, stories people tell about what goes on in the Service, formal rules and procedures, informal codes of behaviour, rituals, tasks, jargon and jokes only understood by insiders, and so on. These elements contribute to some aspects of the organisational culture of the Service, and new members must come to terms with this new and sometimes-strange (to them) organisational life. As new members come into the Service, they need to interpret the meanings of these aspects in order to integrate with the Service and come to terms with its organisational realities. Their perceptions, memories, beliefs, experiences and values will vary at the point of entry, so the interpretations of new individuals may well differ, even when they are coming into contact with the same organisation. The patterns, or configurations, of these interpretations and the ways they are enacted constitute and may support, or effect and change, the organisation's culture (Martin 1992).

3.4(b) Within a cultural perspective, people within organisations, including those in the Fire Service, must continuously create or amend the organisation's culture, not only as they enter but also as they meet new organisational situations to which they and the organisation must adjust. The solutions to the cultural problem of entering and surviving within organisations directly affect the shared understanding of groups of people and this in turn can constitute the evolution of organisational culture. Whyte (1955), in his classic study of Cornerville society, was one of the first researchers to make this point by demonstrating that culture is a process, which both

frames what people do within societies and is also, in turn, continuously affected by new people who enter the culture (Bryman 1991). Therefore, individuals in organisations, and those who encounter those organisations, can be both affected by organisational culture, while simultaneously effecting and potentially changing it.

3.4(c) Once formed and internally normalised within the participating group processes, organisational culture needs to be learned or adopted by individuals who join the group, through the process of organisational socialisation. This is the process through which individuals come to appreciate and adopt the skills, values, abilities, expected behaviours and social knowledge essential for assuming an organisational role, and for participating as an organisational member (Stapley 1996, Lui et al 2003). However, organisational life in complex organisations takes place by means of a conceptual framework of which individuals may be unaware. For this reason, in any exploration of culture it is necessary to consider unconscious processes as well as conscious ones. This is because an organisation, or a part of an organisation, is an association of individuals, and it is those individuals who develop the constructs that are considered structure and/or culture (Stapley 1996). In this way, culture can be seen as a kind of mental programming, and in a group context, it can be seen as a collective phenomenon or a ‘collective programming of the mind’, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. It is learned, as opposed to being inherited, and it derives from the social environment (Hofstede 1991). Therefore, the relationship between an individual and an organisation becomes a complex, dynamic and reciprocal process of socialisation within a work group.

*“This process of organisational socialisation i.e. of assimilating an organisation’s culture and becoming part of it, takes place through a sequence of sanctions, pressures and rewards”... “An employee who infringes organisational norms is made aware of it through direct or subtle pressures.”... “Through socialisation the individual becomes part of the organisation, but so too does the organisation become part of the individual. The organisation offers individuals something of the power, the glamour and the glory, which surrounds it ... In exchange, the individual must*

*compromise his or her freedom, work to someone else's orders and espouse the organisations values and norms.*" (Gabriel 1999, pg.195).

3.4(d) Sackmann (1991) believes that the cultural cognitions of individuals have functional attributes and that they create a common basis for perception, thinking, feeling and acting. This helps individuals recognise, integrate and frame meaningful alternatives, from an essentially infinite number of possibilities, in similar ways. This, in turn, leads to an ability to understand, communicate and coordinate within social systems and work groups. In this way, individuals and cultures complement the grey areas of the organisation's formal structure and provide an invisible bond between individual organisational members. A key assumption in much of the literature on organisational culture, is that the main function of culture is to enhance social order by providing a collective mental framework (Alvesson and Berg 1992). The assumption made is that each collective has a cultural system that includes sets of values and cognitive perspectives that are, to varying degrees, shared by organisational actors. Therefore, the communication that takes place in a collective shapes a commonly recognised or accepted worldview based on a common set of values. In this way, the shared worldview becomes the organisational culture and new members become acculturated or socialised, and the more experienced actors are required to constantly reconfirm, or renegotiate, the shared worldview or culture (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). Therefore, if culture gives meaning to the lives of individuals it must be internalised and adopted by those individuals (Godley and Westall 1996). Even though adults may come to the Fire Service with their values and beliefs already formed by the broader culture, individuals are both shaped by the Fire Service's existing culture, which they in turn can produce or change through their activities and relationships (Schoenberger 1997). Groups and individuals can therefore experience culture as an internalised way of life, or a set of norms that are adopted either consciously or unconsciously. The customs and traditions of an organisation can, in this way, be a powerful influence on behaviour (Salaman 1997) and life for individuals within a given culture is only likely to flow smoothly if their behaviour conforms to the unwritten, normalised codes of the organisation (Morgan 1997).

### **3.5 The formation of identity**

3.5(a) While it seems that groups are made up of collectives of individuals and therefore they must bring with them their values, opinions and beliefs, it also seems to be the case that organisations can affect individuals and their individual view of their place in the world. One way that this may be achieved is by the provision of an associated identity for individuals and groups within the workplace. For these individuals and groups, organisational culture can provide a key component in the provision and/or reinforcement of identity. This is because within the workplace environment, the institution concerned can provide categories of thought that set the boundaries of self-knowledge, thus helping to fix the identities of the individuals or groups concerned (Church 1996). Therefore, an organisational culture can give its members both identity and models for the interpretation and understanding of their day-to-day experiences (Piccardo et al 1990). This understanding is likely to be shaped by power-based relationships and the broader socio-cultural context, which allow for the production of discourses through which individuals can construct their identities (Dick and Cassell 2004). In this way, it is likely that Fire Service culture will form part of an integrated individual's identity, and shape how they see the world (Albert 1998). It also seems to be the case that in these circumstances, the team can be more important than the organisation as a focus for identification (Marks and Lockyer 2005).

3.5(b) Organisational reality and work identities are simultaneously constructed and organisations are sites where social realities can provide a place for the construction of identity (Karremon and Alvesson 2001). Therefore, it is argued here that there are substantive links between culture and identity and this issue will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### **3.6 Group identification**

3.6(a) Individuals in organisations can often go through a process of identification, which is displaced onto groups. In these circumstances, these individuals have a need

to protect and maintain the group in order to enhance or defend their own identity and this emotional commitment may provide a resistance to cultural change (Reed 2001). Once formed, groups can often develop a life and identification of their own, thus creating, developing and maintaining group boundaries. For group members the outward signs of dress, language, symbols, etc. confirm identity within a group and allow for a ready recognition of other like-minded persons. The strength of identification can be measured in the degree to which people define themselves in terms of their membership of a collective and how much their feelings of self worth are reflected in the status of the collective (Marks and Lockyer 2005). In a psychodynamic explanation of group identity, Stapely (1996) indicates that,

*“identity within a group goes beyond the mere perception of it and the investing of it with some emotional meaning, for identification also contains an element of responding or, more specifically, an element of individual commitment.”* (Stapely 1996, pg. 146).

He goes on to define this group identification as,

*“a set of pre-conscious and unconscious attitudes, which incline each member to apperceive the group as an extension of himself and impel him to remain in direct contact with the other members and to adhere to the group standards. The result of an individual’s group identification is that he reacts to the attributes of the group as if these attributes were also his own”..... “this is reinforced by the universal trend of groups towards some form of uniformity including literally special uniforms or distinctive clothing through which incomplete self-certainty, for a time, can hide in group certainty”* (Stapely 1996, pg.146).

3.6(b) In this way, identification is constituted in the shared narratives that people author in order to provide meaning and sense in their working relationships (Humphrey and Brown 2002).

### **3.7 Systems of meaning**

3.7(a) One outcome of the reciprocal interaction between individuals and groups in the development of an organisational culture is a conceptual approach to organisations, which sees them as systems of meaning that are shared to various degrees. As a sense of commonality of purpose is necessary for continued organisational activity, so that interaction can take place without constant interpretation and reinterpretation of meaning, such consistency needs to be distanced from the confusion of reality, the need to maintain stability and the need to change. In this way, culture can simultaneously facilitate change while at the same time reinforcing traditional values and beliefs (Anthony 1994).

3.7(b) Human beings are able to understand their environment based on their perception of the effects of the activities of those in authority, and meanings held in common are partly handed down to them from previous generations. The cultural baggage of tradition is reinforced by the material environment, which confirms our inherited beliefs and which in turn is partly transmitted to us by social agencies, (e.g. law and education) and is partly modified by our own education and experience (Anthony 1994). From this perspective, culture can be seen as going much deeper than superficial characteristics, it is a shared understanding (Bryman 1991) in which reality for both individuals and groups is actively and socially constructed. Shared transactions both constitute and shape the meanings that underlie people's lives and cultural systems are more or less internalised, therefore culture is a concept about meaning and its construction (Mayerson 1991). This indicates that its members' understanding of the social system of which they are part define an organisation's culture. It must therefore include aspects and practices that define and help to sustain what is 'normal' for those individuals and groups. It is, in this sense, a symbolic field constituted by interpretive processes providing a context for sense making and meaning about the organisation and the reality it occupies in the workplace (Whetton and Godfrey 1998).

3.7(c) Based on the cognitive perspective of culture in organisational settings, Sackman (1991) argues that the sense-making mechanisms of culture should be of particular interest to those carrying out organisational research. From this perspective, she indicates that organisational members often use culture in order to attribute meaning to events and occurrences. This includes the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing and acting in a given cultural setting. Here, Sackman (1991) considers artefacts and behavioural traits to be expressions of culture. These expressions are at the visible surface level while their attached meanings are below the visible level. As cognition is used to attribute meaning to events the structural side of culture can be defined as,

*“ sets of commonly held cognitions that are held with some emotional investment and integrated into a logical system or cognitive map that contains cognitions about descriptions, operations, prescriptions and causes. They are habitually used and influence perception, thinking, feeling and acting.”* (Sackman 1991, pg.34).

3.7(d) These sets of cognitions can only become commonly held, through social interaction. They can be introduced from outside the individual or emerge from growing experience, they can be invented or negotiated and in repeated applications they become attached to emotions and imbued with varying degrees of importance, which are also commonly held. They are passed on to new members of a collective and in this way are relatively stable over time. While changes of belief may occur, such changes are most likely to be based on dramatic events and will be of a revolutionary rather than evolutionary nature (Sackmann 1991). Therefore, culture can be seen as a continuous process of both organising, and negotiating meaning for the individual within organisations (Wright 1994).

3.7(e) These patterns of belief, or shared meanings, can be fragmented or integrated, however, operating norms or rituals within an organisation normally support and enhance them in the eyes of organisational members. Therefore, organisational culture develops as an ethos created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols and rituals. In looking at culture, we are in fact considering a process of

reality construction, which allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, rhetoric or situations in a collective way (Morgan 1997). In this way, culture is involved in all those practices that carry meaning and value for us and that need to be meaningfully interpreted by others, or depend on meaning for their effective operation. Therefore, from a cultural perspective, organisations become assemblages of meaningful practices that construct certain ways for people to demonstrate acceptable behaviours at work. Culture structures the way people think, feel and act in organisations. In addition, organisations themselves can be described as cultural phenomena, as they provide assemblages of meaningful practices that construct certain ways for people to conduct themselves in an organisational context (Du Gay 1997). In this way, people construct ideas and values about work and provide shared frameworks, assumptions and beliefs that are used to define and make sense of work and employment for individuals and collectives (Salaman 1997). Looked at in this way, organisations can be seen as both the enactment of a shared reality (Morgan 1997) and cultural products that are made by the meanings attached to them (Gabriel 1999),

*“culture includes all the material and spiritual heritage of an organisation or a community, its myths and stories, artistic and craft artefacts, buildings, tools, laws, institutions, rituals and customs. What makes these ingredients cultural products is not their physical substance, but the meanings attached to them and the ways in which they infuse people’s lives with meaning. (Gabriel 1999, pg.171).*

3.7(f) Considering the culture of the Fire Service from this perspective gives a focus to internal cultural developments which are only visible through artefacts and behaviours. However, groups of people formed into organisations do not exist in a vacuum and their cultural identifications within the organisation, together with the organisation’s culture will also be effected or even determined by a number of additional factors. Most important for a study of Fire Service culture in the current context would seem to be those of the historical development of the Service’s contemporary culture and the wider society in which it is embedded.



### **3.8 Shaped by history**

3.8(a) A major determinant of an organisation's culture is likely to be that of its history and Geertz (1993) gives a key role to history in the production of culture when he indicates that it is shaped by history. From this perspective an organisational culture is developed over a period and is therefore related to its history and its traditions (Alvesson 1993), as organisational cultures are inherited from the past and become deeply imbedded in the organisation. In fact, it seems that the culture of an organisation must be a product of its history because it is shaped by the interaction between individuals and its circumstances in the past. Malinowski (quoted in Schwartzman (1993)) goes as far as describing culture as a living history. Organisational cultures can be seen, therefore, as a set of historically formed networks comprising organisational and social processes, together with systems of organisational values and beliefs (Czarnawska 1986). Culture emerges from history, is rooted in practice, sustained by structures and it becomes habitual, unconscious and unthinking as the result of routines of repeated behaviour (Anthony 1994). Therefore, culture is traditional, historically derived and it is passed from older members of an organisation to younger ones. In this way, it shapes our perceptions of the world and our behaviour (Adler 1986).

### **3.9 The effect of society**

3.9(a) Schein (1992) puts forward the view that in order to survive organisations must both adapt to their environment and integrate their workforces internally. He argues that all groups of people must deal with survival, growth, and adaptation to their environment. They must also have internal integration processes that permit functioning, together with an ability to change and adapt to changing circumstances. This internal integration and external adaptation is carried out through cultural processes. Schein's belief that organisations have a requirement to respond to changes in their environment if they are to survive and succeed has gained a considerable following. His views were supported by Tayeb (1988), following a study in Iran, when he concluded that,

*“organisations have to respond to changes in their environmental conditions if they are to succeed and survive.” (Tayeb 1988, pg.5).*

Anthony (1994) also supports Schein’s views when he argues that for a culture to persist, it must adapt to significant changes in its environment. Therefore, it can be argued that organisational groups such as the Fire Service exist within the context of a wider culture comprising the society of which they form a part. In addition, even though culture is often modelled as resulting from individual beliefs, values and knowledge, this line of thought may greatly understate the extent to which organisations are shaped by the wider environment (Scott and Meyer 1994). From this perspective,

*“Organisations do not exist in a vacuum. They cannot, therefore, be treated separately from the wider society they inhabit and interact with. Any sensible model of organisations, and of change in organisations, therefore would have to acknowledge, and make some attempt to understand the various ties and linkages between organisations and the wider society” (Collins 1998, pg. 5).*

3.9(c) Therefore, even though the relationship between national and organisational culture is significant but complex where they can both replicate and reject national values (Nelson and Gopalan 2003). Every action in a social system can therefore be influenced by the wider social system and employees are likely to reflect the larger society and culture from which they come (Amado and Brasil 1991). From their wider social system, they bring their education and skills together with their attitude towards work, organisation and general expectations about their role and responsibilities (Sparrow et al 1994). From this perspective, the norm for the Fire Service will be the most common and generally acceptable pattern of values, attitudes and behaviour within the wider society and these societal norms will have a strong effect on the culture of the Fire Service (Adler 1986). Therefore, culture can be seen at a number of levels within a given society, national or societal, industrial or professional and organisational. Societal culture affects organisational culture and the organisation, and those associated with an organisation are likely to reflect the

characteristics of the surrounding culture (Cray and Mallory 1998). From this perspective, deep rooted values and beliefs can be best understood as the historical result of broader cultural contexts, like civilizations and nations (Laurent 1995).

3.9(d) Although criticised by some, Hofstede's (1980) research is seen by many as the key exemplar in the comparative field of work, which looks at the effects of national culture on organisational culture (Cray and Mallory 1998, Luther and Luther 2002). In his influential study, Hofstede looked at the attitudes and values of managers in subsidiaries of a single company located in 39 different countries. As a result of this study, Hofstede identified four cultural dimensions along which he believes countries can be seen to differ. Power distance, which looks at how much the host culture encourages superiors to exercise power. Uncertainty avoidance, which is concerned with the degree that the host culture encourages risk taking. Individualism/collectivism, which is the degree to which the host culture supports individual concerns as opposed to collectivist or group concerns and the final dimension masculinity/femininity, is the degree that the host culture supports masculine values as opposed to feminine ones. As a result of this study, Hofstede argued that these national cultural differences affect organisational cultures and determine the way in which organisations are structured and managed. Tayeb's (1988) work supports Hofstede's theories. Tayeb found, for example, that if there is a wide power and authority gap in a given society, then the same pattern is reflected in organisations in that society (Tayeb 1988).

### **3.10 Us and them**

3.10(a) An elite organisational identity can secure an image which appeals to the public and this can then be incorporated through social construction into a sense of self. Therefore, one organisational effect of the cultural phenomenon may well be that of identification. Moreover, this identification for both individuals and groups can lead to strong ties within an organisation. However, one adverse effect of this identification with an 'in group' is that it can also identify other individuals and groups as somehow not belonging, not being the same as us. In these circumstances,

tensions and conflict may arise between groups and individuals and, in some circumstances, it seems that people can divide the world into two groups: our group, which is normal and other groups that are somehow abnormal. Montaigne was one of the first philosophers to draw attention to this divisive effect of the cultural phenomenon. In the early 1580s he undertook a long journey away from his home in France and as he travelled, he noticed how what was considered normal differed considerably from area to area. These considerations of what was normal resulted in a phenomenon that he labelled as “regional incomprehension” (De Botton 2000).

*“Each nation has many customs and practices which are not only unknown to another nation but barbarous and a cause of wonder.”* (Montaigne, quoted in De Botton (2000), pg.135).

3.10(b) Montaigne’s work highlights the cultural imperative caused by group identification:

*“Every man calls barbarous anything he is not accustomed to; we have no other criterion of truth or right-reason than the example and form of the opinions and customs of our own country. There we always find the perfect religion, the perfect polity, the most developed and perfect way of doing anything.”* (Montaigne, quoted in De Botton (2000), pg. 142).

3.10(c) Therefore, understanding the culture of a social unit could tell us, if appropriately researched, how its members define themselves in relation to members of other communities, as well as how they define their standing among themselves. The concept of culture as the way in which people make sense of their world may explain why people do what they do, as well as why they do it in one way and not in another (Gross 1985). From this perspective, culture can be seen as a way of distinguishing between groups, a kind of ‘them and us’ claim. Where difference, or “*status inconsistency*”, can form the basis for being accepted into a group, or not being accepted into a group (Thompson Heames et al 2006). These distinctions create divisions that in an organisational sense can be internal, for example

departmental, hierarchical or functional but may also be related to other senses of individual and group identity from outside the organisation, such as professional, occupational, generational or geographical. Alternatively, they can be based on individual characteristics such as male, female, black or white. Therefore, while culture can be seen as a process of making 'us and them' claims within an organisation, it can also be affected by assumptions from within the wider society. Any understanding of organisational culture needs, therefore, to understand culture as a process of making multiple claims about membership categories, about 'us and them', or the mobilisation of distinctions between 'us and them' (Parker 2000).

3.10(d) In these circumstances culture can be seen as a social contract, against which identities are negotiated and acted on, and which foster a common sense of meaning for both individuals and groups within the organisation.

*"I see culture as a social contract, the background or the social contract against which identities are negotiated and enacted. Culture provides a common set of assumptions, a language, a common set of experiences and metaphors, and a common sense of meaning that we can use in referencing ourselves and creating our identities and the distinct categories that define that identity. What category distinctions would be meaningful? In some cultures it's black/white or male/female. In others, there may be other distinctive attributes that help define very different categories on which to base our identities (Whetton and Godfrey 1998, pg. 263).*

3.10(e) This type of circumstance may lead to conflict, as in some groups of people within organisations a kind of cultural blindness may exist, where the provision of normalised codes of action are so strong that what is recognised as normal leads to the perception of activities that do not conform, as somehow abnormal (Morgan 1997). In these circumstances, a strong identification with a particular in-group may lead to stereotyping and the degrading of out-group members, thus leading to conflict between groups or individuals in the organisation.

## **Section III: Cultural change: contested reality or negotiated order**

### **3.11 Power and control**

3.11(a) Reed (1992 and 2001) has outlined a metaphor for work organisations that understands them as asymmetrical structures of power and domination. This power framework approach focuses on,

*“the more permanent configurations of power and domination which simultaneously constrain and enable the technical and political activities of social actors”.* (Reed 1992, pg. 93).

3.11(b) Within this framework organisations are seen as being directed towards the interests of dominant groups and are the tools by which these groups attempt to maintain their position over time. The design of work and its control mechanisms are mobilised by those who dominate the organisation, and organising is characterised as a struggle between various organisational groups for control and dominance within it.

3.11(c) From a control perspective, individuals and groups in positions of power attempt to use the culture of an organisation as a mechanism of control, through which they can maintain their own position of prominence. From the perspective of management therefore,

*“employees are also encouraged to think and feel in line with the company and to be loyal to its purpose and actions.”* (Alvesson and Berg 1992, pg. 142).

3.11(d) It seems that as culture is passed on through socialisation it can develop into a system of social control within the workplace (Morgan 1997). In this way, culture embodies a social process through which power relations are worked out and made effective (Schoenberger 1997). Therefore, culture can be seen as providing mechanisms through which social relations can be manipulated in such a way that

organisational control at a distance is affected (Reed 1992). If this is the case in Fire Service reality, then from a cultural perspective those in positions of power can use the Service's culture as a third-order control mechanism, which is directed at people's minds through their own and the Service's values, beliefs and ideologies. Organisational leaders, to exploit individuals and groups through the mechanism of peer pressure, can use culture in this way, tapping into previously unexplored potential for organisational control. Through this process, they can bring out the best in people to the benefit of the organisation and those who profit from its success (Alvesson and Berg 1992) and in addition maintain or change the power relations of those who are within or related to the organisation. Therefore organisational culture can be seen as a general system of rules, which govern meaning in organisations, and through which those in power can enhance and maintain their position through a general regulatory mechanism for human behaviour, in other words a control system (Gross 1985).

*“In short, an organisational culture can provide an internal, automatic, spontaneous, informal system of direction, control and co-operation that may prove more effective than an externally imposed formal structure of management”* (Westall 1996, pg. 23).

3.11(e) There are two mechanisms through which control can be asserted in organisations: normative control and applied control. Normative control is imposed as cultures seek to enforce group norms using both positive and negative sanctions. Norms and values are therefore important elements of any culture. They are part of the process of social control whereby individuals behave in particular ways, which they come to regard as natural and normal (Gabriel 1999). In these circumstances, it can be argued that the individual does not have a free choice in organisations with strong cultures. This is because peer pressure and the way other alternatives are presented to individuals within the group, by those in authority or existing group members, leaves little space for individual autonomy. Therefore, the culture can control its members, with those members also taking part in the control process (Alvesson and Berg 1992).

3.11(f) It has been argued that culturally-based ritual has been used throughout history to symbolise authority, to gain legitimacy for those in a position of power and to reinforce adherence to particular ideologies. However, in recent times, particularly in Western societies, it seems that the weakening of national and regional cultures, for example patriarchy and religion, in favour of international exchanges and trends, mass media, fashion, mass consumption, celebrity, etc. has produced less stable, rigid and homogenous cultural patterns. These changes seem to be reflected in the workplace and may have produced a gradual decline of authority in organisations, together with the loss of the traditional authority of those in power, due to the changed orientations and values that employees bring into the organisation (Alvesson and Berg 1992). In these circumstances, the people who manage organisations require a new and more socially acceptable method of controlling the workforce in support of their organisational goals. In applying culture as a control mechanism people with positions of power and authority can use ritual and symbolism to influence how organisational members are to think and feel. Rituals are used in these circumstances for the exertion of symbolic power, and in this way they become a mechanism of applied normative cultural control.

3.11(g) In a study of a technically-based corporation, Kunda (1992) found that strong normative controls were applied by the organisation. These normative controls became systematically prescribed and thoroughly enforced prescriptions describing what members of the organisation could think or feel about themselves, their employer and their rightful place in the organisation. In this type of organisation, the culture was seen to be a demanding system of normative control, based on the use of symbolic power. Moreover, and importantly for the maintenance of control, membership behaviour was supervised by a broad group of control agents in addition to the organisation's managers.

3.11(h) Professional groups, which exhibit strong normative controls, can often develop their own cultures and exhibit a distinct way of looking at the world. For example, military institutions, (and in my experience the Fire Service), often reinforce their distinctiveness through the wearing of uniforms, appeals to their



specific traditions and the use of language that is unintelligible to outsiders (Anthony 1994).

3.11(i) The recognition of this trend towards normative control in the workplace has brought two views of its consequences. The first is a beneficial view where for supporters it is the future of organisations, providing a cure for a declining West and the competitive problems it has. With a strong culture, there is no need for conflict between the organisation and the individuals within it. In this way, normative control can be seen as potentially liberating, when personal growth is possible and encouraged in support of organisational goals.

3.11(j) The second view is more negative. Detractors believe that under normative control, workers not only owe a hard day's work to the organisation, but they are also required to give their unqualified support to the organisation and its management. From this negative perspective, control tends to produce much more of a totalitarian system where the corporation demands the worker's soul, or at least their identity (Kunda 1992).

*“On the face of it, the argument for tyranny would seem to have some merit. In its attention to the formulation and dissemination of ideology, Tech management indeed resembles Big Brother (as some members point out). Similarly, the widespread use of rituals, the importance attached to group testimonials, and the face-to-face control they allow are reminiscent to brainwashing techniques. Moreover, members report feeling intense pressure, an invasion of their private life by corporate requirements, and, in many cases, considerable personal suffering”.* (Kunda 1992, pg.223).

3.11(k) In practice, therefore, organisations can be seen from a control-based perspective as systems of cultural rules, which give collective meaning and value to particular entities and activities, thus integrating organisational members into schemes promoted by those in power (Scott and Mayer 1994). Within these organisations, organisational members form cultural groupings according to perceived or culturally pre-set functional domains. Organisational managers

encourage (and where necessary enforce) this type of formal and informal grouping, by using rewards, incentives and other more normative organisational control systems (Sackman 1991). In organisations of this kind, the culture can contain informal or hidden disciplinary practices, which form part of the everyday network of power relations and systems of control.

*“A culture of discipline is established and the employees police themselves”* (Casey 1995, pg. 123).

### **3.12 Contested realities**

3.12(a) Ideas regarding groups in organisations, their different power bases and positions, their culture and how that is represented, can give a view of organisations as ‘fragmented unities’ in which contests over meaning are central both to the organisation and how it approaches change and resistance. Therefore, organisational culture can in such circumstances be seen as a continuing process of articulating contested versions of what the organisation should be doing, who it should be responsible to and who should do what for which reward. Organisations can, from this perspective, be seen to be confined within power relations between men and women, old and young, managers and workers, professionals and administrators (or other conflicting groups) within the organisation (Parker 2000). In this way, relations and processes of domination can be central to an explanation of how people differently positioned contest the meaning of a situation and use the economic and institutional resources available to them to try to make their definition of the situation both dominant within the organisation and accepted as the norm. In these circumstances, culture can be seen as a process of contested reality (Wright 1994).

3.12(b) Looking at culture in this way indicates that organisations can have many cultures and that the process of organising can be embedded in a cultural context from which certain traits are adopted from certain groups. This can lead to clashes and conflicts between those cultural groupings (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). It must be recognised that there are many sites of cultural production in the organisational

context, which may combine any number of sub-cultures. However, it is still possible to recognise a dominant culture within an organisation, a dominant culture that is produced by dominant individuals or groups within that organisation, and which establishes the social reality in which sub-cultures and counter-cultures emerge and against which they contend, therefore culture can be about power (Schoenberger 1997). This contested power relationship may lead to conflict between the dominant culture and sub-cultures within the organisation in order to establish organisational control.

3.12(c) One influential and specific sub-culture within organisations is likely to be that adopted by the workforce. In organisations that have this dynamic, managerially imposed ideology can be seen to be in opposition to the unofficial lower level cultures, which may form pockets of resistance against dominant assumptions and use sabotage, strikes and cynicism in response to pressures for change (Salaman 1997). Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) indicates that in order to contest the reality they experience when externally imposed relationships are enforced as organisational rules, the workforce are often able to manipulate those rules in order to establish a sense of having at least some control over work processes. Coming from this perspective it can be seen that the opposing interests of the worker collective and corporate management may have an influence on the establishment of worker culture within an organisation. The workers' situation at the bottom of the hierarchy, and often in demanding working conditions, provides the basis for their collective attitude, and cultural patterns can often get their form from the tension inherent in the worker-management relationship. Workers can define themselves as 'anti' in relation to senior management's interest in control and exploitation. Therefore, the values underpinning worker culture can have their origins in social conflict (Alvesson and Berg 1992). In Britain, factory workers traditionally define themselves as in opposition to a system they perceive as having exploited their ancestors as it now exploits them. Moreover, and in contrast, managerial elites often assume a basic right to rule workers who they see as having a duty to obey, whether or not this position is justified. This type of relationship is likely to give rise to both conflict and

antagonism within the workplace and culture is in these circumstances followed by conflict rather than consensus (Morgan 1997).

### **3.13 Negotiated order**

3.13(a) As a certain amount of stability can often be observed in organisational cultures over time, it is self evident that the relationships of power and resistance (or functional persistence as Dabosz-Bourne and Jankowicz (2006) call it) within organisations must have an ability to negotiate some kind of steady state for both individuals and groups. Reed (1992) has articulated a theory of organisation as negotiated order, which addresses this point. Looked at from the negotiated order perspective, organisations are seen by Reed as social units that are created, sustained and transformed through social interaction. Because they are social constructions that are in reality negotiated by organisational members, they can be conceptualised as emerging from the ongoing interactions between participants within the organisation. Therefore, organisational cultures comprise temporary patterns that are always open to modification and change. However, even though they are always being renegotiated, organisations contain more formal, substantive elements that set limits to change, and these elements provide the more stable background against which negotiations are carried out. As Reed puts it,

*“These more formalised, organisational elements constitute a relatively fluid structure of power and control which constrains and facilitates political bargaining between organisational coalitions or ‘stakeholders’ over the allocation, distribution and utilisation of scarce resources.”...“the existence of organisations as coherent and sustainable social units is entirely dependent on their continuous reconstruction through social action.”* (Reed 1992, pg. 85).

3.13(b) If culture does emerge from social interactions, as the product of negotiated and shared symbols and meanings (Stapley 1996), then it follows that an organisational culture cannot be developed or changed without the involvement of those who are a part of it. Therefore in practice, cultures may be shaped by the

tension between the two extremes of managerial and workforce attempts to control the organisation (Godley and Westall 1996).

### **3.14 Organisational culture: some conclusions**

3.14(a) Over recent years senior managers in organisations have been encouraged to use a corporate culture approach to managing and changing their organisations. In these circumstances, it could be concluded that senior managers in the Scottish Fire Service will be encouraged to use this approach to attempt to change their Brigades, under pressure from Government. However, the corporate culture approach to changing organisations has been criticised from both a theoretical and practical perspective, and whether or not this approach would be successful in actually changing Fire Brigades in any controlled way must be under some considerable doubt.

3.14(b) A more considered view of the theory of organisational culture indicates that as individuals enter work groups they come into contact with the organisation's culture, and if they are to be accepted into the organisation in a way that is comfortable for them, they have to be socialised into the pre-existing cultural realities of the organisation. This is a process, through which an individual accepts the pre-existing organisational culture and normalises its imperatives, a kind of mental programming of the individual's mind in support of the requirements of the group. If this process of normalisation is successful, it can provide or confirm identity for the individual, as well as a powerful identification with the group concerned, within an organisational system of meaning. In these circumstances, individuals have an incentive to both protect and maintain the group in order to confirm and publicly reinforce their own identity. As these systems of meaning are developed through organisational and personal experience over time, they are shaped and informed by the organisation's history. Organisations do not exist in isolation and both they and the individuals that make them up are part of a wider society. For these reasons, the systems of meaning that form the background to organisational cultural formation, and an organisation's culture, will be informed by the cultural

context in which they are developed. It is also likely that any pressures for change emanating from that external society will affect them.

3.14(c) Once formed, organisational culture can provide the backdrop against which individuals develop different groups within an organisation, identifying ‘us and them’ claims and reinforcing or challenging the existing dominant culture. Culture can also be used to inform and develop structures of power and domination within the organisation, if it is directed towards the interests of dominant groups, a kind of third-order control mechanism that mobilises peer pressure and symbolic power. As all but the most simple of organisations are likely to contain different groups with different levels of power, organisations can also be seen as fragmented unities contained within continuing processes of conflict, as organisational realities are contested between the different groups. However, these conflicts can be constrained by the more formal aspects of the organisation and as many organisations can be seen to be relatively stable, it is likely that they have achieved a reasonably steady state as a negotiated order emerges from contested realities. For these reasons, the change and resistance dynamic in the Scottish Fire Service will require additional research into both the Service’s cultural realities and its interactions within a contested reality framework.

3.14(d) The change dynamic will be considered further in Chapter 9 where the dynamics of changing Fire Service realities, through the application of power by individuals and groups, will be considered, together with a consideration as to whether or not the application of such power has led to a backdrop of contested reality or negotiated order in the Fire Service.

3.14(e) The contemporary culture of the Scottish Fire Service is the subject of Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 6 considers the historical development of the contemporary Fire Service culture. Chapter 7 considers the entry of individuals to the Fire Service and how they are socialised into the pre-existing, dominant cultural realities, and Chapter 8 considers the contemporary culture of the Fire Service through a study carried out in three Brigades. However, in order to ensure the

necessary focus it will be necessary to clarify the definition of organisational culture relevant to this thesis.

3.14(f) The concept of organisational culture seems to have many meanings, depending on the purpose and motivation of the user. Indeed, it almost seems that each writer on the subject uses a different definition. These definitions range from the functional, for example Deal and Kennedy's (1982) description of culture as organisational glue, to Schein's (1992) belief that it is the key to internal integration and external adaption and cognitive-based definitions such as Hofstede's (1991) description of culture as a collective programming of the mind.

3.14(g) Alvesson and Berg (1992) believe that it is very difficult to define the concept of organisational culture, with definitions of culture found in the literature being different with regard to not only what should be included in the definition but also what the main emphasis in the definition should be.

*“Is it a question of cognitions, perceptions, emotions, behavioural norms, symbolism, philosophies or what? The definitions cover everything from cultures as common systems of values, beliefs and norms (which is perhaps the most popular solution) to the view of cultures as ‘shared social knowledge’, from cognitive and perceptual dimensions to emotive-expressive dimensions.”* Alvesson and Berg (1992, pg. 77).

However, they indicate that authors in the field generally put forward a view that organisational culture is related to assumptions, priorities, meanings and values that are shared by organisational members.

3.14(h) It is my intention in this thesis to pursue understanding, and therefore, I believe that a definition, which covers the collective cognitive understanding and emotional investment developed in organisational culture, together with how these aspects of culture influence values and behaviour is necessary. For these reasons, I have used Sackman's (1991) definition of culture as,

*“sets of commonly held cognitions that are held with some emotional investment and integrated into a logical system or cognitive map that contains cognitions about descriptions, operations, prescriptions and causes. They are habitually used and influence perception, thinking, feeling and acting.”* (Sackman 1991, pg. 34).

throughout this thesis.

3.14(i) However, before the culture of the Fire Service is considered, it will be necessary to develop a further review of the literature, specifically literature that relates to masculinity and the adoption of a masculine identity. This is necessary to provide the appropriate academic basis to analyse the relationship between culture and the adoption of a masculine identity, which seems to be an important aspect of life in the Fire Service. This is the subject of the next chapter.



## **Chapter Four**

### **The Cultural Effects of Adopting a Masculine Identity**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1(a) The preceding chapter indicated that organisational culture can provide a normalised and internalised contextual framework within which individuals and groups embark on a process of identity formation. However, it would seem from the preliminary analysis in Chapter 1, that attention needs to be paid to the realities of Fire Service life, realities that seem to be informed by the adoption of a masculine approach to working life in the Service. This aspect of the thesis will need to take account of, and add to, recent research, which has focussed on the complexity of gendered behaviour and gendered relations in organisations (Barry et al 2006). Chapter 1 also drew attention to the Government's belief that the culture of the Fire Service was both male and macho in its organisational realities. For these reasons, it would seem that a theoretical basis that only takes account of theories on organisational culture would be limited in developing a full understanding of the contemporary culture of the Fire Service. Therefore, this chapter is intended to redress that shortfall, through a consideration of the literature regarding masculinity and the adoption of masculine identities in the workplace.

#### **4.2 The gendered cultural framework of organisations**

4.2(a) It would seem that even though gender roles assigned to women and men within the workplace can be seen to be both normative and historically changeable, these roles are socially constructed within the cultural framework of organisations. Moreover, as gender is a way in which social practice is ordered (Connell 1995), there is within all organisations a widespread set of locally held assumptions about the different capabilities of gendered actors (Parker 2000). All organisations seem to carry sets of normative assumptions and specific roles, which provide the backdrop for acceptable behaviours and are often assumed and taken for granted, rather than

being subjected to scrutiny from people within those organisations. The multi-level processes that constitute organisational experience, which are seen in organisational culture, are essentially different for men and women (Alvesson 1993). Organisations can be seen as an artefact of the dominant culture, which operates according to communicative models that are displayed in public (Coleman 1991). While there are different and competing value systems, which thus create a mosaic of organisational cultures, for example gender, race, religion, ethnicity, etc., gender seems to be a consistent feature of organisational culture (Di Stefano 1990). These issues are further discussed in the following sections of this chapter where the linked concepts of masculinity and identity are developed.

4.2(b) Within organisations workers can play a major role in developing workplace cultures, and as a result they also play a major role in constituting gender at work through the development and perpetuation of those workplace cultures (Jenkins et al 2002). Although the shared orientations of men and women in an organisation may differ, cultural meanings can be associated with both masculinities and femininities. The gendered understanding of meaning in organisations and norms regulating the expression of sexuality in the workplace are therefore important elements of organisational culture. Moreover, workplace culture can be seen to construct beliefs and self-understandings of men and women in the workplace, as well as defining what is masculine and what is feminine.

4.2(c) While women and men often develop distinctively gendered work cultures, more broadly speaking they are subject to prevailing cultural definitions of the appropriate ways to practice femininity and masculinity. These definitions inform sets of lived relationships and they are therefore fluid and changing, even though gender relations affect all aspects of social and cultural life (Bradley 1999) and from the perspective of those in organisations, they can seem relatively stable. Once formed these workplace cultures provide strong norms, which in turn prescribe gender meaning and required behaviour in the workplace. Looked at in this way a gendered perspective implies the importance, meaning and consequence of what is culturally defined as male or masculine, or female or feminine ways of thinking,

feeling, valuing and acting. Organisational cultural theory can show how shared meanings, symbols and understanding inform people how they should live their gendered lives in organisations. These provide strong norms that prescribe what is 'the required place' for both men and women at work (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). From this perspective, cultural patterns may be of particular interest as they show how cultural meanings interact with gender divisions of labour, both in terms of how organisational structure brings about certain meanings as well as how these cultural meanings contribute to the sex distribution in a given organisational structure. These cultural patterns should also show how dominating values and beliefs are culturally defined as being associated with maleness or, more rarely, femaleness, and thus in their different ways they guide everyday organisational life and social interaction.

4.2(d) Gender bias is often found in the language, rituals, myths, stories and other modes of symbolism that shape an organisation's culture (Morgan 1997). Moreover, this bias would seem to indicate that sex discrimination is embedded in the cultural values of organisations (Alvesson 1993). Looking at culture in this way, indicates that it seems to be a process of social interaction that can, and often does, gender work organisations. Therefore, organisational culture can be seen as a divisive mechanism, consisting of values, attitudes and behaviour, which reflect and construct masculinity and male power within the workplace (Halford and Leonard 2001). This perspective can also reveal the existence of masculine values in the structure, culture and practices of organisations, identify the gendered nature of power relations and the importance of work as a construct of masculine identity, which provides status and power, associated with personal success in the workplace (Burke and Nelson 1998).

### **4.3 Gender – a social construction**

4.3(a) Even though biological differences between men and women are the same the world over, it would seem that the socially acceptable roles of men and women are only partly directed and constrained by biological factors. Within every society, there

is a socially driven imperative, which dictates that certain social behaviours are more suitable for females or for males. This is most evident in the distribution of men and women over certain professions and within the workplace. In other words, the provision of specific and socially accepted gender roles within the workplace is dependent on the sex of the social actor (Hofstede 1991). Gender seems to be accepted as an achieved status, constructed in everyday reality through psychological, cultural and social means (West and Zimmerman 1991). Gender can therefore, be viewed as a conceptual category that refers to the socially produced distinction between women and men (Roper 1994). Neither femininity nor masculinity seems to be singular, fixed or dichotomous. Both are diverse. Neither are they homogenous, unchanging, fixed or undifferentiated (Telford 1996). However, organisations do reflect patterns in their wider systems (Scott and Meyer 1994), and sex roles developed within those systems spill over from external social expectations into organisations (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999), where they can be reinforced or changed over time. Men and women in contemporary Western societies are therefore differently made up as modern humans; they inhabit, experience and construct their worlds in different and often incommensurable ways (Di Stefano 1990).

4.3(b) The evidence from the literature suggests that the cultural meanings assigned to gender vary enormously over time and in different circumstances, therefore gender must in fact be socially constructed within a cultural framework (Wicks 2002). The definitions of masculinity and femininity in any given society being the product of the interplay between a variety of social forces. Indeed, it seems that gender can vary spatially from one culture to another, temporarily within one culture over time and longitudinally throughout any individual's life course. Different groups within any culture may define masculinity and femininity differently, according to sub-cultural definitions, so it is likely to be more accurate to speak of femininities and masculinities as opposed to positing a monolithic gender construct (Kimmel 1996).

4.3(c) Social scientists distinguish gender from sex, as sex is biological and gender is a product of cultural meanings, which are attributed to those biological differences (Kimmel 1996). The study of masculinities in organisations is not therefore

necessarily or wholly about men, as masculinity is a gender identification that is socially constructed within a cultural context. Therefore, it can be seen that masculinity can be, and is, performed by women and that masculinity is best conceptualised as a plurality as opposed to being homogenous;

*The study of masculinities in organisations is not necessarily about men. It is about masculinities, a kind of gender that is socially constructed. Sex is biological, gender is socially performed. The two are not necessarily synonymous, especially when race, class, sexual identity, colonialism, religion, and so on are considered. Writing about masculinities need not be about the male sex. Masculinity can be and is performed by women (Cheng 1996, pg. xii).*

This is not to argue that all women firefighters have to do to be accepted into the Fire Service is to act like men, rather that women who are able to adopt a masculine persona in the workplace are more likely to be successful in the service. However, the strategies that women can develop to survive or prosper in an all male workplace may have a double edge in that they can also reinforce the masculine system (Millar 2004).

4.3(d) Therefore, concepts of masculinity and femininity can be used to describe cultural beliefs without connecting them very closely to men and women (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). From this perspective, gender can be seen as an active, behaviour-based situational accomplishment (Connell 1995). Because individuals realise their behaviour is accountable to others, they configure and orchestrate their activities in relation to how they may be interpreted by others, in the particular social context in which they occur. Therefore, individuals attempt to become socially identified as female or male, or masculine or feminine. In this way, we do masculinity or femininity differently depending on the social circumstances and situation we encounter. Moreover, in order to generate, reinforce and perpetuate

culturally acceptable gender specific identities, men participate in self regulation where they monitor their own and others' gendered conduct (Messerschmidt 1996).

#### **4.4 A resultant definition of men's work and women's work**

4.4(a) If, as indicated by Parker (2000) and others, there is a widely held set of local assumptions regarding the different capabilities of gendered actors, then that would indicate that these assumptions define what is women's work and what is men's work. In fact, it has been shown that in the West there are fundamental differences in the way that men's work and women's work is seen and understood by society in general (Burk and Nelson 1998). These differences are reinforced, and promulgated through the cultural process of socialisation. Individual women and men are therefore led into repeating the existing patterns of gendered difference at work, through the processes of both the imposed norms of gender stereotyping and of active individual feminine and masculine identification (Bradley 1999). In the workplace, behaviours that are defined as feminine by the prevailing cultural norms are seen as natural and self evident when performed by females but surprisingly odd and unnatural when performed by a man and vice versa. In the organisational context, the level of tolerance for deviation from the prescribed norms seems to be low, because the workplace culture normally requires ideas meanings and norms that bring about homogeneity and predictability in understanding, thinking and valuing among organisational members (Alvesson and Due Billing 1997). In this respect, while individuals, groups and organisations can challenge the categories that society applies to them, they are generally constrained by those socially defined categories. Moreover, in these circumstances men can be criticised for behaving effeminately or outside their social category (Llewellyn 2004). In short, organisations are gendered in theory, practice and discourse, with occupations being segregated according to gender (Collins 2005, Kark and Waismel-Manor 2005).

4.4(b) The current indications are that the prevailing norms for women in Western society require them to provide female care, reinforcing female nurturance together with a concern for relationships and the living environment (Hofstede 1991). A

large part of the paid work that women do in contemporary Western society is related to these traditional feminine tasks of caring for people, being responsible for the education of children, taking care of the home and the environment, etc. Even though these tasks have now become professionalized, industrialised and commercialised, the majority of women in the European Union are concentrated in what can best be described as the service sector. Women play the dominant role in the social security, health and service sectors, teaching and the retail trade (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997).

4.4(c) Jobs seen as not being suitable for women and which are therefore defined as men's work in Western societies, are likely to be hazardous, physically difficult and dirty. They are often characterised by manual labour, which has an element of risk-taking and danger. Some examples of occupations with a strong masculine gender symbolism, as defined by Alvesson and Du Billing (1997) are fireman, post mortem examiner and army Officer. It does seem to be the case that where men work together in groups a masculine culture is likely to dominate (Hofstede 1991), and many masculine work cultures are characterised through military metaphors and symbols.

#### **4.5 Workplace segregation**

4.5(a) These definitions of men's work and women's work would seem to indicate that the Western cultural perspective requires fundamental differences between men and women in the workplace, with clear definitions of the kind of work that is suitable for men and women (Burk and Nelson 1998). Moreover, as sex roles are learned through socialisation, they can have a considerable influence over each individual's choice of work. At the level of the workplace, gender differentiation and inequalities are therefore socially constructed, even though it can be seen that roles within the workplace are normative and often historically changeable (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). In this way, gender will affect the organisational member's experience of work, the meaning work has for them and the meaning they have to the organisation (Hearn and Parkin, quoted in Coleman (1991)).

4.5(b) It is now well established that gender is embedded in corporations, resulting not only in gender divisions but also in situation specific, gendered symbols, images and practices (Messerschmidt 1996). Moreover, this results in a labour market that is highly segregated, both vertically and horizontally through a gendered division of labour (Greene et al 2002). Organisational logic is therefore gendered and most jobs are defined as masculine or feminine; they are seen as natural for women or men to occupy. This has led to collusion between male dominated employers and trade unions, which provides a widespread system of gender segregation at work. This practice is supported by employers who wish to pay women less, male views of their own superior ability, a symbolic apparatus of powerful gendered images about the suitability of men and women for particular jobs and gendered work cultures that cause difficulties to people who cross the boundaries of those jobs (Bradley 1999). The division of labour into female and male work areas can be broadly considered as a vital element in the subordination of women, that men are much better paid, have far more formal power in organisations, and hold the most prestigious jobs is beyond any doubt (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997).

#### **4.6 Masculine identities**

4.6(a) Identity marks the consistency and distinctiveness of an individual person and in Western society gender forms an important part of how people consider and define themselves in relation to others. From this perspective, therefore, gendered identity is crucial in the regulation of self-esteem and self-perception for the individual, both in their social interactions and in their work behaviours. In this respect, gendered identities have to be constructed, negotiated and reconstructed in routine social interaction, in both the workplace and elsewhere, through simultaneous processes of identification and differentiation. They are therefore associated with values, meanings and logics of action, as demonstrated by behaviour in the workplace (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997).

4.6(b) Male identity takes its shape from the various institutions in which men exist, and workplaces from this perspective are important sites for the construction of



masculinities. Historically, men have fulfilled the role of family provider and in this way, they have defined themselves by their work to a greater or lesser extent (Burke and Nelson 1998). Therefore, masculine identity is often socially constructed through work, which in turn is reliant on an occupation within an organisation. Men's primary identification is often with the work they carry out, it is characterised in terms of sacrifice for the family and it provides the rewards of money and social status for successful individuals. Work enables the masculine self-concept of being a powerful, self-reliant and competent individual (Cheng 1996). Within organisations, men seem encouraged to be rational, analytical, strategic, decision-oriented, tough and aggressive (Roper 1994), and risk-taking is widely documented as a masculine practice (Messerschmidt 1996). These characteristics are often seen in contrast to female care, which reinforces feminine nurturance, a concern for relationships and the living environment (Hofstede 1991). Collinson and Hearn (1994) talk about the highly masculine values of individualism, aggression, competition, sport and drinking. In homosocial settings 'working class' masculinities can be seen as valuing such practices as group solidarity with other men, physical toughness, resistance to both authority and danger together with competency regarding machines (Hearn 1992).

4.6(c) Masculinity is therefore made and its making is influenced by the social constraints men experience, particularly in the workplace. Accordingly, masculinity must be viewed as structured action, in other words, the behaviours men perform under specific social constraints. Through interaction, masculinity is institutionalised, permitting men to draw on existing and previously formed masculine ways of acting, to construct a masculine identity for specific settings. The particular criteria of masculine identity are embedded in the social situations and recurrent practices that men (and women) experience and through which social relations are structured. Therefore, masculinity can only be seen as a social construct, involving the creation of meaning (Messerschmidt 1996).

4.6(d) Even though a man's identity takes its shape from the various institutions in which he exists, manliness is often a contested territory, an ideological battlefield

(Edley and Wetherell 1996). Therefore, multiple masculinities can be seen to exist within organisations and these differing masculinities are embedded in relations of power so that particular forms of masculinity can be characterised as hegemonic, or subordinate to each other. In this way, working class masculinities are frequently embedded in the productive manual skills, experience and relations of all male shop floor life (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Masculine identities are therefore, bound up with dominance at work, but they often take different forms for men of different classes (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Managerial and professional men are able to use their positional power to buttress the culture of homosociability and keep women confined to niche positions. However, working class men can see themselves as the chief sufferers from feminism because they see their jobs vanishing to female competition and they have not yet shown a disposition to compromise their masculinity by seeking to enter 'women's jobs' (Bradley 1999).

4.6(e) Though masculinity is put on display as a counterpoint to femininity, it draws its strength from the absence or separation from women, and in all-male workplaces masculine values and practices are emphasised, men do not seem to be men in the company of women (Ackroyd and Thomson 1999). A masculine cultural community therefore, can provide a shared understanding of what it means to be a man, what one looks like, how one should behave and so forth (Edley and Wetherell 1996).

#### **4.7 Hegemonic masculinity**

4.7(a) During the course of the 1990s the academic understanding of masculinities came to understand men's gender identities as malleable constructs that are shaped by interpersonal, situational and historic forces. From this perspective, masculinity is not seen as being homogenous or fixed, as masculinities are considered as a set of plural and changing constructs (Cheng 1996, Addelston and Stirrat 1996). This understanding that masculinity is far from uniform led Hearn (1996) to develop the concept of plural masculinities, to refer to the different forms that masculinity can take within different cultural contexts.

4.7(b) Borrowed from Gramsci's (1971) analysis of class relations in Italy, the term hegemony, when applied to gender, introduces a conception of gender as both a political and social construction (Telford 1986). Connell (1995) developed this notion into a powerful theory of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Since then hegemonic masculinity has taken the place of traditional notions of the male sex and role. The term hegemonic is used to emphasize the dominance of this masculine paradigm within the gender order among men, and in relation to women. This view has resulted in considering the present dominant cultural form of gender as a hegemonic masculinity, which is constructed in relation to women and subordinated and marginalized masculinities (Connell 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is not defined as a fixed character type, which is always the same; it is rather the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given cultural pattern of gender relations, a position that is always contestable. Since hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to femininity, men constructing this form of masculinity need women to validate their identity and in these circumstances hegemonic masculinity, as displayed by behaviours, is constructed relative to other individuals and groups, in particular femininities and dominated masculine groups. In other words, the concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to the way in which particular forms of masculinity exist, not just in relation to femininity, but also in a hierarchy relative to other forms of masculinity. Therefore, different forms of masculinity can be seen within relations of power that can be described as hegemonic or subordinated in relation to each other (Hearn 1996).

4.7(c) Hegemony is the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life (Connell 1995). As a culturally internalised form, it is both a personal and collective understanding, and it provides a socially-based position with regard to 'common sense' about breadwinning and manhood. Hegemonic masculinity is also the internalised form of masculinity in a given historical setting. It is culturally glorified and promoted at a symbolic level in the mass media and in Western industrial societies, it is characterised by paid work, the subordination of women and heterosexuality. As the culturally dominant ideal, it strongly influences masculine behaviour in the workplace. Within the dominant

culture currently demonstrated in contemporary Western society, this type of masculinity describes men who meet the social definition of what it actually means to be a man, it provides the ideal type against which men measure themselves and it sets the standard for assessing 'real men' in society (Telford 1996). At its worst hegemonic masculinity has been defined as stark homophobia, misogyny and domestic patriarchy (Connell 1995). It seems that it can be exclusive, anxiety provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent, pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis prone, rich and socially sustained. The characteristics of those who practise it often include aggressive, ambitious, competitive, individualistic, self sufficient and heterosexual behaviours. Its underlying nuances include "*the dread of and the flight from women*" (Addelston and Stirratt 1996). In order to achieve this culturally prescribed ideal type, men are likely to attempt to express the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity through speech, dress, physical appearance, activities and relationships with others. Therefore, this understanding and practice of hegemonic masculinity is based on a social construct that reflects unique circumstances and relationships. Work is central to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed 'the job' is a major basis of identity and what it means to be a man. In these circumstances, men construct their behaviours in relation to how they may be interpreted by others (i.e. their accountability) in the workplace (Messerschmidt 1996). When performed by men, hegemonic masculine norms may make men suspicious of other men, who may be seen as potential competitors.

4.7(d) As work is of great importance to masculine identity, work organisations can be places where hegemonic masculinity is used as an internalised guiding principle that is used to justify the exclusion of women (Peterson 2007). In male dominated workplaces hegemonic masculinity is contested for, achieved and conferred, therefore, constructing gender has implications for getting power or becoming powerless (Cheng 1996). At present in Western societies this identity type describes men who are successful, capable, reliable and in control (Kimmel 1994). Although this identity type describes men or masculinity, women can also perform it and women who are successful managers often perform hegemonic masculinity as constructed in relation to, and therefore dependant on, femininities and subordinate,

marginalised and dominated masculinities. Therefore, as women strive to be successful in the workplace, they too can often adopt a hegemonic masculinity (Cheng 1996).

#### **4.8 Masculine workplaces**

4.8(a) Certain occupations and workplaces are likely to attract men who are very eager to prove their manliness both to themselves and others. In these workplaces, the inclination to construct the meaning that work has in terms of masculinity may be strong and consistent with the broadly shared values of physical strength and courage, values associated with masculinity. These constructions can be challenged by the presence of women. The same concept may also be related to class, as workers who are poorly paid, working in physically demanding environments and having low social status, face considerable strains on their self-esteem. To construct the job as highly masculine is one way of gaining the required self-respect (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). Even men working in female-dominated occupations are likely to adopt a variety of strategies to re-establish a masculinity that has been undermined, by the perceived feminine nature of their work (Simpson 2004). In some circumstances, these imperatives can lead to an extremely male dominated workplace, which is not tolerant of women or other people who are in any way different from the culturally idealised masculine norm. Individuals who enter this type of work environment can be socialised into a type of masculinity that excludes women and exaggerates the differences between them and men, denigrating women in general (Anastasia and Padavic 2002).

4.8(b) Drawn from the social forces that exist in the context that surrounds the organisation and its dominant cultural norms, the view of the current form of hegemonic masculinity has come to characterise organisations in Western societies. This can result in hyper-masculine organisations that reinforce the subordination and domination of women and alternative masculinities. Organisations collude with their members in developing this type of culture by negotiating and supporting hegemonic masculinities in the workplace. In these circumstances, an individual's concept of

masculinity is verified and supported in and by the organisation, to the extent that other organisational members are prepared to accept, validate and support it. When a hegemonic masculinity is verified in this way, the individual who adopts it is able to enact this type of masculinity confident that others will support it and validate the behaviours, which result. Therefore, through this kind of culturally framed negotiation process, members of an organisation can arrive at an implicit agreement regarding the identities that each will assume at work. As the process unfolds, individuals seek confirmation of their own masculinities from others and they may adjust their masculinities in order to be acceptable within that particular workplace (Telford 1996).

4.8(c) Looking at manual workers from the perspective of a sub- or counter-culture, Collinson (1992) highlighted the way in which working class masculinities are often embedded in the manual skills, relationships and experience of male working life. Here the complex and often-contradictory mix of resistance and compliance that comprises the working class cultural experience is often expressed in highly masculine discourse and practices. The interlaced pattern of class and gender specific values of men in these circumstances can lead to the production and reproduction of masculine identities, reinforced for example by the denigration of management as effeminate and ignorant about the processes of production, middle class office workers as unproductive pen pushers and women as manipulative, exploitative and ineffective in male workplaces.

4.8(d) In organisations that treat manual workers as somehow inferior, working class men are likely to re-assert their sense of self, position, dignity and respect within a male working class sub- or counter-culture. This can be achieved, from their perspective, by adopting the masculine values of being the family breadwinner, carrying out practical and productive work, possessing common sense, being able to swear and articulate in an overtly sexual way and being able to give and take a joke 'like a man'. In these circumstances, culturally based interactions between men on the shop floor are often highly aggressive, sexist and derogatory. They often appear humorous and playful but are, at the same time, insulting and degrading to others.

New members of the organisation at this level are often teased incessantly in order to test their ability to be man enough to take the jokes and insults, which are characterised as ‘piss taking’, together with the embarrassment of highly explicit sexual references. Those who are able to give and take in this environment are accepted as part of the counter-culture, while those who do not express ability in this area fail the test of ‘manhood’ and are likely to be kept at a distance, or at best tolerated within the workplace.

4.8(e) Within the counter-culture, male working class values often emphasise the workers honesty, independence and authenticity. In many cases, the idea of promotion is rejected because it would compromise the sense of masculine independence and freedom (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Humour is a vital ingredient in the punitive and protective aspects of self-organisation within male dominated workplaces. A new worker will often have jokes played on him so that he learns his place within the system of hegemonic masculinity. In dangerous or unpredictable work conditions, it is often argued by those involved that this is necessary for workers to develop the ability to watch out for each other and develop a high level of practical awareness and solidarity. These are the mechanisms through which informal hierarchies and masculine group identities are developed and sustained and joking and sexual misbehaviour at work have great historical continuity.

4.8(f) In these circumstances, there is a major difference between pure and applied humour. In the workplace, applied humour makes points about situations, groups and classes of people; it has definite effects in mind. Here the joking relationship is often a relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some circumstances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who is in return required to take no offence (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). This kind of humour is often pointed and vicious and can be difficult for individuals who are in any way ‘different’.

4.8(g) Hall et al (2007) indicate that the role of the firefighter is mainly stereotyped as being masculine and that firefighters often engage in the social practices of

masculinity as a process of identification in the workplace. The adrenaline buzz of responding to fire calls is therefore central to the engagement with the job and to the identification of oneself as a 'firefighter'. Here, the mastery of fear and excitement stimulates men's pride in both themselves and their work, supporting the 'heroic male project'. Moreover, it is in the domain of applied humour that women's entry into the service is viewed as being problematic.

#### **4.9 Things are changing**

4.9(a) The structure of gender segregation, though persistent, should not be seen as fixed, but as fluid. Jobs change from being men's to being women's and vice versa (Bradley 1999). Even though gender segregation is currently a persistent factor in the workplace, supported by cultural gendered meanings endorsing male dominance, and established structures of gendered power still support male dominance, things seem to have changed since the 1960s. The physical requirements of industrial work are now becoming less important (Casey 1995).

4.9(b) According to Bradley (1999), there are four main influences that are supporting this change away from overwhelming male dominance in the workplace. Firstly, technological and organisational changes are making physical strength less important in manual work. The widespread introduction of machinery such as forklift trucks and automatic production methodologies mean that many more women are physically capable of what was once considered 'men's work'. Secondly, employer's attitudes and policies have changed, often under the threat of equal opportunities legislation. Thirdly, the role of the trade unions has changed and they are much more likely to be supportive of equal opportunities in the workplace. And last but not least, women's own actions and aspirations in entering previously male dominated workplaces have made a major impact on gender segregation.

4.9(c) MacInnes (1998) indicated that in the UK between the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s women's full-time employment increased by one-third of a million while men lost over three million full-time jobs. He interpreted this change as resulting from a shift



from production and occupations that required physical strength (traditionally associated with men), a shift towards part time working, the rise in judicial sexual equality and an increase in class inequality. It would seem then that there is evidence to suggest that gender is declining as a divisive factor in organisational life (Halford and Leonard 2001).

#### **4.10 Resistance to change**

4.10(a) Due to these changes in the workplace men in contemporary Western societies are currently finding it more difficult to fulfil their traditional role of provider. Historically, men have defined themselves by their work and they now have to redefine themselves, as a result of women's influx to the workplace (Burke and Nelson 1998). This change is not happening without resistance, particularly in workplaces that were previously defined as male and were, as a result, important to the establishment and maintenance of masculine identities (Greene et al 2002). While some men may accept or even support the need for change, others may strongly resist the entry of women into the workplace. In these circumstances, male interest in patriarchy can be condensed into a hegemonic masculinity, which is defended by the prevailing cultural machinery. Here it can be internalised in the organisation and be enforced by violence, intimidation and ridicule in the case of straight men and enforced by violence and misbehaviour towards women and gay men. Wallace (1999) indicates that even trade union officials can state that they would be "*very afraid*" of the reaction in a workplace to the entrance of women, from male workers who have been traditionally used to working in an all-male environment.

4.10(b) Bradley (1999) identifies a number of barriers to change in the workplace with regard to male dominance. Firstly, she sees the reaction of men and the resistance of some men, particularly older men, to change as a backlash against the acceptance of women in the workplace. Secondly, she indicates that society's current individualistic ideology of merit can make both women and men wary of the more radical equal opportunities policies. Thirdly, and most importantly in this area,

women's domestic responsibilities can make it difficult for women to enter and stay in the workplace.

4.10(c) In some circumstances a strong sense of masculine identity can be seen as both a reason for, and a site of, resistance within the workplace. With resistance being pursued through a process of identity construction where identities are created through talk and aligned with resistance, by way of the construction of alternative realities (Symon 2005). Therefore, resistance can be seen not only in observable acts and behaviours, but also at the level of identity and the conceptualisation of meaning (Thomas and Davies (b) 2005). It seems that in these circumstances there is a tension between the search for a sense of identity on the one hand and the capacity and nature of management attempts to control the workforce and deliver a product or service on the other.

4.10(d) The resistance to the acceptance of women, together with a struggle for identity in the workplace, can often be manifest in displays of misbehaviour. Ackroyd and Thomson (1999), indicate that within male dominated workplaces, there are four directions that this kind of misbehaviour can take. These are disagreements over the appropriation of work, the appropriation of the materials used in work, the appropriation of time spent on work and most importantly for the purposes of this study the appropriation of identity or contention over the extent to which employees identify with their work activity and their employer's requirements. In this way, control can be attempted, and on occasion achieved, in the workplace through the construction of a specifically gendered identity (Hodgson 2003).

4.10(e) In the battle for identity and its control symbolic resources can be a terrain of informal action and misbehaviour. The primary focus of such activity is the variety of identities carried into or developed within the workplace and joking rituals based on horseplay and banter is a recurrent feature of workplace life. Many of the initiation ceremonies carried out in the workplace have strong connections to the affirmation of gender identities and the assertion of masculinities and femininities. From this perspective, all misbehaviour is associated with processes of identity

formation and self-organising (self-organising is Ackroyd and Thomson's label for the tendency of groups to form interests, to establish identities and develop autonomy based on those activities).

4.10(f) Collinson (1992) argues that much of the identity claiming he discovered in his research was related to workers' ideas about their self-identity, which was formed in distinction to the identity of other groups and especially the management of the firm. The work groups he studied had different values from those that were either officially espoused, or sanctioned by the organisation. Therefore, work groups can relate self-organising to this specific form of identity formation. When this type of group process is informal but internally directed, it is likely to be concerned with identity formation, and to manifest itself as banter, expressions of masculinity, joking and other forms of self-expression (Collinson 1992).

4.10(g) Boland and Hoffman (1983) (quoted in Roper (1994)), in studying the culture of a machine shop, indicated that jokes and humour were used to help cope with difficult conditions in the workplace. The jobs in which the men were involved were often hazardous and were paradoxically made even more so by practical joking. The study illustrated how these jokes helped men deal with difficult work situations and questions of self-identity allowed them to exert a measure of control in their work environment. Jenkins et al (2002), indicate that in masculine workplaces, men may shout, laugh and sing loudly with much of the verbal interaction being highly sexualised. Therefore, humour can contribute to the development of vigorous counter-cultures which are in opposition to the activities of management (Taylor and Bain 2003).

4.10(h) Where men are working together it can be argued that a masculine culture is likely to dominate and dominance is usually contested for through meaning-making contests. In male dominated workplaces sexual misbehaviour is normally constructed around what men do to women and can often be described as sexual harassment, a set of collective male power plays designed to make women feel uncomfortable and to keep them in their proper subordinate place (Wilson and Thompson 2001). In

these circumstances, it would seem that whereas segregation leads to role spillover, men and women working together in equal numbers produces almost no socio-sexual problems. However, where women are breaking into non-traditional areas, sexuality is a medium through which some men express perceived threats to their interests and identity, and misbehaviour results. It can be argued that the entry of women into male territory can be held to spoil 'the job'. This results in a sense of 'pollution' of masculine work in enclaves, where the entry of women is felt to disturb the intimacy of the all male group due to their sexuality. Misbehaviour by such homosocial groups is then characterised by rituals and practices which construct the work environment and discipline both sexes in the name of masculinity (Ackroyd and Thomson 1999). In this type of workplace equal opportunities may be more a matter of lip service for legitimacy reasons than a serious business intended to permeate corporate practices (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). In addition, because those who have power often shape meanings in organisations, increased identification with a particular in-group often leads to stereotyping and degrading out-group members (Whetton and Godfrey 1998).

4.10(i) Within the workplace sex roles spill over from external expectations, where the female role is subordinate sex object and the male role is dominant aggressor (Ackroyd and Thomson 1999). The socially produced distinction between men and women reaches to the very heart of how jobs and hierarchies are imagined and infuses the organisational structure. Kanter's (1977) study identified a number of gendered practices that discouraged women's promotion. A culture of homosociability meant that men tended to choose successors in their own image and were suspicious of those who were in any way different.

4.10(j) In 1996, Addelston and Stirratt published research into an all-male organisation, which illustrated the type of organisation that could result in circumstances where hegemonic masculinity is practised to the extreme. The Citadel is an all-male public college in America. Its mission is to turn its male students into 'whole men' through rigorous training and discipline in an exclusive homosocial, rigid and paramilitary hierarchy. Within this bastion of masculinity, certain objects

act as ‘fortifications’ that perpetuate masculine practices and demark these practices from the outside world. For example, the barracks, the uniform and a ring fulfilled this purpose at the Citadel, illustrating the meaning and practice of manhood within this particular institution. In addition, within the barracks, there were a number of unofficial ceremonies involving nudity and attempts to frighten individuals and these ceremonies can be seen as reinforcing the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. Within the study, it was found that the rites of manhood were sheltered from the contaminating presence of women, as evidenced by the extreme reluctance by cadets to allow women to touch or try on the ring that is given to cadets when they graduate from the Citadel. However, even in these circumstances, there were discrepancies between the collective and individual voices, particularly when cadets were able to talk privately. Therefore, even though hegemonic masculinity is centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, in this example not all men practised this type of masculinity, though most men benefited from it (Addelston and Stirratt 1996).

#### **4.11 Masculine identity: some conclusions**

4.11(a) It would seem from a consideration of the literature that a normalised cultural framework within an organisation, in this case the Fire Service, can form a context that prescribes meaning for organisational players, as well as providing a backdrop for acceptable behaviours in the workplace. In this way, sets of locally-held assumptions prescribe the type of work which is culturally acceptable for women and men to carry out. These gender prescriptions are propagated and reinforced through socialisation, both at the societal level and at the professional and organisational levels. In Western societies, women are encouraged to work in the caring professions, and when the working conditions are hazardous, physically difficult and dirty, with elements that require risk taking in difficult circumstances, the work is generally considered men’s work. Due to these socially defined elements, workplaces are often segregated and individuals who cross the gendered boundaries at work are likely to be subjected to a range of pressures emanating from both within

the organisation and from the wider society, to conform to the norms of the organisation.

4.11(b) Men often associate their identity with their work and use the workplace to inform their sense of self perception and esteem. For this reason, paid work is important in providing a site for the construction of a masculine identity, which therefore needs to be constructed through identification with masculine values and differentiation from feminine values, as demonstrated by behaviours in the workplace. In these circumstances, masculinity is often a contested territory embedded in relations of power and hegemonic domination, which achieve some strength from the absence of or separation from women. It is achieved through the demonstration of the defined masculine values, and through interactions and sets of behaviours between individuals and groups. However, masculinity is not fixed throughout time, as it is a changeable construct, which is shaped by interpersonal, situational and historic forces. Therefore, plural masculinities can exist within a society, depending on the prevalent cultural context of the time. Currently in Scottish society, hegemonic masculinity describes the dominant cultural form within masculine workplaces, and it is constructed in relation to women and other subjugated groups within a workplace hierarchy. It is displayed through behaviours as various groups claim or sustain a dominant position, and it provides a standard against which 'real men' can be defined.

4.11(c) Within this culturally-defined context it can be seen that certain occupations will attract men who are keen to demonstrate their masculinity, and that their masculine construct within the workplace would be challenged by the presence of women. This set of circumstances can lead to an extremely male-dominated workplace, which is not tolerant of women or indeed other groups of people who do not come up to the standard embodied by 'real men'. Moreover, due to the wider social acceptance of hegemonic masculinities, organisations themselves can collude with their members to negotiate and support hegemonic masculinity through the culturally framed negotiation processes of lived realities in the workplace, where

individuals and groups gain validation and acceptance of their behaviours from co-workers and the organisation.

4.11(d) At the societal level the cultural context may be changing as the physical requirements of work become less important, due to the introduction of machinery, women's changing aspirations and equal opportunities legislation. However, in some workplaces, where there is a strong internalised adoption of masculine identity, a site of resistance to change can be encouraged. In these circumstances, such resistance is likely to be demonstrated through displays of misbehaviour associated with identity formation and self-organising, as masculine groups form through self-interest, establish identity and develop autonomy in distinction to other groups. Here, domination will be contested for through meaning making contests, particularly where women are entering previously male dominated workplaces. This is likely to result in stereotyping, degrading out-group members (women in particular) and demonstrations of misbehaviour, in attempts to achieve or maintain dominance.

4.11(e) It would seem therefore that culture and identity are inextricably linked in a reciprocal process where culture can provide the framework within which identity can be formed. Once formed in this way, masculine identity needs, from then on, to be continually reconstructed and negotiated, through demonstrations of acceptable behaviours, behaviours which have, in a reciprocal process, their acceptability defined within the pre-existing cultural framework.

4.11(f) All of these aspects of masculinity and identity could, it would seem, be further analysed and understood through a study of Scottish Fire Services.

4.11(g) Finally, in concluding this Chapter, it is now possible to provide a definition of masculinity against which the Fire Service culture can be analysed in its full context, in order to make appropriate comparisons with the literature as the research progresses. This service-centred definition of masculinity in the workplace is socially constructed through the work of the firefighter (Cheng 1996). It is therefore likely to be firmly linked to the physical and mental strengths required by the task of

fighting fire, founded on the values of group solidarity with other men, physical toughness and resistance to both danger and authority (Hearn 1992). Bound up in the ability to compete for and obtain dominance at work (Collinson and Hearn 1996), drawing its strength from the absence of women (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999) and resulting in behaviours that are tough, aggressive, competitive and risk taking (Collinson and Hearn 1994, Roper 1994, Messerschmidt 1996).



## Chapter Five

### Methodology

#### 5.1 Introduction

5.1(a) Whitehead (1999) believes that one of the keys in looking at the relationship between organisational culture and gender is to take into account the issue of identity, particularly with regard to questions of identity formation. Having introduced a rather naïve view of the cultural change dynamic currently being applied to the Fire Service in Chapter 1, and having fully considered the literature reviews of both culture and masculinity in Chapters 3 and 4, it is now possible to move from that naïve starting point to a more considered and in-depth study of the effect of masculine identity on cultural change within the Fire Service. In this chapter, therefore, it is intended to define the methodology necessary to do this, in an academically appropriate manner.

5.1(b) As Chapter 1 concluded that an initial consideration of Lewin's force field theory indicated that the forces towards change were emerging from Government and the restraining forces were likely to be emanating from the Fire Service itself. It will be necessary to develop an understanding of both the Scottish Fire Service culture, including the effect that masculinity and the adoption of a masculine identity may have on that culture and the current pressures for change to which it is subjected. The overall objective will be to understand the interactions of the various stakeholders involved in the resulting contestations over meaning (Wright 1994) which result from the pressures for change emanating from Government and the resistance to change emanating from the Service. In this way, the understanding of the complex interactions between what are themselves complex organisations will be improved. So that the study does not "*get lost in the jungle of different accounts*" (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992) and to maintain the necessary focus, the research will be structured around a consideration of the key aim of the research i.e. around the question:

*Will the politically applied pressure for change in the Scottish Fire Service be resisted by the Service's existing culture, and the masculine identifications of those who provide the service?*

This should, therefore, enable an academically valid exploration of how culture, masculine identity and change are all interlinked within organisations, specifically Scottish Fire Brigades.

5.1(c) Alvesson and Berg (1992) indicate that in carrying out research into organisational culture there are four relevant levels of analysis: nation, sector (or profession), company (or business) and sub-unit (or department). With regard to the current study, the levels of sector (or profession) and company (or business) can be seen to relate to the Fire Service and Fire Brigades respectively.

5.1(d) In considering the research question across these two levels in the Scottish Fire Service, a number of further issues will need to be addressed. In this respect it will be important to consider whether or not there is a distinct and identifiable Scottish Fire Service culture and if that culture is the same in all of the Brigades studied, or if not, what are the similarities or differences between them. This will necessitate an understanding of the effects of masculinity in the cultural realities of the Brigades concerned. These issues could, in my view, be usefully considered by analysing them through the route of the change process outlined above, comprising an examination of the change pressures emanating from Government and whether or not the existing culture/s will oppose or be accepting of them.

5.1(e) In order to address these issues, it will be necessary to develop a clear understanding of the Fire Service's structures and culture/s and to generate a clear understanding of the pressures for change on the Scottish Fire Service, the motivations behind those pressures and how they are manifest.

5.1(f) In considering the methodology to be followed in both collecting and analysing the data necessary to determine the validity of the thesis and answer the research question, this chapter outlines the approach taken to examine the culture of the Fire Service, considers the choice of a quantitative or qualitative methodology, discusses the use of an ethnographic approach to a grounded theory research methodology, introduces the Fire Brigades within which the research was carried out and gives the rationale behind the choice of those particular Brigades.

## **5.2 Methodology**

5.2(a) An academically valid examination of culture is not easily achieved, as organisational culture is a reflection of the dynamic manifestations of contradictory social and economic currents, which form the backdrop to the realities of contemporary organisations (Alvesson 1993). Culture therefore, needs to be approached as a pattern of development, reflected from a society's systems of knowledge, ideology, values, laws and day-to-day rituals (Morgan 1997), adopted in and adapted to the existing reality of life in the organisation. The requirement to develop an appropriate approach to understanding Fire Service organisational culture, a phenomenon which is in itself a complex, multi-layered and dynamically developing human construct, together with the requirement to understand the various forces at work in shaping and changing that culture, will require an academically valid epistemology upon which such an understanding can be based.

5.2(b) Czarniawska-Joerges's (1992) work provides a starting point for the study. She believes that we do not currently know much about large organisations because their complexity defies many of the traditional approaches to organisational research. She proposes that increased understanding should be the goal in the study of organisations and,

*“we need, then, to disregard the disciplinary boundaries and definitions in order to search for methods that can be melded, shaped and adapted for the best use on the object of study – complex organisations”* (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992, pg 2).

5.2(c) In developing her argument she follows Cohen (1974) who indicates that,

*“the more analytically advanced an anthropological study is, the more over simplified its conclusions in the final presentation seem to be. A poorly analysed body of field data presents a confused account, clustered with a great deal of irrelevant and superficial detail. At best, it gives a naturalistic picture, presenting worlds. Qualitative research may be the best choice when the identification of new theoretical propositions or managerial actions is deemed necessary, but the researcher is not fully knowledgeable about the details of the phenomena under study.”* (Cohen 1974, quoted in Czarniawska-Jeorges (1992) pg.209).

5.2(d) In choosing a methodology it would seem from the literature that there are two basic choices, as even though different approaches have been put forward from a number of perspectives, the basic argument falls into two camps, those who put forward a ‘scientific’ quantitative approach versus those who advocate a ‘humanistic’ qualitative approach. These differences go beyond the simplistic notion of numbers versus no numbers for, as Lee (1999) indicates, they follow from the underlying assumptions adopted by the different approaches.

5.2(e) Jones (1988) has usefully documented the different dimensions, limitations and differences between qualitative and quantitative analyses. In considering his summary of these issues, it would appear that the critical indicator for the decision, regarding which approach to follow in the current study, is that of goal. The main ‘goal’ of this study is that of understanding, understanding the Fire Service culture and the pressures for change that are being applied to it, together with an understanding of how those pressures are mediated and reconciled. This would indicate that a qualitative study would be most effective in allowing an understanding to emerge and evolve, as the study progresses and evidence is accumulated. In this way, meanings for those involved with and immersed in the Fire Service culture can be understood within their natural setting and within the existing context, as Geertz (1993) puts it *“from the native’s point of view”*. The choice of a qualitative research methodology then leads naturally to the use of semi-structured

interviews, together with participant observation and experience, as the main research techniques. The focus of the study will need to be on the understanding of both organisational members and processes, it will need to be explicit with regard to participant reactions, giving those concerned their own voice, and it will have to be grounded in the local context of the Scottish Fire Service. This type of research requires the study of intact cultural groupings in their natural setting over a period of time, where the data can be observationally-based, subjectively interpreted and contextually specific. This in turn should lead to the production of richly detailed data that can be used to generate a 'thick description' which will allow ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes to be explored and interpreted, within a socially-constructed cultural reality (Siehl and Martin 1988).

### **5.3 Ethnography**

5.3(a) In arguing that organisations are formal due to their structures and the specific tasks they have to accomplish, and informal in the way that organisational members continually negotiate with one another in the interpretation and carrying out of such tasks, Schwartzman (1993) indicates that the promise of ethnography is the presentation of a work culture that can emerge from the interplay between those so-called formal and informal aspects of organisational life. Following Malinowski (1922), she goes on to indicate that ethnography is the method through which 'the native's point of view' can be grasped. In addition, it is necessary to ground the process and products of ethnography in both the past and the present, going into the field to learn about a culture from the inside out. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) indicates that this should be an interpretation of organisational processes from the position of the people involved, collected and re-told by a researcher who also has a certain standpoint.

5.3(b) When actually applying an ethnographic methodology in a study, Sackmann (1991) believes that the data has to be collected from individuals and then aggregated to a group level. She believes that the methodology should,

- surface tacit components from the insiders' perspective
- be sensitive to structural specifics such as sub-cultures and
- enable comparisons across individuals and research sites.

5.3(c) She proposes a study methodology with five major phases.

1. Generate insider knowledge.
2. Extract themes from the data.
3. Further pursue those themes.
4. Probe the validity of emerging hypotheses.
5. Analyse and re-analyse all the data collected.

5.3(d) In a similar vein, Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) has proposed a strategy for using interviews with organisational actors, in order to develop a cultural study. She proposes a five point strategy which,

1. obtains actors' accounts,
2. looks for similar accounts, trying to understand why they are similar,
3. does the same for differences,
4. attempts a story of the phenomenon, tying together various versions, actors, situations and accounts and
5. avoids any one version of events, including the writer's, to lead to the narrative.

5.3(e) In order to represent multiple realities, "*without getting lost in the jungle of different accounts*", Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) recommends a process of constant comparative analysis as advised by the proponents of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978).

## 5.4 Grounded theory

5.4(a) In their review of organisational research methodology, Larson and Lowendal (quoted in Lee 1999) noted that grounded theory was the dominant qualitative method used in published studies in this field. This approach to organisational research can be seen as an ongoing process of interpretation, designed to examine data gathered from all possible perspectives under conditions of rigorous debate and honest analysis. There are three defining processes contained within the overall methodology. Firstly, grounded theory uses experiential data, where the researcher brings his or her own experiences to bear on data that is gathered empirically. Secondly, it requires a process of induction, deduction and verification, where preliminary notions are subjected to subsequent empirical testing against any additional data gathered. Thirdly, it is a generic process of continuous and inter-related hypothesis generation, data collection, empirical testing, and theory/concept revision, regarding some organisational phenomenon. This process involves the researcher moving from speculation to formal analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978).

5.4(b) Lee (1999) has identified eight generic steps within a grounded theory approach:

1. The researcher generates tentative ideas, questions and concepts.
2. The researcher suggests some potential underlying concepts for the organisational phenomenon and their linkages.
3. The researcher tests preliminary linkages against empirical data.
4. The researcher strives continually to relate those concepts to the objective world.
5. The researcher strives to integrate, simplify and reduce the central concepts and their inter-relationships.
6. The researcher engages in the production of theoretical memos while conducting the mechanical procedures of empirical testing, revision and re-testing of concepts.

7. The researcher conducts data collection, coding and interpretation in a dynamic and reciprocal manner.
8. The researcher writes a research report.

5.4(c) Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) describes the grounded theory process as a constant comparative analysis.

5.4(d) In describing the actual process of carrying out a constant comparative analysis, she indicates that it is an inductive method of analysing events on the strength of their similarities and differences. These events are taken from individual accounts, during interviews or by participant observation. Core categories can then,

*“compose a hierarchy of increasing abstraction, constituting the building blocks of an emerging theory that is held in place by the relationship between them”* (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992, pg. 205).

5.4(e) Overall, grounded theory is a process whereby the theory follows the data. While it is rooted in Respondent reflection of the value position of the actors within the organisation, it must be explicitly stated that the researchers bring their own values to the analysis of the data. It is often written in the form of several case studies followed by analysis, hypothesis generation and testing.

## **5.5 The study**

5.5(a) The research upon which this study is based took place in the Scottish Fire Service. The Fire Service in Scotland is structured in the way indicated by paragraphs 1.2(a) and 1.2(b) above and while the service as a whole can be seen to face the same task of fighting fire and is bound by the same set of legal requirements, the eight Fire Brigades that make up the service have different boundaries and formal structures. They are also governed by different sections of Scottish Local Government, as discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore, it can be argued that the Fire Service constitutes an industry level, and individual Fire Brigades constitute an



organisational level (as described by Cray and Mallory 1998). Having considered these issues, I decided that individual Fire Brigades, considered as separate organisations (Cray and Mallory 1998), would form the initial units of analysis in this study.

5.5(b) Having taken this decision, three Fire Brigades – Fife, Strathclyde and Lothian and Borders – were chosen as those within which the detailed study would be carried out (see pg. 261 for a map indicating the geographic location of these Brigades). There were several reasons for choosing these particular Brigades.

5.5(c) There are three types of firefighter employed within the Scottish Fire Service: wholetime, retained and volunteer firefighters. Both retained and volunteer firefighters normally work at other jobs and when an incident occurs they are summoned to the fire station by electronic pager. Their training is normally carried out on weekly training nights, which last for approximately two hours, and they do not undertake the same length of residential course for their initial training. All of these factors mean that they do not have the same exposure to the Fire Service workplace, and their cultural identity within the Fire Service is not likely to be of the same intensity as their wholetime counterparts, as their workplace culture will be affected by external factors to a more significant degree. For this reason, and in order to ensure consistency within the study group, it was decided to confine the research to the wholetime part of the service. This decision regarding the subjects of the study meant that the Brigades chosen as the areas for study would be required to have sufficient numbers of wholetime fire fighting staff, to enable a valid study regarding their organisational culture. For this reason, Brigades in the central belt of Scotland provided the most appropriate area for the research, as they all contain a reasonable number of wholetime firefighters. The choice of Strathclyde, Fife and Lothian and Borders enabled a consistent slice to be taken from the central belt from east to west of the country and allowed for geographic consistency and reasonable access for the researcher.

5.5(d) The choice of three Brigades also provides a contrasting variety of research areas in terms of size, structure, geography, risk base and political context. Strathclyde is considered a large Brigade with 2,222 full-time firefighters, Lothian and Borders is considered a medium-sized Brigade with 742 full-time firefighters and Fife is considered a smaller Brigade with 403 full-time firefighters. Strathclyde has a divisional structure and Lothian and Borders and Fife have functional structures. While all three Brigades are considered to be in the central belt of Scotland, Strathclyde covers an area of 13,831 square miles including highlands and islands, Lothian and Borders covers an area of 2,500 square miles and Fife covers 508 square miles. Strathclyde contains the city of Glasgow and Lothian and Borders the city of Edinburgh. Lothian and Borders and Strathclyde are governed through joint boards and Fife through a unitary authority. All three Brigades cover a variety of different fire risks.

5.5(e) In developing the comparative framework for the study it is intended to follow Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), using a process of constant comparative analysis in order to represent multiple realities, through a process of obtaining actors accounts and analysing similarities and differences. So that a rich picture of the cultural phenomenon that is the culture of the Scottish Fire Service can be developed. It is considered reasonable to suggest that three Brigades will facilitate an ability to make valid comparisons and draw conclusions, at both the organisational (Brigade) and profession or industry (Service) levels.

5.5(f) All wholtime recruits to the Scottish Fire Service carry out their initial training at the Fire Service Training School in the town of Gullane in East Lothian. Moreover, as individuals enter an organisation they are socialised into the culture of that organisation (Gabriel 1999). For these reasons, research was also carried out in the Scottish Fire Service Training School (see also Chapter 6).

5.5(g) A slightly different starting point was adopted when researching the pressures being applied to the culture of the Fire Service. As there were indications that these pressures were emanating from the political context of the Service, it was decided to

start the research with a paper-based review of the position espoused by Government Ministers in their public speeches. This was followed up through semi-structured interviews with both civil servants and fire service inspectors. In addition, the opportunity was taken to engage in informal discussions regarding their perceptions of Fire Service culture with two Scottish Ministers during the course of the research.

## **5.6 The subjects**

5.6 (a) As the overriding purpose of the study is to increase the understanding of the culture of the Fire Service, and its complex interactions both within its organisational boundaries and in its context, this study is about answering questions of description, interpretation and explanation. For this reason, it was decided to use semi-structured interviews as the main research tool. Even though this approach would seem most appropriate, it must also be accepted that it does have its weaknesses. Outcomes from the research are not always repeatable or comparable across settings, there are unknown effects of the interaction between the researcher and those being studied and semi-structured interviews have been criticised as only providing anecdotal evidence (Jones 1988). However, on balance it would seem that the strengths of this approach in considering the in-depth processes at work, in and around the Fire Service, outweigh its weaknesses when it comes to the critical area of understanding the lived meanings of the Service, from the point of view of its participants.

5.6(b) Prior to carrying out the research in the Brigades concerned, permission to do so was sought from and granted by the relevant Firemaster, this approval was granted without any difficulty. In all, 41 semi-structured interviews were carried out with a wide variety of Fire Service employees and stakeholders in order to construct the thesis. See Appendix A for the interview schedules used in this study – it should be noted that the interview schedules were used as a guide and the interviews themselves took slightly different routes dependant on the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer. In addition, many opportunities for informal discussions and observations were taken, in a variety of circumstances within the study areas.

5.6(d) History, there were ten Respondents interviewed in this area, including four from Lothian and Borders, three from Fife and three from Strathclyde. They included firefighters, supervisory staff, middle and senior managers. Two of them were women, one was a black man and one was a senior Fire Brigades Union official. All of them were retired from the service and they ranged in ages from their 60s to their 90s.

5.6(e) The Fire Service Training School, three Respondents were interviewed, including the Commandant, the Deputy Commandant and the Senior Instructor. Recruits to the Service were not interviewed at the request of the School, as it was thought that this would “*interrupt their training*”.

5.6(f) Watch-based personnel, there were six Respondents in this area, two each from the three Brigades. They were all also trade union officials of the Fire Brigades Union.

Middle managers: there were ten Respondents in this area, including four from Lothian and Borders and three each from Strathclyde and Fife.

Principle Officers, there were five Respondents in this area, including the Firemasters from each of the three Brigades and the Deputy Firemasters from Fife and Strathclyde.

5.6(g) The Scottish Executive, there were five Respondents in this area, including two career civil servants (from a department of three), one individual who was on secondment to the Scottish Executive, but had previously been a consultant who had carried out work with regard to how Brigades were responding to and implementing the Governments Best Value regime, and two Fire Service Inspectors (from a team of three).

5.6(h) Two Conveners of Fire Boards.

5.6(i) In order to ensure that ethical research standards were applied, all of the research informants were given a guarantee of anonymity prior to taping the

interviews. For this reason, where Respondents are referred to in the body of this report they are referred to by their organisation and an individual letter. For example, if the Brigade in which they work is obvious from the text, they are referred to as Respondent B, etc. or if their place of work is not obvious from the text, they are referred to as Strathclyde Respondent C or Civil Service Respondent A, etc. In this way, they have been given a unique identification without being personally identified.

5.6(j) As the interviews were concluded, each one was transcribed and the transcriptions were in turn double checked for accuracy.

## **5.7 A participant observer**

5.7(a) In seeking to interpret and make explicit a practical understanding of human actions in this study, I will be following in the footsteps of those who use a hermeneutic interpretive methodology (Stapely 1996). As Whetton and Godfrey (1998) put it, the main outcome from an interpretive approach should be an insightful description and explanation, with the intention of understanding the meaning systems employed by organisational members and other relevant stakeholders. Where,

*“The best of all situations for a dyed-in-the-wool interpretivist is to “live the experience” of the informants, so there is a heavy dose of participant observation characterising interpretive research”* (Whetton and Godfrey 1998, pg. 27).

5.7(b) Participant observers are able to uncover the meanings of what people say and do as they can provide *“richly detailed portraits from the inside”* (Jones, Moore and Snyder 1988). However, as a participant and an observer I recognise the fact that I will bring my own views prejudices and opinions to the research. I have been a Fire Service employee for approximately 40 years and currently hold a senior position with The Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade. This will bring its own challenges when collecting and analysing the necessary data and it will require a rigorous application of grounded methodology to ensure that the research remains both grounded and

valid. In this way, I hope to be a credible witness and to convey the realities of Fire Service life through systematic description and reporting, as described by Casey (1995), in order to,

*“formulate insights, to explain and interpret events and to seek understanding”*  
(Casey 1995, pg.203).

5.7(c) The challenges and limitations of this approach are further developed in section 5.10 below.

## **5.8 A personal statement**

5.8(a) I joined what was then the Belfast Fire Brigade in 1969, as a Junior Firefighter, at the age of 16. Following two years training and education (two days per week learning about fire related subjects and rehearsing the required practical skills, with three days per week studying at a ‘technical college’ for O-level examinations), I commenced my operational service in July 1971. Following a considerable amount of operational experience working in the fire stations in Central and West Belfast, I was promoted into a training role where I oversaw the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade’s training establishment. This establishment trained all of the recruits to the service in Northern Ireland, as well as delivering a number of other training courses (the Belfast Fire Brigade amalgamated with the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade in 1973 as part of a local government reorganisation). Subsequently moving through the ranks, I carried out the various roles of fire safety, personnel and welfare and project management, ultimately achieving the rank of Divisional Commander with responsibility for one of the services divisions in Northern Ireland, covering, in the main, Co. Armagh. In 1994, I transferred on promotion to Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade in the role of Strategic Planning Officer. The subsequent year I was promoted to Assistant Chief Fire Officer and at the time of carrying out the research for this thesis, I carried the rank of Deputy Chief Fire Officer. From 2002, I was until I retired in June 2010, the Chief Fire Officer.

5.8(b) As a result of this approximately 40 years experience, of working in two separate Fire Brigades in virtually every rank in the service, and having extensive operational experience in one of the most difficult areas to deliver fire and rescue services in the world, I consider myself to be an ‘expert’ in the field. However, this long association with the service means that I have also been deeply embedded in the culture of the service. As a result I have felt the comradeship of the strongly-bound teams, the resulting loyalty to ‘one’s mates’, the commitment and teamwork necessary to successfully deal with incidents and the resulting feelings of being part of a special organisation, delivering an essential emergency service that this engenders, in a very personal way. These factors will bring with them both the advantages and disadvantages of participant-observer-based research that are outlined below, as I interpret and present my findings.

5.8(c) Having left school at the age of 16 with a limited education as far as formal qualifications were concerned, I started to study for the examinations which at that time qualified individuals to apply for promotion in the Service. Being possessed of a good memory I found that I was able to pass all of the so-called ‘Statutory Fire Brigade Examinations’ with relatively little difficulty. However, in doing so I gradually came to understand that being able to reproduce various facts or list, for example, the properties of different chemicals, did not necessarily lead to an understanding of those facts or chemicals. Therefore, I enrolled in an Open University Degree course, with a desire to understand the chemical reactions that were involved in fire and the various properties of hazardous materials, in order to better deliver in practical terms, the service I was now committed to. As I progressed through the course and the Service, I gradually became interested in the more human elements of delivering a Fire Brigade and this led me to an interest in the concept of leadership in organisations. This interest caused me to enrol in, and successfully complete, a Masters Degree with The Queens University of Belfast.

5.8(d) This academic work undoubtedly led to improved understanding and indeed helped my progression through my chosen career; however, as my career progressed, the context within which the Fire Service operated was also changing. This

organisational context is more completely described elsewhere in the thesis. Suffice it to say at this stage that the 1960s and 1970s were a time of industrial unrest in the Service. This unrest resulted in the first national Fire Service strike in the late 1970s, which was resolved by a pay deal that introduced a formula for resolving the issue of pay in the Fire Service. Linked through a formula to the pay of the upper quartile of 'manual workers' this deal removed the necessity of annual negotiations over pay. An unintended consequence of this, was that it became very difficult for the employers to negotiate any change in the conditions of service for firefighters, as they were not able to use leverage over pay in pay and conditions negotiations.

5.8(e) This changed in the late 1990s/early 2000s when the Fire Brigades Union submitted a pay claim that was outside the pre-existing pay formula. The resulting negotiations over pay and conditions led to a national industrial dispute in 2002, which was only fully resolved in 2005/6 and which resulted in major changes to both the pay and conditions of firefighters. As this was happening, I developed my personal interest in understanding what was happening in the Service and its context. This interest led to my application to undertake a formal course of study at PhD level and ultimately to the production of this thesis. The data, which underpins the thesis, was collected between 1999 and 2002 and immediately pre-dated the actual industrial unrest. Initially my interest was in the change process. However, this quickly changed to an interest in the dynamics between formal imperatives to change being promulgated by the Government and informal culturally-based resistance to change emanating from individuals and groups within the Service. This is the type of interaction described by Schwartzman (1993), as the presentation of a work culture, which can emerge from the interplay between the formal and informal aspects of organisational life. In this way, I intended to develop an understanding of what was really happening in the Service in which I worked, in a way that would generate both academic respectability and practical relevance, an approach that Alvesson and Berg (1992) described as that of an 'academic practitioner'. Turner (1992), in describing the two sets of preoccupations for an 'organisational investigator' as the cultural and symbolic environments and practical import, coined a similar term for people with this interest in organisational understanding, that of the reflective practitioner.



5.8(f) It was only after I had collected much of the data for the chapter on the historic development of the Fire Services culture and was engaged in the process of its analysis, that it became clear to me that fact of a masculine identity was a major issue in the cultural realities of service life. This happened as my understanding began to emerge from the analysis of the data. This in turn led to a significant alteration to the development of my thesis, into its ultimate exploration of the effect of masculine identification on culture and change within the Scottish Fire Service.

5.8(g) I have included this description of my personal experience in the Fire Service in order to give the reader an improved understanding of my lifetime interaction with the Service, my commitment to it and how that influenced the research as it progressed. My intention is to help explain my motives, as a participant observer, for doing this particular piece of research, and how I was drawn to it as the thesis developed and this report emerged.

## **5.9 The process**

5.9(a) In order to collect the data for the research and ensure that it was effectively analysed, the approach followed was in effect an amalgam of those recommended by Sackmann (1991) and Czarniawska-Joerges (1992). In collecting and analysing the data upon which the research is based it was decided to generate insider knowledge through a process of obtaining actors accounts through semi-structured interviews. Extracting themes from that data, further pursuing those themes, probing the validity of emerging hypotheses and analysing and re-analysing all the data collected. In doing this, similar accounts were looked for and attempts were made to try to understand why they were similar. The same was done for differences. Finally, a story, or rich picture, of the phenomenon under study was constructed, in order to bring together various versions, actors, situations and accounts. As this was being done, strenuous efforts were made to avoid any one version of events, including that of the writer, dominating the narrative.

5.9(b) The resultant narrative contained in this report can be understood in three sections.

5.9(c) The first section comprises Chapter 1, which introduces the study and in doing so starts the consideration of some early tentative ideas, questions and concepts regarding the culture of the Fire Service and the pressures to which it is being subjected. Chapter 2 starts to consider the pressures for change being applied to the culture of the Fire Service, in order to provide a 'way into' this complex set of service dynamics. Chapters 3 and 4 comprise the necessary literature reviews regarding the subjects of culture and masculinity, while Chapter 5 contains the research question and sub-questions, which it will be necessary to answer in developing the thesis. This chapter also outlines a proposed methodology for the study in order to direct data collection and analysis.

5.9(d) The second section contains the findings of the research. Chapter 6 describes the historical foundation of the Scottish Fire Service culture through a review of the available literature, and an ethnography collected from retired members of the service. Chapter 7 considers the socialisation of new members to the Scottish Fire Service, through an ethnography collected from managers of the Scottish Fire Service's Training School. Chapter 8 considers the contemporary culture of the Scottish Fire Service, which is presented in the form of an ethnographically-based case study into the contemporary cultures of three different Fire Brigades in Scotland.

5.9(e) In the third section, Chapter 9 provides some findings regarding the effects of adopting masculine identities on culture and change within the Scottish Fire Service, based on an interpretive analysis of all the data collected. Finally, Chapter 10 draws the thesis together, drawing appropriate conclusions from the research, as well as making recommendations for further research.

5.9(f) It should be noted that even though the process followed is outlined in a linear fashion above, the actual process of carrying out and presenting the research

contained in this report was far from linear in reality. Many iterations and false starts occurred, in developing the core concepts that underpin the research and in relating them to their indicators. At each stage, it was necessary to consider those core categories, associated data and relevant theories, as alternative hypotheses and speculations were developed. This led, in reality, to a process that was much more reciprocal than linear, what Glaser (1978) called “*a set of double back steps*”. In this way, understanding was pursued through an inductive, descriptive process of analysis, akin to that described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), using core concepts and a series of theoretical memos, to support and direct the inductive analysis.

5.9(g) This iterative process at every stage of research and analysis, allied to an almost total immersion in the data, led to a number of choices and changes regarding the methods I used in order to progress the thesis. Initially, it was my intention to consider the change process in the Fire Service, to gain an improved understanding of what was really happening in the organisation to which I had devoted many years of my working life. In order to do this I intended to use a methodological strategy based on Lewin’s (1951) force field theory together with ethnographic and literature-based data, gathered from within the service and from its political context. However, as the study progressed, the initial change-based basis of the research itself changed and evolved, as understanding of what was really happening in the Fire Service emerged from the data.

5.9(h) Therefore, while it seemed that the use of Lewin’s approach remained appropriate as an overarching strategy, a requirement to consider both culture and masculinity within a consideration of the restraining forces emerged as the study progressed.

5.9(i) Initially, I intended to use data gathered from politicians, from both national and local government level. To this end, I developed an interview schedule (see Appendix B) and carried out two interviews with the Convenors of two of the Fire Authorities, responsible for the political governance of two of the Fire Brigades engaged in my study. However, when I came to analyse the data I had gathered, I

found that while the politicians concerned seemed engaged with the Service, in their answers to my questions and in subsequent discussions, they seemed to use rhetoric which was based on a pre-defined political position in terms of their support for the Service. Unfortunately, this gave little in the way of specific data, which would be useful for my study. Therefore, I decided not to progress with this method of producing data for analysis and used my conversations with politicians more as background information, rather than a source of specific data.

5.9(j) The first tranche of ethnographic data was collected from retired members of the Service. This was done initially, to consider the historic development of the contemporary Fire Service culture. However, as it was being analysed it became clear to me that a significant component of that culture was predicated on the adoption of a masculine identity, which seemed both widespread and powerful in the values, beliefs and attitudes of the Respondents. For this reason, I paused in the analysis of the data from both literature-based sources and the retired Respondents, in order to carry out the second literature review regarding masculinity and identity that is contained in Chapter 4. This change of approach led in turn to my ultimate understanding of the reciprocal relationships between culture, masculinities and change, described in Chapter 9.

5.9(k) In considering the issue of masculinity in the Fire Service it would have been useful to carry out a number of interviews with female Fire Service Respondents. However, in the event it was only possible to interview one female Respondent, for two reasons. Firstly, there are very few women employed in the Fire Service and, secondly, access to them was difficult due to the Service, and the women concerned, not wishing to have the few females that were employed “*put into the spotlight*”.

5.9(l) In presenting the results of my research, the opportunity was taken to use the actual words of the Respondents as often as possible in order to give them a genuine voice in the telling of their own story; their words were only edited to ensure an appropriate flow and to improve readability.

## 5.10 Challenges and limitations

5.10(a) While every effort was made to carry out this research in a theoretically appropriate manner, it is recognised that there are a number of limitations to the ethnographic approach taken.

5.10(b) It would seem there are two traits common in this type of research: an holistic approach to the subject matter and direct, prolonged and intensive contact on the part of the researcher. While these two issues are related, they are also difficult to realise in practice, therefore it is important to understand that they are “*ideals to be striven for*”, ideals that tend to produce a set of partial and fragmentary realities as opposed to something that can be ‘*photographed*’ in its fully realised completeness (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992).

5.10(c) In these circumstances, a number of research difficulties are readily apparent, as the approach requires both a major time and emotional commitment from the researcher, and the ability to maintain enough distance to ensure the necessary ability to carry out appropriate analysis of the data gathered, a difficult trick to pull off. Therefore, the subjectivity or value neutrality of the researcher may well be problematic. As Riley (1991) puts it,

*“this approach requires complete dedication to a project, both physically and emotionally, as the researcher becomes intimately involved in the culture being studied and with the people who produce and reproduce that culture. She or he also simultaneously strives to maintain enough distance to examine both the acculturation process and its results. Whether this distance is possible is debatable”* (Riley 1991, pg.217).

5.10(d) Therefore,

*“Although an ethnographic report may claim interpretive authority, each report is limited insofar as it derives from what is a partial perspective. Any interpretation is*

*also only a second or third order construction. The ethnographer interprets that which he or she observes, experiences or is told by others, recording this cultural data in field notes and consciously and unconsciously letting it settle against a tableau of meaning structures within his or her own imaginings” ... “what appears as written ethnography, therefore, is as much a product of the time and context (and the writer) in which it was written as of any purported truth of interpretation”* (Rosen 1991, pg.280).

5.10(e) Having taken these issues into account, I accept that the first limitation to the research must be that of myself as a participant observer. As described above, I am a Senior Officer in the service, and therefore my participation is both real and institutionalised. This will inevitably raise issues of relative power positions, and the effect that this will have on other actors in the service in relation to their participation and interaction with me during the research. In particular, this will bring difficulties in ensuring that the Fire Service Respondents answer the questions in the semi-structured interviews openly and honestly. In addition, I must accept that I will bring my own researcher bias to the study. However, I have striven to carry out the research on which this thesis is based in a systematic, consistent and academically grounded manner, in the hope and expectation that I can *“glue together a picture of a single interacting whole”* in order to generate a valid understanding of the phenomena under study (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992).

5.10(f) Even though it is my belief that in the main the Respondents did answer the questions openly and honestly during the semi-structured interviews, there were some signs that on occasions some of them were uncomfortable, particularly those Respondents from the Scottish Fire Service’s Training School. I have attempted to indicate where individuals appeared uncomfortable, or otherwise, in the presentation of the chapters containing data gathered from the Respondents.

5.10(g) The second area of limitation in the research is related to the selection of Respondents, particularly those from the Fire Service. In order to gain access to the retired members of the Fire Service, I worked through the various Brigades’ retired

associations and asked for volunteers. This means that the Respondents in this area were self-selecting, with the associated limitations that self-selection in research can bring. With regard to the serving fire Officers, I worked through the Brigades themselves asking for volunteers. This means that there were two levels of selection in this area, firstly the organisation asked for volunteers and secondly those volunteers self-selected. However, there was some randomness in the selection as all of the Respondents worked a shift system, and as they were interviewed on days chosen by myself, the combination of my availability and their being on shift led to a certain amount of randomness in the selection of individuals. It proved impossible to interview many female Respondents for the reasons given in paragraph 5.9(k). This lack of ability to include female Respondents, while unavoidable, will undoubtedly provide a limitation to the research. A limitation, which could only be remedied by additional research in the future.

5.10(h) A third area of limitation was due to the restriction of the study to wholetime firefighters. Fire Brigades themselves are complex organisations with a wide variety of staff. This includes retained staff, administrative staff and staff from a wide variety of other professions, such as IT, legal, engineering, etc. This leads to a view of the Service as a patchwork of different departments and professions, more a mosaic than a monolithic construct. Therefore, the analysis of the Fire Service's culture cannot be said to be complete from an organisational perspective if it does not take into account every grouping in the organisation. However, this particular study is in relation to Fire Service personnel who have a firefighting commitment and in these circumstances, it is argued that studying staff with a current wholetime operational commitment, as defined above, would enable an examination of the Service's core or dominant culture to emerge from the research.

## **5.11 Conclusions**

5.11(a) The overall purpose of this study is to improve the understanding of an organisational culture, specifically that of the Scottish Fire Service and how that culture is related to the adoption of masculine identities. Moreover, it is also intended

to pursue an understanding of the change process in which it is engaged, linked to Lewin's (1951) notion of driving and restraining forces, and the need to examine the effect on a workplace culture that emerges from the interaction between the formal organisational structures and the informal cultural aspects of organising (Schwartzman 1993). Therefore, and despite the limitations outlined in the preceding sections, the decision was taken to use a qualitative ethnographic approach to the study, including the use of semi-structured interview schedules. In order to ensure the necessary academic rigour, the study was firmly based on a grounded theory philosophy (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978). The process used to develop the emerging conclusions from the study was a combination of the processes recommended by Sackmann (1991) and Czarniawska-Joerges (1992), including a constant comparative analysis. In all 41 structured interviews were carried out in three separate Fire Brigades, together with document analyses and participant observations in the field.

5.11(b) This report emerged from that work.



## Chapter Six

### Scottish Fire Service Culture: Historical Beginnings

#### 6.1 Introduction

6.1(a) If an organisation's culture does indeed emerge from its history, as Anthony (1994) and others suggest, then the starting point for any serious exploration of organisational culture should be the history of that organisation. Therefore, this chapter comprises a consideration of the historical development of the Fire Service's culture in Scotland.

6.1(b) In the case of the three Fire Brigades being analysed, as the basis for an understanding of the contemporary culture of the Scottish Fire Service, it would seem from a preliminary review that all three Brigades shared a common history up to the period following the Second World War, when the service was returned from a national wartime Fire Service to Local Government control. For this reason, it seems reasonable to assume, at this early stage of the research, that the Fire Service's culture was likely to have many similarities throughout the country. Therefore, the data collected for this part of the study is not divided into the three Brigades studied, but is presented as a common understanding of the Service's culture as it existed throughout Scotland at that time.

6.1(c) The main data source used in the development of this chapter was the interviews carried out with Respondents, however, due to the time frames concerned, a full history was difficult to obtain, therefore secondary sources were also used. For this reason, the chapter is presented in three sections, with sections one and two representing literature-based and ethnographic research. The first section starts with an examination of the available literature, up to and including the war and the second section comprises an ethnography based on semi-structured interviews, collected from surviving Fire Service employees, who either served during the war or joined the Service immediately following it. To assist in both collecting and presenting the

ethnographic data appropriately it was collected and analysed with reference to seven core categories, values and beliefs, the development of identity, cultural imperatives, the dominant culture, the formation of groups in the Service, contested realities and resistance to change. The third section draws conclusions from all of the research contained in the chapter.

## **Section I: a review of the literature**

### **6.2 Early beginnings**

6.2(a) The history of fire is ancient, almost as old as the history of mankind itself and from the earliest times fire has been both advantageous to the development and quality of human life, and a threat to the well-being of humanity.

6.2(b) The dangers of fire must have been obvious from the beginning of history, however the earliest surviving records of an organised reaction to those dangers relate to Roman times. Prior to 300 BC, firefighters in Rome were slaves called the *familia publica*. It would seem, from the available records, that these slaves could not have been particularly effective as a firefighting force, because in 6AD following a disastrous fire the Emperor Augustus started a new Fire Service that was given the title, ‘the Core of Vigils’. Rome had 7,000 of these firefighters in a city of just under one million (one firefighter for every 140 people). The duties of the service during that time included fire prevention and, as a sanction, firefighters were empowered to inflict corporal punishment on offenders who did not comply with fire safety regulations. Although, even with these sanctions, it seemed that efforts to prevent fire had limited success, if contemporary accounts are to be believed.

*“There is a high return from urban property, but the dangers are far higher. If there could be some way of stopping houses in Rome catching fire the whole time, I should certainly sell all my property in the country and buy urban property”* (Aulus Gellius, quoted in Wells 1992, pg. 196).

6.2(c) And even in those times it would seem that groups of organised firefighters could cause difficulties for the authorities, as the following exchange of correspondence demonstrates.

6.2(d) Pliny to the Emperor Trajan,

*“While I was making a tour of another part of the province, an enormous fire at Nicomedia destroyed many private dwellings and two public structures – the old men’s shelter and the temple of Isis – though they stood on opposite sides of the street. It spread so far, first owing to the force of the wind, and secondly to the inactivity of the people, who, it is clear, stood idle and motionless spectators of such a terrible calamity; and in any case the city possessed not a single pump or fire bucket or any equipment at all for fighting fires. These will, however, be procured, as I have already ordered. Do you, my lord, consider whether you think it well to organise an association of firemen, not to exceed 150 members. I will see to it that none but firemen are admitted into it, and that the privileges granted shall not be abused for any other purpose; and since they would be so few, it would not be difficult to keep them under surveillance”* (Lewis and Reinhold 1990, pg.184).

6.2(e) Trajan to Pliny,

*“You are of course thinking of examples of a number of other places in suggesting that an association of firemen might be organised in Nicomedia. But we must remember that the peace of your province, and particularly of those cities, has been repeatedly disturbed by organisations of this kind. Whatever name we give them, and for whatever purpose, men who have gathered together will all the same become a political association before long. It is therefore better to provide equipment which can be helpful for controlling fires, advise property owners to use these themselves, and, if the situation warrants it, call on the populace for assistance”* (Lewis and Reinhold 1990, pg. 184).

6.2(f) In the British Isles, the 1680s saw the start of Insurance Company Fire Brigades, which were set up to protect the property of the individual company's policyholders. Competition soon developed between these rival Brigades, as the first to reach a fire was entitled to claim a 30 shillings bounty under an act of parliament of the time. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the competitiveness of these insurance company Brigades had become notorious. Fire fighting had, on occasions, degenerated into hand-to-hand combat and even the slashing of each other's hoses, while the property they were supposed to be protecting continued to burn (Holloway 1973).

6.2(g) In 1824, following a major fire in Edinburgh, the City Fathers established the Edinburgh Fire Establishment under the command of one James Braidwood, who was later to go on to command the first London fire engine establishment. This first Municipal Brigade in the United Kingdom was soon followed by the other major cities in the British Isles who established their own Fire Brigades (Henham 2000).

### **6.3 The turn of the century**

6.3(a) At the turn of the century, the Fire Service in Britain was organised along traditional naval lines (some of these traditions continue to be reflected in the language of firefighters today, for example shifts are called watches and the kitchen is called the galley). Brigades preferred to employ ex-naval staff because it was perceived that they had the skills required to carry out firefighting tasks, and that they would be accustomed to accepting the level of discipline that was considered necessary within the Service. The exception to this naval tradition was in Scotland where tradesmen were preferred as firefighters by all of the Brigades, except for the one established in Edinburgh. At this time, a career in the Fire Service offered the national average wage, job security and a pension. However, discipline was extremely strict, and firefighters were expected to work virtually 'continuous duty', when other trades averaged a 50 hour week. The working conditions were so draconian that the Manchester Courier referred to the Salford firefighters as,

*“municipal slaves, condemned to the most rigorous imprisonment for 14 days, so that a fire call is a veritable godsend”* (Bailey 1992, pg. 8).

6.3(b) By 1906, employers,

*“in the shape of Local Councils, still considered trade unionism incompatible with, indeed subversive of, their disciplined uniformed Fire Brigades.”* (Bailey 1992, pg. 3).

6.3(c) And the militaristic/naval approach to discipline within the Fire Service was considered by those in command of the Service to require unquestioning obedience from the firefighters. However, one result of the long hours, shared accommodation and working conditions, the dangerous nature of the work, and the exclusively male environment, was a strong identification with the Service and with other firefighters. This seemed to reinforce a certain bond in the workforce and contributed to the first moves towards trade unionism when, in 1906, the London firefighters formed a branch of the Municipal Employees Association, a move that was not popular with employers who believed that discipline and trade unionism did not mix.

6.3(d) This was also a time of increasing fire losses and perhaps, somewhat paradoxically, a civic pride in the Service. This civic pride was reflected in the imposing new Brigade Headquarters provided for the Fire Brigades in Edinburgh, London, Belfast, Newcastle, Birmingham and Manchester, amongst others. Some of these imposing buildings continue to be used today. For example, the Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade Headquarters remain in the building that was built in Edinburgh in 1900.

## **6.4 The First World War**

6.4(a) At the start of the war, firefighters were poorly paid in comparison with other workers. Their wages were, on average, below that of mechanics, and by 1917, the wages of a firefighter were comparable to those of an industrial labourer. Indeed, the

take home pay of women tram conductors was higher than that of firefighters. By 1918, Britain was war weary, the cost of living had risen considerably and the country's workers were restless. There was considerable industrial unrest culminating in a series of strikes. This included the country's first police force strike, which achieved a substantial pay rise for police Officers. Perhaps encouraged by the success of the police, London firefighters submitted a claim for shorter hours, more leave, increased wages, and the right to representation by a representative body. They enjoyed limited success in their claim for shorter hours and increased wages, and importantly won the right to representation by a union in negotiations with the employers. This London representative body developed into a Firefighters Union, which, over the following 10 to 12 years, spread throughout the country.

## **6.5 Between the wars**

6.5(a) Between the first and second world wars, Britain, in common with other Western nations, suffered a time of deep recession and associated industrial unrest. At this time, the Fire Service Union representatives shifted their political allegiance to the left. The union leader in London, Jim Bradley, left the Labour Party and stood in the 1928 election as a communist candidate. Although the Firefighters' Union representatives had moved to the left, the firefighters themselves took no part in the general strike of 1926 as they received an exemption from the Trade Union Council (the union in London had agreed, as part of an earlier settlement, not to take part in industrial action). In 1930, the Fireman's Trade Union was renamed the Fire Brigades Union, a name which it continues to use to this day.

6.5(b) In 1936, as the Second World War was approaching, a Government Committee, the Riverdale Committee, produced a report into the Fire Service. The main recommendations of this Committee were that,

*“Fire Brigade Law should be consolidated into one comprehensive measure.  
The Fire Brigade Service should become available to all rate payers as freely as other services.*

*Authorities designated as Fire Brigade Units should be placed under a statutory obligation to provide adequate fire protection for their districts with provision for action in the event of any authority failing to exercise its duty.*

*The National Exchequer should make a direct contribution to the Fire Service, since there was urgent need for its development, it should not be purely local in character as it had become an essential factor in national defence.*

*Government inspection should accompany the introduction of Exchequer Grant to ensure the maintenance of proper standards of efficiency.*

*An approved training school should be set up.*

*Efforts should be made to ensure standardisation of equipment” (Blackstone 1996, pg. 385).*

6.5(c) This was the beginning of dual political responsibility for the Fire Service being shared between National and Local Government, as the Exchequer was contributing finance it was felt that it would be necessary to require the right of Government Inspection and this dual responsibility continues to the present day. In addition, Riverdale made the first official recommendation to standardise equipment and training within the Fire Service throughout the United Kingdom. The Fire Brigade Union refused to appear before the Committee as the union’s leadership,

*“wanted no part in shaping the nation’s Fire Service Policy, no part in management” (Bailey 1992, pg. 40).*

6.5(d) In 1939, the Auxiliary Fire Service was mobilised in preparation for war. This resulted in many thousands of part-time auxiliary firefighters boosting the ranks of the existing professionals. Many of the new recruits were women and these women employees were used to staff control rooms, carry out driving duties and,

*“perform any work that would release an able bodied fireman for active firefighting duties” (Blackstone 1996, pg. 395).*

However, it would seem that women did not carry out the actual task of fighting fire.

## 6.6 The Second World War

6.6(a) During the Second World War, the major changes enforced on society were reflected in the Fire Service. At this time, there was a significant change in how the public regarded the Fire Service and how firefighters perceived themselves. Prior to the war, the Fire Service was seen as an adjunct to Local Government and did not seem to be particularly well regarded within society. During the war the image of 'Firefighter as Hero' was born – this shift in perception, both within the service and in the mind of the general public, had a major affect on the culture that was evolving within Fire Service organisations. Indeed, it could be argued that the current culture of the Fire Service has strong roots in the changes that were invoked during and immediately after the Second World War. Firefighters stopped seeing themselves as ordinary municipal workers and, encouraged by public perceptions following the blitz, started to perceive themselves as 'heroic firefighters, 'men in a special kind of job'. By the end of September 1940, 50 firefighters had been killed and over 500 seriously injured. As Blackstone (1996) put it,

*“There was an about turn in the public attitude to firemen: pump crews returning wet and dirty from fires were cheered by passersby in the street, cinema audiences applauded when firemen appeared on newsreels, strangers stood them drinks in public houses, bouquets were thrown in place of brick bats”* (Blackstone 1996, pg. 414).

6.6(b) In 1940, the National Fire Service College was established and in 1942 the first National Manual of Firemanship was published. These official actions instituted a process of change that would establish the Fire Service as a profession rather than merely a job, a profession with a Manual of Firemanship, a manual that introduced for the first time consistent guidance on how the practical work of fighting fires should be carried out throughout the United Kingdom. Perhaps even more importantly, there was a central training establishment where the culture of the Service could be developed, reinforced, propagated or changed, as firefighters and Officers from all over the country gathered in the same place to be trained.



6.6(c) From the Trade Union perspective, the war was a time of successful collective bargaining. In 1940, a National Joint Council was established to oversee pay and conditions and the Trade Union lobbied it for improvements. In 1942, with support from the Trade Union Council, the Fire Brigade Union successfully convinced the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, to grant recognition to Trade Unionism in the Fire Service.

*“And so for the first time, the principle of Trade Unionism has been accepted in a uniformed, disciplined and conscripted force”* (Bailey: 1992, pg. 61).

6.6(d) In 1944, the hours of duty for firefighters were reduced to 84 hours per week. During the war, the union leadership continued to be left wing and,

*“communists were soon to be found at every level of the Union”* (pg. 64) .... *“In all, the Communist Party succeeded in winning control of the Fire Brigade Union”* (Bailey 1992, pg. 65).

6.6(e) During this time, there was conflict between the regular firefighters and the newly conscripted members of the Service. In particular, the male regulars resented the fact that many of the conscripts were female. To quote Segars (1992),

*“A further blow to the regular Fireman’s world of routine came when they realized among these new recruits there would be women. Maisie Gillard recalled the regulars’ response: “they didn’t like the idea of women going into the Fire Service at all. Some of those old LFB men were quite rude.” For most regulars, the service had gone too far; for them, fire fighting was a man’s job.”* [...] *“Senior Fire Officers were no less opposed. Chief Officer Hall of the Leighton Fire Brigade in East London refused outright to admit women into the AFS, saying, “I would rather resign than be made to drill young girls and women to be firemen.” He thought that the only place for women to work in wartime was in hospitals as nurses.”* (Segars 1992, pg. 140).

6.6(f) During the war women did work in the Fire Service as control operators, and they carried out the more traditional 'women's work' of typing and cooking. They also did jobs such as driving and dispatch riding, however, it would seem that they were not employed as firefighters, even during the war. Even the Fire Brigades Union opposed women in the service, believing that they lacked the necessary stamina to carry out the job. However, during the war, 25 firewomen were killed as a result of 'enemy action'.

## **6.7 After the war**

6.7(a) After the war, the Fire Service was returned to Local Government control. At this time a large influx of ex-military personnel re-focused one of the major sources of conflict within the Service, the dichotomy caused by the enforcement of discipline, which it was argued was required for effectively carrying out the job safely, as compared to its use to obtain a military type system of authority and control within the workplace.

6.7(b) In 1947, the Fire Services Act returned the Fire Service to Local Government control, however, Central Government kept the power of central supervision, thus retaining a dual responsibility for Fire Brigades. The main sections of the 47 Act transferred the governance of the National Fire Service to new Fire Authorities, within a Local Government set up, imposing upon them the duty to run an efficient Fire Service within their area. They also gave the Home Secretary powers to make regulations as to pay, hours of duty and discipline, as well as prescribing the qualifications and procedures for promotion within the Service. The Home Secretary was required to approve the establishment of Brigades, including both personnel and fire engines. He was also given powers with regard to standards of training and the design and performance of equipment, in addition to the power to set up a central Fire Services College. All of these powers of the Secretary of State have been exercised in practice over the years. Fire Service Inspectors were appointed at that time and subsequently, and a grant of 25% of approved expenditure for Fire Authorities was payable by the Government. A new Pension Scheme was instituted.

A Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council was set up to give advice to the Secretary of State on any matters except ranks, pay, hours and discipline, as these matters were to be dealt with by a Joint Industrial Council.

6.7(c) In terms of the workforce, the Fire Service following the war contained approximately 50% ex-National Fire Service firefighters, and approximately 50% ex-servicemen who had returned from duty in the armed forces. This large influx of men had seen active service during the war and they were accustomed to the level of discipline seen in the armed forces. In this way, the militaristic, disciplined and male culture of the Fire Service was further reinforced as a direct result of the Second World War.

## **6.8 The 1950s, 60s and 70s**

6.8(a) This 30-year period was a time of continuing industrial unrest within the Fire Service. While the main cause of these disputes was pay, they also reflected the desire of the workforce and their representatives to further improve the status and perception of firefighters, from one of being station and vehicle cleaners or manual labourers to that of professional emergency workers.

6.8(b) In the 1950s during the aftermath of the war, the pay of firefighters fell in comparison with that of other workers, in particular the Police Force. This increase in differentials led to widespread discontent amongst firefighters, discontent that led to a series of 'work to rules' in Brigades up and down the country.

6.8(c) As Englander (1992) indicates,

*“the modern firefighter, by comparison with his pre-war predecessor, is not only better organised but more militant. Between the wars, mass unemployment limited the scope for militancy.”* (Englander 1992, pg. 104).

6.8(d) And,

*“By the late sixties, however, industrial issues were uppermost. “The year has again been beset with industrial action,” wrote the Chief Inspector of Fire Services in his report for 1975. But by then, conflict seemed endemic: relations between firemen and their employers had so deteriorated that it was the absence of unrest that was considered noteworthy. “Perhaps”, said the Times, “the long night watches waiting for the alarm to ring encourages brooding over discontents, whatever the reason, firemen are often in dispute”” (Englander 1992, pg. 105).*

6.8(e) The employers responded to this industrial unrest by enforcing the Fire Service Discipline Regulations, and firefighters were charged with disobedience to orders. These charges were only dropped because of public sympathy when, during a large fire in London, three firefighters lost their lives. The problems simmered on in the 60s and 70s and resulted in two Government Inquiries: the Holroyd Report (1970) and the Cunningham Report (1971). Despite these reports, the grievances over pay and conditions resulted in the first national Fire Brigades strike in November 1977.

6.8(f) With hindsight it can be seen that these two reports, and the strike, resulted in a further change in how the public perceived firefighters and how firefighters perceived themselves. The outcome of the two reports resulted in a shift towards professionalism in the Fire Service. Prior to these reports, the time between incidents was used for cleaning vehicles, stations and equipment. In the 1970s, this changed and firefighters were given increased responsibility for fire safety, and more of the time between calls was used for training. The Cunningham Report equated firefighters in the newly proposed circumstances with semi-skilled to skilled workers in manufacturing industry. Following the 1977/78 strike, firefighters’ pay was linked to the upper quartile of manual workers and a 42-hour working week was established.

6.8(g) Cunningham also allows an insight into the culture of the service at that time, and how firefighters saw themselves,

*“It is the element of risk and the demand for courage which sets the fireman’s job apart from others. Undoubtedly, the firefighter’s job at incidents generates excitement due to the emergency circumstances of the workplace, and a successful conclusion to incidents requires the application of skill and judgement if life and property are to be saved. It can be concluded therefore that it is the demands of the operational task that generates job satisfaction in the workforce”* (The Cunningham Report 1971, pg. 22).

6.8(h) Firefighters had at that time, and arguably still have, a sense of their importance to society, due to the singularity of the Fire Service as a profession and the emergency nature of their work.

6.8(i) The reinforcement of the existing militaristic culture was also seen to be enhanced by firefighters being part of a uniformed and disciplined service. To quote Englander (1992),

*“Its singularity as a profession derives in large part from its status as a uniformed and disciplined service. Fire fighting is a hazardous occupation in which death and injury are not infrequent. Its paramilitary character registers the necessity for self control, orderliness and obedience, both to protect the individual fireman and sustain him in the primary work groups through which his dangerous duties are performed. It is within these close-knit and highly cohesive work groups, the watches, that loyalties are formed to the Brigade, the Service and to one’s mates. The fireman’s uniform, with its insignia of rank, is the outward expression of a special service and his place within it”* (Englander 1992, pg. 103).

6.8(j) This is only part of the story, however, as the amount of time firefighters spend at incidents is only a small proportion of their time ‘on duty’. To quote David Englander once again,

*“Continuous cover, an operational imperative, imparts a special character to the organisation of work and the social relations that arise from it. The Fire Station,*

*unlike the factory, is the focal point of an occupational community in which the domains of work and non-work, private and public, are inextricably entwined: for firemen must work together and play together. With a work cycle consisting of lengthy periods of inactivity, punctuated by brief encounters of great intensity, the fireman is inevitably pre-occupied with the ennui of routine duties and the relief therefrom. "If anyone came in the dining room some nights, they'd think everyone was potty" said one fireman, describing the evening 'stand-down' in a Northern Fire Station. Grown men sat there with roulette roll a penny ... and one of the blokes with a scraper saying ... "next please, roll up, let's have your money". The role confusion which this engenders serves to separate firemen from factory workers. "A lot of outsiders, workers in factories, look down on it," said one Firemen. "They think we sit all day playing snooker." These perceptions, though collected in the late 1970s, were widespread within the Fire Service for as long as anyone could remember. "There is", said a Home Office Inquiry of 1944, "a common impression that firemen spend the greatest part of their time idly waiting for a fire call"" (Englander 1992, pg. 101).*

6.8(k) Cunningham also indicated that 60% of junior ranks and 68% of senior ranks had seen military service. This resulted in the continuing imposition of military style discipline. A discipline, which it could be argued was, and remains, necessary for the protection of firefighters and public safety, in circumstances that are inherently hazardous and fraught with danger. The Trade Union however, sees this issue differently.

*"For in the mind of management there has existed a hopeless confusion between the discipline necessary to secure life and limb, and that enforced as an instrument of control in the workplace" (Englander 1992, pg. 104).*

6.8(l) This combination of history, task and social circumstances resulted in a culture of militaristic discipline in an all-male institution, which prides itself on carrying out a dangerous task in a professional manner. 'It's a man's job'!

## **6.9 The 1980s**

6.9(a) The all-male culture of the Fire Service was challenged in the 1980s as a result of the 1976 Sex Discrimination Act and the first full-time woman firefighter was recruited to the Fire Service in 1982. However, progress in this area has been slow with the idea of women firefighters being resented by both Officers and male firefighters. In 2005, 106 wholetime women firefighters were employed in Scotland and 4,400 men, or to put it another way 2.4% of the workforce were women (Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services for Scotland 2004-2005).

## **Section II: ethnography**

### **6.10 Introduction**

6.10(a) This section of the current chapter comprises an ethnography based on the recollections of retired Fire Service personnel. It is founded on a number of core categories that were partially shaped by the initial interview schedule, but in the main, they emerged during the analysis of the collected data.

6.10(b) The purpose of the section is to continue with a comparative analysis which will inform an understanding of the Scottish Fire Service's culture through a consideration of its historical antecedents.

### **6.11 Values and beliefs**

6.11(a) The first theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews taken from retired members of the Service is that of the role of fire prevention. The earliest records, coming from Roman times, indicate that firefighters carried out fire prevention duties and there is evidence that this aspect of the role of firefighters continued to be valued up until the 1930s, when the provision of a fire protection role was made a statutory duty for fire units. However, this meaning assigned to the role of firefighters changed dramatically during the Second World War when the British

public and the firefighter's themselves focussed on the physically demanding operational task of fighting fire. Even though the operational aspect of the service had obviously always existed, the Second World War brought it into sharp focus and the self-image of firefighter as hero was further developed and normalised in the cultural realities of the Service. Firefighters saw themselves as heroic men in a special and essential job. Moreover, even when the focus moved towards making the Fire Service more professional because of the Cunningham Report (1971), which also reinforced the need for fire prevention in the firefighter role, the main emphasis remained on the operational imperative, emphasising the hazardous nature of the emergency role and the courage of those who performed it.

6.11(b) The second theme that emerged was that of a militaristic and disciplined approach to the management of the Service. This militaristic approach was evident in Roman times at the inception of the first organised Fire Service, the Core of Vigils, which could use corporal punishment as a sanction. It was further reinforced in the time before the First World War by recruitment from the navy, however it was fully internalised within the contemporary culture of the Service after the Second World War, when there was a large influx of ex-military personnel from the armed forces. In fact, there was a determined effort to recruit ex-military personnel after the war, and Senior Officers travelled to places like India and Germany in order to carry out the recruitment process. The evidence indicates that this was done to enhance the culturally valued role that discipline played within the Service.

*“Well, the forces people, they were more accustomed to a wee bit of discipline”* (Fife retired Respondent B).

6.11(c) The third theme that emerged is related to the physical task of fighting fires, ‘doing the job’. Virtually all of the Respondents placed great emphasis on this, and pride was taken in the twin cultural attributes of being able to carry out the physical requirements of the operational task, together with the individual physical fitness and mental toughness that this required. Individual firefighters were only accepted onto a watch when they had proven themselves at fires.



*“When you showed that you were capable of doing the job, you became accepted. When you were promoted to 3 as a young recruit and then Branch man 1, you knew that you were getting recognised. I was ‘fair away with myself’ when I got recognised as a Branch man No.1 when I was still on probation. You started to get recognised as somebody who was not scared to go in and have a go.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent A).

## **6.12 The development of identity**

6.12(a) The focus on the physical and dangerous task of fighting fire, together with the militaristic approach to organising the Service, led to indications of the development of a masculine identity by those who were required to deliver it. One clear view emerging from the Respondents was that while the operational task of firefighting could be dirty and dangerous, it also provided a rewarding and important self-image and identity for those who had the necessary capability to practise and embody it. Firefighters felt respected by the community for their work and believed that they had status in the eyes of the public. ‘The job’ provided great satisfaction, and when measured against other sections of society, presented a great opportunity to demonstrate the masculine attributes of strength and courage. These attributes could also be compared to other less worthy (or subjugated) males, leading to indications of a desire to make hegemonic comparisons between those who could do the job and those who could not.

*“Well, when I left the insurance job, there were friends I had there and they felt I was being very stupid going into the Fire Service because it was regarded as being a dangerous job, and there was a lot of blokes that would have liked to have been firemen but fear held them back, they couldn’t understand why it is you go rushing into buildings that are on fire and rushing into smoke and so on whenever anyone else would want to get the hell out of it.”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

6.12(b) And a certain heroic status was given to those who were able to fit the culturally prescribed attributes or internalised norms of ‘the job’,

*“he was a fire eater you know, he was a fireman”* (Fife retired Respondent A).

### **6.13 Cultural imperatives**

6.13(a) When taken together, these aspect of the Fire Service culture indicated that there were a number of historically prescribed imperatives to which members of the service were required to comply. The heroic status of the firefighter, based on the masculine attributes of physical and mental toughness, the ability to cope with an autocratic management structure (although this was being challenged by the 1970s) and a strong and internalised set of group norms regarding what it meant to be a ‘fireman’.

6.13(b) These group norms were based on the teamwork that the firefighting task required and a reliance on each other, which on occasion could mean the difference between life and death. These internalised group norms were also focused and distilled by the fact that firefighters served long hours and in many cases they lived with their families in Fire Service accommodation. These unique circumstances led to the formation of workgroups of men with strong social bonds of loyalty to each other, as well as a real identification with the task they carried out and the public service they provided.

### **6.14 The dominant culture**

6.14(a) An initial analysis of the emerging culture would indicate that it was being formed within tightly bound male working groups, with acceptance of individuals being based on their ability to fit into the dominant culture and being able to demonstrate the culturally required physical aspects of ‘the job’. This in turn leads to a set of group norms that were described by Respondents as masculine, macho and competitive in nature. Here, government prescribed rules, such as the introduction of health and safety legislation, were often considered a challenge to the self-defined masculine identity adopted by the workforce, because they prevented the job from being carried out ‘in the way it should be’.

*“Well, Glasgow Fire Service, if I may say so, was a macho type of Brigade, it had a pride in being macho and they used to shout, ‘get in, get in, get in’ without breathing apparatus, get in, get in, get in, get the fire out, get people out or whatever it would be.”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

*“There was rivalry in watches but I would say it was friendly rivalry and I would say that it was good for the job because when I was a Station Officer, I used to encourage rivalry because it made blokes determined that they were going to be the best and it didn’t matter, usually it was silly. It was nothing to do with firefighting but it carried over into that, we were the elite type of thing.”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

6.14(b) This self-defined masculine capability and mental toughness was often demonstrated through a particular style of gallows humour.

*“Well, I can remember a couple of times where a bloke was burnt to death in their bed or at least overcome by smoke and he was lying on top of the bed and the place had been well gutted, and he would just say “look at this guy here, he’s slept right through it, slept all through this”. He’d make remarks like that it was quite funny at the time.”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

6.14(c) Where individuals did not, or could not, fit these culturally prescribed norms they were isolated or ridiculed through ‘banter’ and presumably often left the Service.

6.14(d) This culture and its associated masculine identity, led to the formation of competitive groups within the service and a definition of ‘us and them’, where us could do ‘the job’ and them could not. In these circumstances it was seen as self-evident that women could not be firefighters and while they could work in the Fire Service, they could only do so in clearly defined areas of ‘women’s work’ such as cooks, cleaners and control operators.

*“No, no, they were no use. I still don’t think they are really, oh you’re in some terrible places and you’re sweating, I suppose there is women that can do that if they’re built that way, but for a normal woman I would have said no.”* (Fife retired Respondent B).

*“Because really some of the fires I’ve been at you needed a backup. I would hate to think it was some lassie backing me up, up five flights carrying a hose.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent B).

*“Yes, women in the control room, but beyond that, no.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent A).

6.14(e) During the collection of the data for this research the opportunity was taken to interview one of the very few black men who entered the Service after the war. He became a middle manager within the Service, and while he believed that in the main he was accepted, it was in his perception an acceptance laced with reservations. Prejudice against him was evidenced by the fact that he was the last person with the necessary qualifications in his Brigade to be promoted to the rank of Station Officer. In fact he believed that it may only have been because of his successful sporting career in track and field (a capability that would fit the masculine cultural ideal) that he was *“adopted into the brotherhood”* despite his colour,

*“people might have been saying a black man giving orders and things like that but it didn’t bother me because in those days I was involved with track and field athletics and practically every weekend my photograph or name was in the papers as a sports personality. So in the community I was well known.”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent B).

## **6.15 Contested realities**

6.15(a) There has been contestation over what it means to be a firefighter over the centuries when the cultural beliefs and values of different groups did not coincide.

One of the earliest signs of this was when the Roman Emperor Trajan believed that an association of firefighters would inevitably become a politically motivated group, perhaps one of the earliest indications of firefighters entering into conflict with the Government of the day.

6.15(b) A second area of contestation over meaning relates to different realities adopted by different groups with regard to the militaristic and disciplined approach to organising within the Service. While managers believed in a military style of management, the trade union vigorously opposed this. This led to the union “*wanting no part in management*” and conflicts over which group would be dominant in the realities of Fire Service life. This hierarchical and autocratic approach to the management of the Service led managers to believe that they were culturally required to dominate others in the Service, particularly those further down the hierarchy; they had to be “*the boss*” because,

*“if I don’t be the boss, then somebody’s going to try and get something over me.”*  
(Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

6.15(c) These culturally required attempts at domination can be directly related to theories regarding hegemonic masculinity in the workplace. In particular, they indicate a conflict over control and dominance between managers and the workforce over whom in reality dominated a particular work group.

6.15(d) It would seem that on occasions this management style could be taken to extremes,

*“one of the aspects I hated was if I got an Officer come up to me and he’d say, ‘grrrr’, just growling at me, as if I was an imbecile and it annoyed me”* (Strathclyde retired Respondent C).

6.15(e) And it was often treated with annoyance or ironic ridicule by firefighters,

*“Oh what aye. What was his famous words, if the Firemaster says shit in the yard I’ll shit in the yard, stupid, dear oh.”* (Fife retired Respondent B).

6.15(f) In the 1970s, there was a generational change with regard to the individuals who were Officers in the Service due to the retirement of those who had joined after the war. However, these new individuals were socialised into the previous cultural imperatives by their predecessors and they attempted to continue with the old managerial style. When discussing this period of time, one Respondent asked for the tape to be switched off, and indicated that in his view Officers were at that time *“building an empire”* and that *“the power over the years has gone from the firemen.”* In this way, he both confirmed the distinction between the management group and the workforce, and indicated that in his view at least, the managerial group were attempting to continue their dominance over the firefighters in the Service, a dominance that would be resisted by firefighters who comprised the majority in the workplace.

6.15(g) Undoubtedly these factors led to a worsening of relationships between Officers and firefighters, as a new generation entered the workplace, and contributed to the industrial unrest in the Service during the 1970s. At the individual level, firefighters still ‘followed the rules’ during the prescribed working time, however on the extended rest periods they took their own actions, which often meant ‘sending Officers to Coventry’. As one firefighter put it,

*“Later on we got new Officers, you know young chaps ye ken. We had one boy, he got fed up before us because all we did was just ignore him, abide by the rules of working and when it come leisure time it was kind of childish, we used to be playing cards, him and his pal would come and sit aside us and we would just move away ye ken. So he got the message.”* (Fife retired Respondent C).

6.15(h) Traditionally, firefighters considered themselves as working long hours, being poorly paid and suffering from poor working conditions. Over the years, this has led to conflict with the employers, conflict which was crystallised in the first national firefighters strike in 1977. Even though this unrest was, on the surface, about pay and conditions, an interpretive analysis would indicate that it was also about a deeper imperative to improve the status of firefighters and make the Service more of a profession. This analysis points towards a third meaning making contest in the Service, one over what it means to be a firefighter in terms of status and prestige, a contest between firefighters and their representatives and the local government employers. From the trade union perspective, this contest was portrayed as a conflict with Officers, management and employers, over working conditions and a fairer distribution of scarce financial resources, characterised as a struggle to oppose financial cuts and to change and improve the Service. The workforce and their union believed that the employers preferred it if firefighters were seen as unskilled workers, as opposed to professionals, so that wages could be kept unfairly low. Trade union representation was not welcomed in those circumstances and,

*“the Union had literally to force its way in and to demand that its voice be heard”*  
(Strathclyde retired Respondent A)

## **6.16 Acceptance of equalities**

6.16(a) One significant theme emerging from this historical review of the Service’s cultural realities has been with regard to the challenge to the male identity that would be presented by the acceptance of women in the Service.

6.16(b) Even though, due to a shortage of men, women did work in the Fire Service during the Second World War they were not permitted to carry out the role of operational firefighting. Their jobs were confined to the socially prescribed role of ‘women’s work’ such as telephonists and drivers.

*“Well, they manned the phones and were telephonists. Staff car drivers and we had one girl who drove the TL. She didn’t take it to fires, she took it for servicing and things like that.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent C).

6.16(c) Even the female Respondents who worked in the Fire Service during the war and demonstrated a feisty attitude to dangerous roles such as dispatch rider, subscribed to the socially prescribed male norms of the Service, even though there were indications that they may not have totally agreed with this at the time.

*“Oh, no, no, no. Not here, I really don’t think it’s for women. I feel, I know they’ll be trained properly but I would worry that it would endanger the men and the men worried about them.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent D).

*“Well, things were different in those days. The women were expected to stay at home and do the cooking, the ironing and bear the children. Thank God it’s all changed now.”* (Lothian and Borders retired Respondent C).

6.16(d) Even following the introduction of equalities legislation in the 1980s, relatively few women joined the Fire Service. However, even though their numbers were small their entry to the Service was resented and resisted by male employees through rhetoric and the enacted internalised cultural norms of the Service, within the social context of the time.

### **Section III: Contemporary culture and its historical development – some conclusions**

6.18(a) All of the Brigades that make up the Scottish Fire Service share a similar history, and the understanding of the formal organisational framework that emerged from the literature review in this area reflected the militaristic management style imported to the Service through its historical development. More recently, the founders of the contemporary Scottish Fire Service reinforced this autocratic, militaristic and hierarchical framework to the Service’s style of management prior to



the First World War by recruiting extensively from the navy, and this approach was further reinforced by the recruitment of ex-military personnel immediately following both World Wars. During these phases of historical development, the Service's culture was encouraged to become both enclosed and inward looking due to the long working hours, the restrictive working practices and the fact that firefighters and their families lived, worked and socialised together almost exclusively, and to the virtual exclusion of other social groups. This early emerging cultural reality, together with the social circumstances in which it was developed, resulted in a very strong, if somewhat inward looking, commitment to the Service from those who delivered it. This commitment was internalised in the minds of firefighters and Officers alike as pride in being part of this special organisation, an organisation that was in existence purely and exclusively to help people in an emergency.

6.18(b) In addition to the internal imperatives required by the developing culture, the view of 'firefighter as hero' in the minds of both the general public and those who delivered the Service evolved through similar processes, from the dangers associated with the task of firefighting. This view of firefighter as hero was crystallised during the blitzes of the Second World War, as prior to that stage of the war,

*"Firemen in uniform were slighted and even openly insulted, being referred to as parasites, slackers and scroungers"* (Blackstone 1957, pg. 405).

6.18(c) However, during and following the blitz, particularly in London but also in the other industrial cities of the United Kingdom, firefighters dealt with many difficult and dangerous fires caused by the German bombing campaign. In the course of this challenging work, many firefighters were killed or injured and because of this, there was a complete turnaround in the public's attitude towards them. This reversal in attitude towards firefighters was summed up in a Daily Mirror cartoon of September 14<sup>th</sup> 1940 which was entitled *"Local Boys Make Good"* and pictured firefighters and air raid wardens being pelted with bricks in 1939 but showered with flowers in 1940. This heroic image of the firefighter, together with the physical nature of the firefighting role, reinforced the pre existing societal perception that fire

fighting was a 'man's job' and that women were not capable of carrying it out, either physically or emotionally. This perception fitted comfortably into the dominant beliefs held by Western societies at the time, beliefs that prescribed different types of work for men and women to undertake in the workplace. These wider societal-based cultural imperatives were so strong that even during the height of the war when a large proportion of able-bodied men were fighting in the armed forces, women were prevented from carrying out the task of firefighting. Instead, they were given jobs, which carried less of a masculine identity such as driving and cooking or acting as control operators or dispatch riders. In this way, the exclusivity of the masculine role of firefighter was sustained, even in some of the most difficult times in British history.

6.18(d) In many ways the data gathered from the retired Respondents to the semi-structured interviews confirmed the initial findings from the data gathered through the literature based study of Fire Service history, and a consistent view of the prevailing Fire Service culture emerged from the ethnography. This view supported, reinforced and further developed the emerging understanding of the Fire Service culture indicated by the documentary evidence. The ethnography reinforced and confirmed the emerging view, that the Fire Service's formal organisational framework was indeed hierarchical, autocratic, militaristic and masculine. This additional evidence enabled a view of the historically developed Fire Service culture as one, which at its core valued physical fitness, together with the ability to carry out the dangerous role of firefighter in a socially defined masculine and heroic manner. These informal cultural realities of Fire Service life were reinforced over many years as a result of the tight knit working groups on which the Fire Service was based, particularly at watch or shift level. They were accepted, internalised, unquestioned and taken for granted as 'the way things are' and they were therefore normalised into systems of meaning (as described by Sackman 1991, Salaman 1997 and others) as a major determinant of the cultural reality of the Scottish Fire Service. In addition, this cultural reality was seen as the ideal, by the majority of those who delivered the service, not only as 'the way things are' but probably more importantly as 'the way things should be'. For these reasons, it can be seen that the Scottish Fire Service

culture was developed over many years and is shaped by and related to its history and traditions (as indicated by Geertz 1973, Czarniswska-Joerges 1986 and Alvesson 1993).

6.18(e) In analysing the history of the Fire Service it became clear that there were a number of significant groups involved in the development of the Service's culture. The militaristic approach to the management of the Service drew attention to the managerial group within Brigades. The approach of this group to the management of the Service was shaped by the influx of military personnel after the Second World War and in the 1970s the majority of Officers in the Fire Service had military experience. This militaristic history led to attempts at enforcing a military-based, disciplinary approach to the management of the Service, in attempts to exert control over the workforce.

6.18(f) A second significant group was developed over the years, particularly before, during and after the Second World War, namely the Fireman's Trade Union, renamed the Fire Brigades Union in 1930. This group saw itself in opposition to the management of the Service and to its militaristic management style. It also believed that it was in a classic struggle with the Government over scarce financial resources with which to develop and improve the pay and conditions of its members.

6.18(g) The 1976 Sex Discrimination Act led to the slow and tentative formation of another significant group within the Fire Service, women firefighters. Although small in number, this group posed a significant challenge to the self-defined masculine identity of many in the Service.

6.18(h) This review of the historical development of Fire Service culture, and the groups that have enacted its developing realities, has allowed a number of themes regarding the culture of the Fire Service to emerge. At this stage, it can be tentatively concluded that the traditional culture of the Service in Scotland, prescribes and values a heroic self-image regarding the role of firefighter, a militaristic hierarchical approach to the management of the Service and physical and mental toughness in

those that fulfil the role. Members of the Service adopt a strong self-defined masculine identity, which leads to definitions of 'them and us', where women are excluded and subjugated males are marginalised. A number of significant groups have been identified both within the culture and in its context and the relationships between these groups can be seen as generating conflicts over hegemonic positioning between groups within the culture, as well as between groups in the culture and those in its cultural context. This led to the development of processes where realities were contested between those groups.

6.18(i) With regard to core categories and emerging themes, in analysing the data collected in this section of the report and relating that data to Schwartzman's (1993) view that an understanding of a work culture could emerge from the interplay between the formal and informal aspects of organisational life. It would seem that the formal managerial structures of the Fire Service could usefully be analysed through a consideration of issues such as autocracy and hierarchy, while the informal cultural aspects could be analysed in relation to systems of meaning adopted in the Service. It would also seem that in relation to the exclusion of women and other under-represented groups in the Service a consideration of the acceptance, or otherwise, of the equalities agenda in the Service could prove productive. These issues, or emerging themes, will be further considered, following the research into socialisation in the Service contained in the next chapter and prior to their use in a consideration of the contemporary culture of the Service in Chapter 8.

## Chapter Seven

### The Scottish Fire Service Training School: Socialisation Through Induction to the Service

#### 7.1 Introduction

7.1(a) As individuals enter into new organisations they are socialised into the culture of that organisation by more experienced organisational members (Czarniawska-Joerges (1992)). This is facilitated through a sequence of sanctions, pressures and rewards, through which the individual becomes part of the organisation and the organisation becomes part of the individual (Gabriel 1999). For recruits to the Fire Service this process of socialisation begins at the Scottish Fire Service Training School, therefore this chapter considers socialisation to the Service through the School's initial training regime.

7.1(b) All recruits to the Scottish Fire Service are trained at the Scottish Fire Service Training School, which is set in the rural setting of Gullane on the east coast of Scotland. The frontage of the school is that of a traditionally built building, originally an hotel built at the end of the 1800s. To the left of this building as you face it is a small car park and modern construction accommodation blocks. Behind the building is a large tarmac covered square on two levels. To the right of the square are workshops and garage accommodation for the School's fleet of fire engines and its other vehicles, and to the rear is a gymnasium and lecture rooms. There is a modern extension to the main building and this comprises a lecture theatre and a canteen for staff and students.

7.1(c) In approaching the contemporary culture of the Scottish Fire Service it will be important to understand the processes used to gain entry to the Service. This should allow an analysis of how the Service's existing, internally normalised culture is reinforced and passed on through the process of socialisation (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). To enable the research, three members of the school staff were interviewed

using a semi-structured format. It was not considered appropriate by the school to interview recruits at that time due to their developing understanding of the Service and a desire by school staff not to “*disrupt*” their training. During the interviews, two of the interviewees appeared nervous and uncomfortable. One became particularly uncomfortable when discussing discipline and the other seemed uncomfortable with the interview being taped (he frequently looked at the tape during the interview). These two interviewees also maintained a formal demeanour throughout the interview process. All instructors at the School were male at that time.

## **7.2 The formal organisation framework**

7.2(a) The most striking issue emerging from the ethnography taken at the Training School was the indication of a strong formalised requirement for discipline within the Service. For this reason the instructors in the School preferred recruits from the armed forces, as they were believed to be more disciplined than those who did not come from a militaristic background. It was considered by the interviewees that recruits with experience of military discipline were also a good influence on those recruits who had not been in the armed forces,

*“discipline is very very important and I think it’s one of the most important values for a recruit going back to the Brigade that he understands the discipline that’s in the Fire Service and is able to accept it”* (Training School Respondent A).

*“But then again you get people coming in from the forces, they know what discipline’s about, they know how to march, they are a good influence on the other members of the squad.”* (Training School Respondent A)

7.2(b) Even though discipline did seem to be tight within the School, and a great deal of marching and saluting could be observed, it was also indicated by instructors in what seemed to be a regretful way that discipline was not as strict as it used to be. It seemed that instructors attempted to control every aspect of the recruit’s life while they were at the School and regretted that,

*“they (the recruits) are allowed a bit more freedom at nights and whatever than they used to be when I was here”.* (Training School Respondent B)

7.2(c) Instructors valued a system of strict hierarchy within the School, and within this hierarchy they saw themselves as an elite group who worked hard to deliver a competent recruit in difficult circumstances. They took pride in being able to turn out a *“good recruit”*, even though it could often be difficult in their perception to train the people that Brigades selected. In order to achieve this valuable but difficult result, instructors believed that they required total commitment to an institution in which they could take pride, within which they could apply strict discipline and enforce the bureaucratic application of written School rules within a well-defined organisational hierarchy.

*“Well it’s strict in as much that there’s a set of School rules and they have to abide by the School rules. If they break the School rules they’re punished”* (Training School Respondent A).

### **7.3 Systems of meaning**

7.3(a) The development of systems of meaning, which valued strict hierarchy and discipline within the School, led to the clear identification of two distinct groups. The first group comprised a cultural elite in the form of a core group of instructors and the second group were the recruits, who were to be trained within the School. The Respondents emphasised that what they were trying to instil in the recruits as far as values were concerned was respect for tradition, history and a strong sense of pride in a special Service.

*“Well, I think there’s a tradition in the Fire Service, which makes it that wee bit different and possibly a wee bit more special, there’s a pride in the Service, which has been there for years and years. One just needs to go back to how the first municipal Fire Brigade was formed in Edinburgh and that was over 200 years ago*

*and the tradition and the pride in the Services has always been there, I would like to think that it will always be there.”* (Training School Respondent A).

7.3(b) These systems of meaning required a pride in the uniform of the Service and an imperative to maintain “*standards of dress*” for both recruits and instructors, standards which in the minds of the Respondents upheld the image of the Fire Service with the general public.

*“So pride in that way, pride in the uniform”* (Training School Respondent C).

*“Yes, well, again it’s a standard of dress thing, if they’re going into the village, we don’t mind them going in relaxed dress, but it’s got to be smart, we don’t go for the holey jeans and the ripped t-shirt thing, we’ve got to show the image of the Fire Service in the village basically and the instructional staff and the students should be showing the same standard.”* (Training School Respondent B).

#### **7.4 The adoption of identity**

7.4(a) The entire atmosphere at the School, the uniforms, the marching and saluting, the physical emphasis, the hegemonic hierarchical management style, together with the physical layout of the premises where militaristic badges and photographs of men in uniform were prominently displayed, gave a strong masculine feel to the School. This all indicated the kind of individuals that would be valued in the School. The identity adopted in the School was almost exclusively one of hegemonic masculinity, as demonstrated by the hierarchical approach adopted in its formal systems, and the approach to women in the Service demonstrated through the reactions of Respondents to the entry of women and minority ethnic groups to the Service. It was indicated by Respondents that Brigades had started to recruit people from these under-represented groups and therefore the School would have to train them. This seemed to create a tension in the minds of the instructors. On the one hand, they believed that their role was to train whoever was sent to the School, and no matter how poor the recruit they were sent they took great pride in turning out a competent firefighter. While on the other hand, it seemed clear that they did not believe that



women or ethnic minority men could make good firefighters. This conflict seemed to be resolved by the instructors espousing their support for equality of opportunity, but undermining this in reality by the demonstration of a variety of beliefs indicated through rhetoric. First of all, Respondents indicated that on a personal level they as individuals had never had difficulty accepting women or people from a minority ethnic background, even though it may be a “*hurdle*” for some others in the Service. In this way, they attempted to claim the moral high ground. They would then go on to imply that this acceptance of equality may not be fair to the white males, who would not be recruited and argued that this was in reality discrimination against white men, who were the “*normal firefighters*”.

*“I’m all in favour of equal opportunities and such like and fairness at work and I think that’s great, that’s something we should really pursue. However, we’ve got to watch how we pursue that, we’ve got to make sure that we pursue that fairly to the people we’re leaving behind.”* (Training School Respondent B).

*“I would tend to believe that maybe some better candidates are not getting through because they’re maybe the wrong origins. Controversial or not but that’s the way I feel things happen.”* (Training School Respondent B).

*“I think the feeling at the minute is that the drive to get more ethnics in is just going to the stage where it’s discrimination against what was a normal firefighter if you like because they are pushing so hard to get them in you know.”* (Training School Respondent C).

7.4(b) They would then go on to argue that in order to allow these under-represented groups to join the Service Brigades would have to “*lower their standards*”, and in order to get through the recruits course people from under-represented groups would have to be given preferential treatment in some way. The Respondents indicated that this set of circumstances led to arrogance in recruits from under-represented backgrounds, who did not know their place in the hegemonic hierarchy of the School. However, to maintain the moral high ground they portrayed this perceived

reality as being “*unfair*” to others (white males) at the School and indicated that it would inevitably erode discipline in the Service.

*“From personal experience I have found one or two who think themselves a bit bullet proof. Because they’re minorities and because they get looked after in what could maybe loosely be construed as preferential treatment, maybe it’s not preferential treatment, but there’s more effort made to ensure that everything is okay in their camp and maybe that’s not fair on the rest.”* (Training School Respondent C).

*“One or two of our, supposedly, I say supposedly but to me they’re as Scottish and British as I am and the third, fourth or maybe fifth generation, are struggling. There’s one in particular on the course at the moment and I won’t mention names, who has an arrogant nature, I’m here, I’m bullet proof because I’m who I am and the Brigade will take me back anyway. That concerns me, that’s got to the stage of a definite lowering of standards and a danger to the actual disciplined culture of the Brigade”* (Training School Respondent B).

7.4(c) In addition to this subtle undermining of individuals and groups who did not fit the internalised correct image of the firefighter, the Respondents also argued that it was difficult to recruit minority ethnic people to the Service, as there were so few of them in Scotland. Moreover, those that were here did not want to join because they looked down on the Service, as it was not “*high enough status*” for them. In this way, instructors in the School contested the reality being propagated by the wider political context within which the Fire Service was embedded, a reality that would see under-represented groups being accepted into the Fire Service against the wishes of the normalised, internalised and dominant culture of the Service.

## **7.5 The informal cultural framework**

7.5(a) The cultural imperatives within the Scottish Fire Training School can be related to systems of domination and control, with instructors maintaining dominance

over recruits. In this context, the instructional staff can be seen as an elite group that is required to dominate and the role of the recruit is one of obedience to orders. Moreover, even though the instructors espoused an open and relaxed style, it was evident from the interviews and observations carried out in the School that this was not followed through in practice. In a reflection of classic notions of bureaucracy the Commandant was seen as being entitled to the respect due to his rank, even though it was indicated that he was attempting to introduce a bit more of a relaxed style than previously existed, through how he addressed or spoke to subordinates. He was also prepared to have meetings with staff in order to address any problems that arose. However, there were limitations to this approach and when things did “go wrong” it would seem that a more authoritarian cultural reality emerged.

*“It’s very open, however, if things go wrong, then there’s a man at the top who could crack a whip and that’s what it should be.”* (Training School Respondent B).

7.5(b) The recruits at the Training School were perceived and treated as a subordinate group of subjugated males within a hegemonic framework, and for this reason instructors felt free to be disparaging towards them during the collection of data from the semi-structured interviews. Instructors indicated that they were required to train a poor standard of recruit who had little idea about discipline and who were used to being looked after by their mothers, down to not being able to iron trousers or clean shoes to an acceptable standard,

*“and you know some of the people who come here certainly do not have common sense, they just don’t think things through, they had everything done for them before they came here instead of being able to stand on their own two feet and make decisions. I’ve always remembered one of my Instructors whose comment to me was “boss you can’t teach wood you know”* (Training School Respondent A).

7.5(c) In these circumstances, the role of the recruit was to provide blind obedience to instructors and if they failed in this cultural imperative they were punished. Recruits were not allowed to argue with instructors and even though the School had a

formal counselling procedure it was clear that this was used to reinforce discipline, as opposed to counselling recruits in a supportive manner,

*“it is a culture shock for them because they’re told to do everything at the double, they’re told to stand to attention for example if an Officer is walking past, they are taught how to march some of them”* (Training School Respondent A).

*“If they break the School rules, well, they’re punished. It would be looked at by the duty Officer and he would, if he felt it was necessary, go to the Senior Instructor, plus we have what is called the counselling book and if they are counselled there’s a record kept of it.”* (Training School Respondent A).

*“Each case is taken on its own merit and we have facilities in place whereby we can award punishment if you like”* (Training School Respondent C).

7.5(d) The instructors believed that even though their task was difficult and they were often given poor material to work with, they always turned out recruits that were able to take their place in the elite body of firefighters. They even went as far as indicating that if Brigades selected the wrong sort of recruit, then the School would change that person.

*“I mean even from my experience, here we’ve transformed some difficult cases”* (Training School Respondent C).

7.5(e) From the interviews and observations taken at the School it could be seen that the dominant culture demonstrated during the socialisation of new recruits to the Scottish Fire Service, was one of an autocratic and hegemonic hierarchy. It was lived in a quasi-militaristic reality where both instructors and recruits were required to demonstrate a commitment to hard work and physical fitness in an atmosphere of competition. Pride in the uniform was seen as being important, it had to be kept in an excellent condition and there was a lot of marching and saluting of higher ranks by the recruits.

7.5(f) Instructors in the School were seen as a cultural elite within the dominant culture displayed at the School, and blind obedience was required by them from recruits. Deviant individuals were dealt with through strict disciplinary procedures and the School's counselling procedures. They were often threatened with 'not making the grade', and losing their job in the Fire Service, a job that many of them would have given up other employment to undertake. Therefore, it can be seen that recruits at the Training School were a subjugated group under a great deal of pressure to conform to the demonstrated cultural requirements of the Service, a cultural reality propagated and enforced by instructors.

7.5(g) These underlying cultural imperatives of the Service, as propagated during the socialisation of recruits, did lead to a number of behavioural difficulties on the part of the instructors in the way that they treated recruits to the Service. Over the years, there have been reports of bullying and harassment at the School. This can be seen as an understandable result of the system of hegemonic masculinity adopted by the instructors and is illustrated by a story told by a middle manager in Lothian and Borders, about his son when he was a recruit undergoing training at the School. Following an inspection of recruits uniforms, his son's uniform did not comply with the standard expected by the instructor and having made this clear the instructor pushed his face close to the recruit and shouted "*you are a piece of shit, what are you?*" the recruit was then required to reply "*I am a piece of shit, sir*". This approach was confirmed by a Respondent from one of the Brigades, who said,

*"I did have a sub-Officer standing about an inch from my face shouting and bawling at me and obviously spit was landing on my face"* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

7.5(h) In addition, an instructor has been accused of sexual harassment by a number of female recruits. This issue is currently the subject of legal action and the final conclusion is not yet known.

7.5(i) All of the instructors at the School had been members of the Fire Service for a number of years. Many of them had served previous terms at the School and had applied to return there. It was evident that the values and culture of the Service as demonstrated at the School had been readily accepted, normalised and in most cases internalised by them. As a result, despite what was espoused, they were in reality opposed to any attempts to change the culture of the Service and, in particular, they were demonstrably opposed to the acceptance of women and minority ethnic people in the Service.

## **7.6 The passing out parade: a ritual of confirmation**

7.6(a) The values and beliefs being transferred from instructors to recruits at the Training School through socialisation of those who were inducted to the Service were encapsulated in the ritualistic ceremony of the passing out parade (see Appendix C). Here a strong respect for autocratic hierarchy was demonstrated by the fact that Firemasters and their guests were treated very differently to the recruits. Recruits were expected to stand up when approached by a more Senior Officer and saluting was commonplace. Within the demonstration of competence by the recruits, there was an emphasis on marching and saluting. Overall, a strong militaristic emphasis was demonstrated throughout the passing out parade and there was an obvious denigration of women and other professional groups (the ambulance Service), although this was disguised as humour. In addition, the entire event demonstrated the cultural importance of competition, hard work and physical fitness as a means of demonstrating an ability to enter the hallowed and heroic profession of firefighting, in order to be able to do ‘the job’.

## **7.7 Conclusions**

7.7(a) This chapter has in many ways confirmed and reinforced the key themes emerging from Chapter 5 on the historical development of the Fire Service’s culture, where they relate to the militaristic, hierarchical and masculine nature of the cultural reality experienced by members of the Scottish Fire Service. The indications are that

the socialisation of new recruits to the Service was carried out within a cultural reality that valued strong discipline within an autocratic and rule-based structure. Officers were seen, within the hierarchy of the School, as a cultural elite and firefighters were required to obey orders as part of a hegemonic system based on dominance, which was formalised within the structures of the School.

7.7(b) All recruits to the Scottish Fire Service undergo their initial training at the Scottish Fire Service Training School, through a residential training course that lasts for 14 weeks. Recruits who have military experience are preferred by instructors as they are more used to the discipline and have a militaristic bearing, which is valued at the School. This process of recruiting and training new entrants to the Fire Service can be perceived as part of a process of separating the recruits from their previously taken for granted realities as ordinary members of the public and socialising them into the heroic 'band of brothers' that characterises the subconscious and accepted realities of those in the Fire Service. This process of separating the recruits from their previous realities, both symbolically and physically, is in effect a rite of separation (Beyer and Trice 1988). As part of their induction to the Service, the recruits are told that they have been successful in competing against thousands of applicants for the coveted and hallowed job of firefighter. They have now entered an elite band of individuals who have the ability to progress into a special and unique organisation, it will be extremely hard work to succeed in the course and they will need to be both physically fit and disciplined to get through the demands of their training. They are given a great deal of instruction both with regards to the skills they will require and, more subliminally, with regard to what is required in the role of firefighter, in a culturally-driven process of development (a rite of transition, Beyer and Trice (1988)). They are isolated from external influences on a three-month residential course, which emphasises the Service-defined masculine virtues of physical fitness and mental toughness. Moreover, they are taught what to think, feel and value in relation to the cultural realities they aspire to, as they are socialised into the culture of the Service, in a process of socialisation as described by Gabriel (1999), Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) and others, where the Instructors constantly reconfirm the prescribed worldview. The culturally required imperatives espoused by those in a

position of authority within the training establishment, and demonstrated to the new recruits by their instructors, are those of hierarchy, autocracy and hegemonic masculinity.

7.7(c) Finally, in this phase of their incorporation into the Fire Service's dominant culture they take part in the ritual of the passing out parade. A ritual (or rite of incorporation, Beyer and Trice (1988)) through which they demonstrate, in both a practical and subliminal manner, their acceptance of the culturally prescribed norms of the Fire Service and their ability to demonstrate, in practice, the culturally prescribed values and behaviours of the Service. This is all demonstrated in a way that is designed to induct the new recruits into the Fire Service and its normalised values. The passing out parade also demonstrates in a very practical way that it is acceptable to display behaviours that denigrate both women and other services if such denigration is disguised as humour, as the ritualistic passing from recruit to firefighter is witnessed, and in this way confirmed, reinforced and supported, by the most Senior Officers in the Service. It is also witnessed and given support by the wider culture in which the Service is embedded, in the shape of the families and friends of recruits.

7.7(d) Through this process, recruits are exposed to the formal organisational framework of the Fire Service, comprising a hierarchy where discipline is highly valued and everyone knows their place within a system of rank conscious domination and control. They are taught to value physical fitness and competition, together with the history and traditions of the Service, which are based on the special nature of the emergency operational task. Moreover, while support for equalities is espoused, the position of women and people from a minority ethnic background is undermined through rhetoric that indicates standards must have been reduced to allow their entry to the Service, and their inclusion is in fact discrimination against white men.

7.7(e) Therefore, a pride in the uniform, and the image of a disciplined Service with high standards that this portrays to the public, is valued in the School and passed on to the recruits through the process of socialisation. There is an underlying belief that



women and men from a minority ethnic background cannot rise to the high ideals required in the Service, and that they will undermine the discipline and standards necessary in those that deliver it. This leads to attempts to undermine the acceptance of under-represented groups during the training process and reinforces a masculine, militaristic and hegemonic approach to the Service's culture, where one of the main functions of the training is to establish a commitment and allegiance to the command structure of the Service in the way first described by Hassard (1993).

## **Chapter Eight**

### **The Realities of Life in the Scottish Fire Service: A Cultural Study in Three Brigades**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

8.1(a) Having considered the historical development of the Scottish Fire Service culture in Chapter 6, and having analysed the process of induction into the Service in Chapter 7, this chapter considers and analyses the contemporary Fire Service culture in three Fire Brigades.

8.1(b) The chapter is based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with Respondents from the three Brigades – Fife, Lothian and Borders and Strathclyde – and starts to present a rich picture of the contemporary culture evident in the Service. In order to be true to the Respondents, their actual words are used wherever possible, in order to give them their own voice, when their lived experience is being analysed and described in this report. The intention is therefore to allow conclusions to be drawn from the data, with regard to the culture of the contemporary Fire Service.

8.1(c) Having analysed the categories of data emerging from the literature review and the analysis of data presented in Chapter 6 on the history of the Scottish Fire Service, having used those categories in Chapter 7 in relation to a study of socialisation into the Service, and having further compared them with the analysis of data emerging from this chapter. It was considered that the consistency of the continuing comparative analysis would be further enhanced by the data from the case studies, if they were presented in four core categories, distilled from those used in Chapters 6 and 7 and comprising the formal organisational framework, the acceptance of equalities, systems of meaning and the informal cultural framework adopted in Brigades. This presentational framework for the data was also intended to enhance the ability to make comparisons regarding similarities and differences between the cultures of the three Brigades in the conclusions to this chapter.

8.1(d) In approaching the three Brigades analysed for this study, I originally felt that as they were different organisations, structured in different ways and covering a range of different risks and geographic areas (as indicated in the following three paragraphs), they would display a certain amount of heterogeneity. However, in analysing the data, many remarkable similarities emerged. Therefore, as it seemed that the contemporary culture of the three Brigades displayed a great deal of homogeneity, the data from the three case studies was amalgamated into a single narrative, in order to reflect this homogeneity and reduce duplication, as the thesis was developed.

8.1(e) Fife Fire Brigade covers an area of approximately five hundred square miles and employs approximately 400 firefighters. It has a number of small and medium-sized towns in its area and a mixture of both urban and rural fire risk. Its headquarters are based in an old mining office building, and the first impression on entering is of a sparsely decorated and fitted out building. There is a canteen on the ground floor where employees take breaks and while there is no formal segregation the tables have different groups sitting at them, so for example Officers sat at a different table to other ranks and non-uniformed support staff sat together. There was a feeling that the Respondents were open and honest during the interviews taken for the study and the building had a reasonably relaxed atmosphere. During the time taken to collect the data for this research the serving Firemaster retired from the Service on ill health grounds and the serving Deputy became Acting Firemaster. At this juncture, the atmosphere in the building became somewhat more relaxed and even jovial at times.

8.1(f) Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade covers an area of 2,500 square miles and employs approximately 1,000 firefighters. Within its area are a number of small and medium-sized towns and the city of Edinburgh. There is a mixture of fire risk ranging from high risk in Edinburgh to remote/rural in the Scottish Borders. The headquarters is situated in a red brick building that was built in 1900 and it is located in the city of Edinburgh. Edinburgh is said to be the home of the first municipal Fire Brigade in the world and on the ground floor of the headquarters is a museum with

artefacts including fire engines, going back to the 1600s. The building does not have a canteen and so it is difficult to get an impression of the interactions of staff in that kind of informal setting. However, from time to time small groups would be seen in the corridors and on the stair landings, talking about work or social issues (so called 'stair heid meetings'). The general impression is of a friendly and open work environment within a traditional building. With regard to the Respondents to the semi-structured interviews, they seemed both honest and open, however, one of the middle managers did seem to be guarded in his language when speaking about the previous management regime.

8.1(g) Strathclyde is considered a large Fire Brigade within the Service and it is often described by its members with pride as one of the biggest Brigades in Europe. It covers an area of 13,831 square miles, including large parts of the Scottish Highlands and a number of islands, and it employs 2,222 full-time firefighters. Within its area, there is a wide range of fire risk ranging from high risk in the city of Glasgow, to very remote and rural risks in the highlands and islands. It contains, in addition to Glasgow, a number of larger towns together with smaller towns and villages. Its headquarters is housed in a modern building based in the town of Hamilton; it has an operational station and a number of other buildings attached to it, including a vehicle repair workshop. On entering the headquarters the first thing the visitor sees is a large mat with the crest of Strathclyde Fire Brigade on it. On the wall, there are pictures of Senior Officers together with their qualifications and responsibilities. Off the reception area are a number of rooms named after previous Firemasters. The Firemaster has an anti-room adjacent to his office, and this room is used for meetings of Senior Officers and "*important visitors*". The room is large with a relaxed area at one end fitted out with coffee tables and easy chairs and at the other end there is a dining table that would seat ten. The room is decorated in dark wood panelling and there is a display cabinet with what appears to be gifts from Fire Service visitors. There is a canteen on the ground floor for all staff however it is noticeable that Officers and "*other ranks*" sit at separate tables. The main initial impression given is of a hierarchical, rank conscious and confidant organisation. With regard to the

Respondents to the semi-structured interviews, all of the Respondents seemed both honest and open regarding their approach to the collection of the data for this thesis.

8.1(h) Where differences emerged between the Brigades studied, this is reported in the four core categories outlined below, and further considered in the conclusions to the chapter.

## **8.2 The formal organisational framework**

8.2(a) The research into the formal organisational framework in the three Brigades gave the clear impression of very traditional organisations, which were both autocratic and hierarchical in their approach to organising. The main organisational imperative for people in the Brigades was to follow the instructions of more Senior Officers, ensuring that line managers were kept informed of progress at every stage: *“here’s the message, get it done”*. The Brigades themselves were top driven and what the Firemaster said, was done. There was little room for disagreement or debate on the part of other managers or staff. Officers who wished to progress in their careers attempted to toe the party line and where this was not done, life could be made very difficult for them.

*“The dominant culture within Strathclyde and I think still within the Service is the hierarchical culture. That is the dominant culture. Where everyone generally is expected to defer to those above and that’s in terms of rank, not in terms of age, experience, skills but in terms of rank and that continues to be the dominant culture”* (Strathclyde Respondent B).

*“If you wanted to try and change say a procedure and it didn’t meet with approval at the end of the corridor (the Firemaster’s office), you were as well just going and battering your head off the brick wall and forgetting about it”* (Fife Respondent B).

*“I had a Sub-Officer whose, I would say mission in life was to make my life as miserable as possible on a daily basis.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

8.2(b) This militaristic approach to management was reinforced by a number of iconic demonstrations of hierarchy including the demonstration of rank through rank markings and uniform.

8.3(c) At the time the data was being collected, new sets of values were being espoused and promoted by the senior managements of all three Brigades.

8.3(d) In Fife, this espousal was being led by a recently appointed Firemaster from England. It was not clear to the Respondents what the new values were, however, it was understood that they were based on those developed within Fife Council and the Brigade was trying to have them accepted by the workforce. Even though a number of managers indicated their support for these new values, they could also use irony to undermine their own espousal. Moreover, it was clear from the research that the new espoused values were not shared, understood or supported by the majority of the workforce, including some of those who were responsible for their introduction.

*“The theory speak values are contained within the Service Plan and the Firemaster’s report on our aims, values and mission statement. Within that are Fife Council’s aims and values and I fully support them. You do need a copy to look at them. They’re very broad, I can’t be too specific but I fully support them because I’m part of the group that was working on them. I fully support them and I hope that everyone else does in the Service as well. You can laugh at them because they’re so, I don’t know the proper word when something is a little bit touchy feely, they’re genuinely enough put in place and they’re good values.”* (Respondent A).

*“Probably at the moment, no, if you go out in the stations and you start asking that sort of question (are the values shared?) you’d probably get blank looks.”* (Respondent B).

8.3(e) In Lothian and Borders, the Brigade was now seen as moving to a more open style with attempts being made to reduce hierarchy, to become more mistake

tolerant, to build consensus and to develop a more democratic style. In short, the Respondents saw the Brigade as becoming a more relaxed place to work.

*“Probably quite a sensible style, I don’t think it’s over authoritarian, I like the idea that most Officers, and I will say that the vast majority of Officers in this Brigade can accept that anybody can have a good idea. You don’t have to have a rank to have a good idea, you don’t have to have had the course.”* (Respondent B).

*“If I could benchmark that to other Brigades I would say that we have a less formalised disciplined approach to the rank structure than a lot of other Brigades. I think that’s been deliberate policy and has been driven through for many years. I think quite successful, so that although there is a rank structure and clear divides at different levels the relationship they have is quite informal.”* (Respondent D).

*“It’s much more relaxed and sensible than it used to be.”* (Respondent F).

*“I think again for myself and right through the organisation people feel quite comfortable, we’ve got a less disciplined style of management, less autocratic than some other Brigades and I think that one of the benefits of that is that people do feel approachable. I think they also understand that it doesn’t mean to say that because I disagree with it, it is going to be changed, but I can feed in and I can say directly I disagree with that without the feeling of being put down.”* (Respondent D).

8.3(f) In Strathclyde, it was also clear from the data collected that a new Firemaster was also espousing a change to the management style, towards a new and more accepting approach to difference in the workforce, and he was also promoting a less autocratic approach to the relationship between managers and the workforce. However, it was also clear that this espousal had not yet resulted in any significant change and the attempts to change the culture of the Brigade were neither believed nor trusted, even by those who were being given the responsibility to manage in the new philosophy.

*“Well, they’re certainly talking the talk but they’re not walking the walk. In my experience in the sort of Senior Officer cadre of the Brigade, a lot of people are talking about it, but we’re not actually putting it into practice.”* (Respondent B).

*“even though we’re trying to move away from this hierarchical culture, that culture still exists, if you get an order from above, then you’ve got to follow that and unfortunately an estimation of your knowledge, skills, experience and how good you are at things is measured by what’s on your shoulder, not by what’s within your ears or anything else. The golden rule is when someone above makes a decision and says that’s it, then that’s it, they don’t brook generally any sort of debate on the issue. There are some exceptions to that but I would say that that’s a general rule”* (Respondent B).

*“We’re saying right we’re going to be an open management style, we’ll be permissive and mistake tolerant, but people don’t believe it and they think, well I don’t know that it’s been tested properly, and there’s a fear there that if they are open then somebody is going to come along with a big stick and whack them over the back of the head for not being as good as they might be.”* (Respondent C).

#### **8.4 The acceptance of equalities**

8.4(a) The data collected in all three Brigades indicated that they had recognised the Government’s equality agenda and were trying to respond to the challenges being put forward to recruit more women into the Service. It was espoused that a more open and transparent selection process should be introduced and that selection should be based on merit regardless of sex. The Respondents indicated that even though problems may exist regarding equality of opportunity, they as individuals had not experienced any difficulties personally. However, it was clear from the data that the dominant view held by the Respondents was that the Fire Service was a dirty and often dangerous job, and clearly this was not a job for women. It was also clear that women would find it difficult to gain acceptance in the Brigades,



*“it’s a kind of social aspect in as much as people say well no, no, a woman shouldn’t be doing a job like that, it’s a dirty and dangerous job, women shouldn’t be doing that,”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

*“I think there’s an attitude where men say I wouldn’t like to see a woman put in a dangerous position like that and I really do think there’s a bit that says no women shouldn’t be in a position where they are going to risk their life, that kind of thing, I firmly believe that. So between the two of them, that society position where people are saying no this isn’t the role that women should fulfil and the cultural thing that says basically women in the Fire Service, over my dead body.”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

*“So I would say we’re not welcoming to women, that would be the bottom line at the moment. I think we’re striving towards it, we’re having to, we’re getting driven towards it anyway.”* (Fife Respondent B).

8.4(b) Lothian and Borders had, at the time of data collection, made the most progress in employing women firefighters and they employed 30 women in this role at that time. There was some evidence that women were becoming acceptable as firefighters.

*“I just see how the women operate on stations now and out on the fireground and it’s only afterwards sometimes you say for whatever reason it comes to mind that that firefighter is a woman. I’m thinking back to the early days, the debate when they started coming in even in to the routine, the debates around the tea tables about how they were never going to be able to do it, it’s a man’s job. There’s still that about of course but I think the women themselves have proved that they can do the job.”* (Respondent F).

8.4(c) However, it also seemed that a deeply internalised view that women could not make acceptable operational firefighters still existed in the Brigade. Respondents

portrayed this perception as emanating from the organisational context within which the Fire Service is embedded, as opposed to being their own internalised opinions.

*“I have friends who are strong feminists who, when we first started recruiting female firefighters, said och naw that’s, that’s no good”* (Respondent E).

*“There’s certainly quite a large group of people who said that they won’t be able to do the job but I think that that culture exists throughout the United Kingdom that there will be people who don’t know of a female firefighter, therefore the presumption is that they won’t be as good at the job as the males.”* (Respondent E).

8.4(d) Therefore, the clear view that emerged from the data in this category, was that the Fire Service was not a job for women as it was a ‘man’s job’. This cultural belief was based on a firmly held, traditional perception of what the woman’s role was in contemporary British society.

*“I personally had a problem with kitchen duties, well my mother looked after me and my wife looks after me, but that’s just a personal thing. I don’t see that as my role in life.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent A).

*“Well, I don’t know what to say about women, sometimes they can be a pain in the arse, but having lived with them all my life no more so than being at home I can assure you.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent A).

*“To say they don’t want f....ing women on this Station because when I’m watching the television I can’t pass wind and I can’t swear.”* (Fife Respondent G).

*“Yeah, well for a time they were just calling her “Princess Difficult”! Maybe blokes are just the same though some are more sensitive than others, just if there wasn’t females on the watch you would never have noticed it”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent A).

8.4(e) Arguments were also put forward that women in the workplace were not required to comply with the same entry standards as men, and furthermore when they were in the Service they received preferential treatment when compared to their male colleagues.

*“In fact, if anything the argument that’s being put back towards me a little bit from male firefighters has been, you know there’s 14 of us in a watch and there’s only 1 female and, and yet the female’s got better facilities than we’ve got ‘cause we’re having to you know...and is that not discriminatory against us?” (Lothian and Borders Respondent E).*

8.4(f) And, one Respondent went as far as to say that the acceptance of women was only being promoted because it was *“politically correct”* and in the eyes of the firefighters this was becoming a point of ridicule.

*“Now, this PC thing we’re actually at the point where we’re almost becoming ridiculed for being too PC” (Strathclyde Respondent A).*

8.4(g) The clearest indication of realities for women in the Service was given by a woman member of the Service, in two stories related during the interview process.

*“When I first started, I used to go for my lunch and you would be sitting eating your soup, or your lunch, or whatever, and people would come along and just ping your bra at the back. Now, as you know, we wear white shirts so if their hands were dirty or whatever, there was a mark there all day and everybody knew that had happened to you. And that was actually an FBU official that was doing that, the Brigade Secretary” (Fife Respondent F).*

8.4(h) And,

*“I started on shift on a night shift after my training and the person in charge sat me down and said, oh, you’ll get your lunch at this time and you can bring something in,*

*or you can go to the canteen for your lunch. So I thought, well, I'll just go for my lunch, it's going to be easier. Well, are you sure you want to go for your lunch, are you sure you don't want to bring something in because you might get a few problems? I said no, I'll try it, you know. And it was...well, whatever you do, when you go down they'll put a cribbage board in front of you, don't touch it. And I asked well, why, and she wouldn't tell me. So, to let you understand, I didn't know what a cribbage board was, right, I had never seen one and I was terrified that somebody would put a cribbage board in front of me, and I would pick it up. So, eventually, I thought I have to find out what it was, what the story was. So, anyway, after a couple of shifts I said look, I would really like to know why I've not to touch this cribbage board because I don't even know what one looks like, and she said well, what they do is they measure their penis on this cribbage board and there's marks all along it with somebody's name on it. I was still frightened that I wouldn't recognise the cribbage board. However, the day it was put in front of me, I knew what it was, and I just got up and walked away. I mean, 4 or 5 years on, I was still getting quizzed about what form of contraception I used, they wanted to know what forms of contraception all the Control Operators used” (Fife Respondent F).*

8.4(i) In all three Brigades, evidence of sexist behaviour towards women emerged from the data.

*“I think we've had our own problems in the past, I think it's fair to say with sexual harassment and equality measures” (Fife Respondent D).*

*“I'm just aware of something going on and it's actually some sort of degrading disgusting act which involves females and whatever else. It's supposed to have been committed by a member of this Service and it surprises me that if somebody is capable of carrying out such an offence, I don't even know how he managed to get through the recruitment system. As I say I don't know exactly the ins and outs of the case, it's all just subject to rumour and supposition at the moment but there is something going on at the moment” (Fife Respondent C).*

8.4(j) There was also a perceived difficulty with people from a minority ethnic background joining the Service. This perception was based on a feeling that, while people from this type of background would be more acceptable than women, racism still existed.

*“I think women take away the macho image of the Service, which a lot of the Service in terms of their culture hang on to, because it’s nice to be this person that does things that other people maybe are never asked to do, I’m not saying couldn’t do, but are never asked to do, and women in the Service takes a bit of that myth away and a lot of people don’t like it because of that. You know, I can’t see how a member of the ethnic community would necessarily take that away, wouldn’t be valiant.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

*“There isn’t the same problem with a black male joining the watch by and large as a woman joining the watch and I think that’s a socio-cultural thing, not just a Fire Brigade thing. I think part of the reason for that is that the self esteem of male firefighters derives a lot from the fact that they’re held in high regard by the public because it’s a difficult job to do, it’s a man’s job in the sort o traditional Western sociological sense of that. When a woman comes into the job now it’s suddenly a job that a woman can do and that can compromise the male self-esteem. I think that’s actually operating at a sort o hidden level, you know a sort o clandestine level and it doesn’t actually come into play when a male, if a black male joins the watch. The self-esteem, the masculinity of the people on the watch isn’t compromised, the difficulty of the job isn’t compromised, it’s still a man’s job, you know. When the crew turn up at incidents, all males there, there’s nobody saying “oh, a woman can do that job”. So I think that explains the slight distinction between the two”* (Fife Respondent C).

8.4(k) However,

*“It’s probably still racist with a small ‘r’. I don’t believe the vast majority of people within the Brigade are racist as you would see in the press, but we are still quite*

*content to talk about the Paki shop or going for a Chinky and if you question them on it, they will say “but we don’t mean any harm”. It’s just a name.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

8.4(l) One Respondent articulated the position particularly well when he stated,

*“I have never thought of Scotland as a particularly racist nation but I have never said there wasn’t racism, the problem is that it is down to the identifiable if you like. You put a woman in fire kit and you would be pushed, at a distance, to tell who was a woman and who was a man. You put somebody with black skin in fire kit and you can tell instantly, no matter what distance that you are, that person is black, and that everybody else is white. And I think because people from ethnic backgrounds may have different coloured skin, then they are more identifiable almost than a woman, if you like, and I think they get a harder time. I think there are more people willing to be racist, and make racist remarks than there are people willing to make sexist remarks. So, I don’t think it’s very welcoming for ethnic minorities either. Again, the same thing applies, and it’s not every day, and there are a lot of people who have absolutely no problem with it and they are in the majority but there are still a sizeable minority who are willing to make these people’s lives hell.”* (Strathclyde Respondent D).

8.4(m) One Respondent indicated that this prejudice may well come from the wider society within which the Fire Service was embedded.

*“There’s people for 35 years of their life, a lot have people have been taught that calling people a black, or a darkie or a nigger, there’s nothing the matter in it”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

8.4(n) And there was evidence of a shared opinion that people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds were not attracted to the Service because it was somehow ‘beneath them’.

*“In terms of people from certain black and ethnic minority communities there is still this idea that the Fire Brigade is not, you know, a job for them because in certain cultures it’s not”* (Strathclyde Respondent B).

*“I don’t think they are welcoming to minority ethnic people. It’s difficult in Scotland because there’s not a big community of black people to pull on but there are still quite racist views on the Stations when there’s nobody there, but people are much more inclined to be openly racist than openly sexist, there are still comments getting made that are racist, and sometimes people are racist when they don’t mean to be”* (Fife Respondent F).

## **8.5 Systems of meaning**

8.5(a) It can be seen from the data collected in all three Brigades that their systems of meaning had existed within a relatively stable negotiated order for a number of years. This negotiated order was based on a set of hegemonic masculine principles, which valued a uniformed, rank-based system of hierarchy at all levels in the organisation. This existing hierarchy allowed for control within the workplace through systems of fear and bullying, where members of the Service would resist the entrance of women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds and indeed anyone else that did not embody the heroic and masculine ideals embodied in white male firefighters. The areas of contestation, which resulted from this relatively stable negotiated order, were those between individuals on watches for dominance, established individuals and new entrants and management and the workforce. In these circumstances, it could be seen that any attempts at change would be resisted through the contestation of what it means to be a firefighter, how one should look, how one should behave and how one should interact with subordinates and peers.

8.5(b) There was an obvious, strongly valued masculine identity for those who worked in each of the Brigades. This identity was wrapped up in the operational task of fighting fire and the physical and mental strength that this required. The perceived outcome from the adoption of this masculine ideal was a hegemonic framework,

which informed the reality of individuals and groups that were in turn embedded in the dominant culture. This cultural reality resulted in meaning making contests that could be characterised as attempts to achieve dominance over other groups within the culture. This contestation was particularly evident in the relationship between senior managers, middle managers and the workforce, where meaning making contests emerged as battles over the preservation of historic and traditional realities in the Brigades, claimed and contested by each group.

8.5(c) Therefore a number of cultural groupings could be identified within the three Brigades studied during the collection of data, and it would seem that they could be clearly divided into three groups comprising watch-based staff, middle managers and senior managers. However, within the Brigades two further groups could be perceived, even though they were poorly represented in terms of numbers. These were female firefighters and firefighters from minority ethnic backgrounds.

8.5(d) The systems of meaning, observed in the Brigades, seemed to be predicated on strong teams, particularly at the watch level but evident throughout each Brigade, and as individuals entered those team-based workgroups, they were exposed to a strong requirement to fit into the pre-existing cultural realities of the team. If an individual did not, or could not, fit into these cultural realities they would be pressurised to conform or they would be isolated, and potentially ridiculed, in the workplace.

*“The watch probably would deal with it. They would try and influence him on a daily, hourly, minute by minute basis. The dominant culture on that watch would start to encroach on them, how can we influence that person. That person either succumbs to that and becomes part of the group or stays aloof from it and doesn’t know how to respond, that’s the problem then when that happens” (Lothian and Borders Respondent D).*



*“In a very negative way, the person can become an outcast within a watch and can tend to be ignored or, or worse you know, almost pigeon holed of being the sort of odd-ball in the watch”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent E).

8.5(e) This pressure would come from the older and more established members of the group and it would be based on hegemonic and masculine domination, which at times could be intimidating or even result in violence (threatened or real) directed towards the individual being targeted.

*“When I joined the dominance in the Brigade, without doubt was that the newest on the watch, the youngest on the watch was inferior to the oldest on the watch and that wouldn’t be based on anything that related to skills or ability, that would purely be related towards length of Service in the Brigade and I think there still is, to some extent, some reliance placed on, this firefighters been in the Fire Brigade for 20 years therefore must have dominance over the firefighters that have been in 4 or 5 years. But I don’t see that much these days. It was almost a bullying culture I think when I came in, which I don’t see now”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent E).

*“A couple of firefighters who I was quite friendly with when I went on to the watch were frightened of these people when they went to their work, they knew at some point in every shift they would be picked on, made fun of, perhaps even physically threatened”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent E).

8.5(f) However, these actions were not always successful in influencing the individual and if they could withstand the intimidation of the work group they could be perceived as being strong enough to ‘take it’, even if they were different. Over time these individuals could become accepted within the workgroup as “*characters*” in their own right and in these circumstances they would be seen as “*one of our own*”. The evidence indicates that the watch would then become protective of them if they were in any way criticised by outsiders, particularly other watches or Brigade managers.

*“Then they can, they can almost become characters, somebody who doesn’t fit in and a watch itself can become protective towards the person on the watch that is a little bit different from the other watches”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent E).

8.5(g) The established systems of meaning and their associated negotiated orders were being challenged in all three Brigades by their Firemaster, who was attempting to challenge and change the well-established and dominant cultural realities of the Brigade. Espousing a new set of values based on fairness and dignity, the three Firemasters were articulating and arguing for a new and more open style, which would in turn re-cast the systems of meaning in their Brigade.

8.5(h) In Lothian and Borders, as indicated in the above paragraphs, this challenge was having some limited effect. However, a different situation existed in both Fife and Strathclyde.

8.5(i) In Fife, it was evident that there were a number of contested realities being articulated, although it would seem that the Brigade had for a number of years been in a relatively stable negotiated order, comprising a system of male dominance within an autocratic and hierarchical hegemony. This negotiated order had been challenged by the Firemaster who was, because of his attempts to change the culture, in conflict with virtually everyone else in the Brigade. At the time this research was being carried out the dominant culture was reasserting itself following the unsuccessful attempts to change it.

8.5(j) Approximately five years prior to the collection of data Fife Fire Authority had appointed a new Firemaster who made attempts to change the culture and undermine some of the traditions that were valued in the Brigade, such as the Officers club. He was also encouraging a new set of espoused values and the entry of women and people from a minority ethnic background to the Brigade. Both middle managers and the workforce saw these attempts as undermining the core values of the Brigade, and they were vigorously resisted through rhetoric, argument and formal complaints against the Firemaster and his management style. This opposition to change, was also

supported by some senior managers who while espousing their support for change also argued that the previously held cultural realities had some merit. As this research was being carried out, the new Firemaster retired on ill health grounds and the previously dominant culture was being vigorously restored.

*“The experience I’ve had before is with two other Firemasters in charge and when we got Mr. \*\*\*\*\* in charge I felt there was a drastic change to the way that the Service was actually being controlled or operated. Certainly away from a lot of the traditions that Fife Fire Rescue Service used to hold and he tried to implement a change without necessarily looking at what the organisation required.”* (Fife Respondent D).

*“But, setting aside individual concerns there is still, and this is quite important I think, a professional subscription to what Fife Fire Service is about and people want to see Fife Fire & Rescue get back to what it was and get back on the right track so it’s quite exciting. There’s a feeling developing of commitment and people prepared to put themselves out to get this direction.”* (Fife Respondent C).

*“We’re changing now to the structure that’s being introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> March where we’re basically going backwards in time to a system that was in place before to address some of the problems”* (Fife Respondent D).

Therefore, it would seem that the new Firemaster had been defeated by the previously dominant cultural realities and the Brigade was reverting to the previous negotiated order.

8.5(k) There was also clear contestation over who could be a firefighter with the inclusion of women being vigorously opposed by the existing male dominated workforce. To a lesser but still significant degree the inclusion of minority ethnic males was also being resisted, however, this was not seen as a major issue by the Respondents, due to the relative scarcity of these minorities in the Fife area.

8.5(l) In the view of the Respondents from Strathclyde, the new approach espoused by the Firemaster seemed to be imposed on the Brigade in a traditionally autocratic manner. The new values of openness and inclusiveness, were not adopted or even accepted by many in the Brigade and the proposed changes were being opposed through rhetoric and in some cases open opposition, through ignoring or actively opposing the adoption of the new culture. It was not, at the time of writing, clear if the current contestation over the reality of what it means to be a firefighter would result in any meaningful change in the organisational cultural reality of the Strathclyde Brigade.

*“Mr \*\*\* came in as a new broom, complete different style and everything but things haven’t really changed that much”* (Strathclyde Respondent C).

8.5(m) The Firemaster in Strathclyde had been recently appointed and he was espousing a new set of values. These new values were grounded in the area of equality of opportunity, treating people with dignity and respect and a new set of written policies had been agreed with the trade unions. A specialist diversity and fairness team had been established. In his visits to operational stations, the new Firemaster indicated, in his response to the semi-structured interview, that he always raised the issue of equalities. In addition, he stated that one golden rule in the Brigade was, as far as he was concerned, to *“treat others as you wish to be treated yourself and that means with respect, dignity and allow people to enjoy their work”*. The Brigade was introducing a policy of *“positive action”* and this was designed to attract and recruit more women and under-represented groups to the Brigade. It was also indicated that the new espoused values were not a matter of choice, and that there would be sanctions against anyone who challenged them by either word or action.

*“I then go on to say on the other hand we will not tolerate acts against our goals, our policy, to attract more under-represented recruits to the Service and I specifically go through, you know, bullying, harassment, and we’re talking here white male against white male or woman to man or black person to white, whatever*

*– bullying, harassment, racist remarks, sexist remarks, isolation, intimidation and even down to the point of religious bigotry as well. Now they know that if they embark upon that kind of behaviour and what we say to them is if someone knowingly sets out, deliberately and knowingly sets out to deny people those rights and respect their enjoyment, etc. or if you condone others who have set out to do it – so you know about it but you’ve done nothing to stop it – then you must face the consequences of your actions or your in-actions and we leave them in no doubt whatsoever”* (Strathclyde Respondent F).

8.5(n) There was some evidence from the other Respondents to the semi-structured interviews that these new espoused/imposed values were welcomed and supported by others in the Brigade, even though they were, in the words of one Respondent, *“top driven”*.

*“It is certainly from the top driven, there’s no doubt about that, previously from my time at Headquarters it’s a different atmosphere and I believe the present incumbent in the Chief’s job is leading from the top and it permeates right down through the Brigade. We know the limits, we know the ethos and people, I think he describes it as we want people to be happy when they come to their work, it’s not too much to ask to be comfortable at work, to be able to come to work without fear of any sort or bullying or any sort of thing and I believe that prevails down through the Brigade”* (Strathclyde Respondent A).

8.5(o) However, there was some confusion with regard to how these new values were being introduced to the Brigade. It was clear from the data that there was no clarity with regard to the new values and if they would be adopted within the Brigade, there was a feeling that the changes were articulated rather than meant and a certain cynicism as *“it had all been seen before”*. The Respondents clearly did not believe that the new values were either understood or shared by the workforce.

*“You do see people that talk the talk but not necessarily walk the walk and I think perhaps a lot of it is to look good outside doing all the right things so the political*

*masters get the right message, but when you look into the organisation again, this doesn't apply here” (Strathclyde Respondent C).*

8.5(p) There was also a view, linked to the autocratic nature of the Brigade, that no one in the organisation was prepared to challenge or even debate the views of the new Firemaster, indeed the data indicated that the autocratic nature of the organisation remained, even though it was being delivered with a new style,

*“In fact what the Firemaster wants happens and that's still the case. That's why I say nothing's changed that much from the last regime. It's a different style, a different manner but still what he wants happens” (Strathclyde Respondent C).*

*“I can think of a number of examples where the Firemaster said right we're doing this because it's Best Value and he's told everybody Audit Scotland and HMI this is for our Best Value Initiative, there's been no input from Best Value and it isn't Best Value and it's a case of trying after the event to make it like that” (Strathclyde Respondent C).*

8.5(q) It would appear from the data collected that a passive resistance was being applied to the new values within the Brigade and, while they were being given lip service, most people in the Brigade were either ignoring them or were waiting to see if they were actually meant by the Firemaster. Even some very senior people seemed to have doubts about the necessity to change the culture.

*“The danger there, I feel, is that we will lose the good tenacity and practical skills of people who don't have the other skills. That's my one concern. Because, you need to have that ability; you need to be a bit thrawn, if you like and determined and perhaps these personality aspects will come across in interview and people can be dismissed because they're over-determined in certain areas and more practically orientated than, if you like, higher skills orientated. I think we do have a good understanding of our people in the Brigade and the problems and what I would say is if we lose a constant promotion from within the Brigade, if we continually were bringing new*

*people into the organisation, in whatever position, firefighters to Firemaster, then we would probably lose some of that. There's an understanding of each other's problems"* (Strathclyde Respondent G).

## **8.6 The informal cultural framework**

8.6(a) There was a clearly defined masculine identity adopted within the Brigades, and this identity was predicated on the often dangerous and physical requirements of the operational task of fighting fires. The Fire Service was seen as a male job, carried out in a masculine environment. This was characterised by the strong attraction in the Service for people who were sports orientated, as it was believed that they were more likely to embody the masculine requirements of the job. There was also an attraction to risk taking and an emphasis on the heroic and dangerous nature of the work.

*"I think that was more to do with the perception that the Fire Service was such a (dangerous) job, and it reflects in equality issues as well, that in actual fact whilst these (health and safety) rules and regulations apply to you know Joe Bloggs and Son, Tin Box Manufacturers, they couldn't possibly be applied with any logic to the Service because we're all rough and we've got to go out there and do things that other people couldn't possibly do."* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

*"When the chips are down, we will do everything we can to assist the public and we will put our lives at risk if necessary"* (Strathclyde Respondent B).

8.6(b) All of the Respondents held a belief that they were part of a special organisation. This belief was based on the dangerous nature of the operational task of dealing with incidents and their view that the public held the Fire Service in high esteem. They had a strong sense of being valued by society, and took pride in being part of a special and heroic occupation. A pride that was based on the ability to carry out the operational task of fighting fires and rescuing people, an essential public Service that could only be delivered by special people who presented a uniformed

and heroic image to the public. Indeed one Respondent went as far as to say that you would have to be part of a special unit to be “*as daft as that*”.

*“I feel that it’s a culture within that says this is a special organisation and that’s primarily because of the role that we play in society.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent D).

*“I think special in the nature of work that we carry out. Special in the amount of training that we have to do to enable us to carry out that work as safely as possible. There’s not, everybody out there can do this job so we’re special in that sort of environment as well and I just think that the whole job we do is kind of a specialist nature because I’ve got mates that just couldn’t hack it”* (Fife Respondent B).

*“I think the nature of the job is special, there’s no doubt about it. Having attended that incident this morning I was speaking to the station Officer, I knew the fellow, and John was saying to me that he was in a bit of a shock because they’d got the fire at ten to eight in the morning his mind set he was walking to his car to scrape the ice to get ready to go home, just starting the engine, and his mind is set on domestics, going home to do such and such. Within three/four minutes from that point he’s at an incident where all hell’s let loose. There’s people jumping out of windows, there’s people requiring rescued, there’s fatalities if that’s not a special job I don’t know what is. You’re being asked as everybody else runs away you go towards it, training procedures PPE and you go to the job”* (Strathclyde Respondent A).

8.6(c) Great emphasis was placed on being able to deal with incidents of fire effectively and it was felt that the Service was essential to the public in times of great need. It was argued that when there was a fire or other emergency the public expected the Service to respond and help them, particularly when life was in danger (a person’s reported call) and that the Brigades always responded.

*“Probably back to the core values to do with incidents. When appliances have to go out the door and when you arrive there are certain things that you do. If you are told*



*for instance a person's reported, then you have to perform and you just can't pull up and be not interested. You get a call, you have to turn up at that call, we have to go, we have to respond, we go there and we do our jobs no matter what disputes are running at the watch at the time, Officers just can't say I'm not gonna go to that. A person's reported you know. It probably would strike a cord with everybody I think that when the public ask for help you have to respond and perform as best we can"* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

*"I think the core values of the Fire Service are to provide a life-saving service and to prevent damage, to prevent injury and to serve, to look after, to do the best we can, to mop up, to be there when everybody else isn't, I don't know how to describe it, if there's nobody else you can count on you should be able to count on the Fire Service kind of idea, that is the kind of underpinning value"* (Strathclyde Respondent D).

8.6(d) The Brigades were based on strongly bound teams, particularly at the watch (or shift) level. Watches were close-knit groups with a strong cultural imperative for individual members to fit in and be part of the team. The social pressures to conform to group norms were often disguised as humour. However, they were in reality a test of compliance to watch imperatives and the masculine ability to give and take the pressures. One clear example of this was given in a story told by a watch-based Respondent, when he was asked how individuals knew that their watch accepted them.

*"Probably being the butt of jokes is the final acceptance. I think when people do join watches, there's some reservation there, especially for recruits on how they're going to cope with the job, how they're going to react to certain things but, basically, I would say that once you start being the butt of the jokes you've actually been accepted on to the watch. When I transferred from Rosyth to Dunfermline Fire Station, I joined the White Watch at Dunfermline, and the White Watch was known because they stood together on everything. They were the most antagonistic shift to be honest. A very old shift as well, a very old shift. Lots of years of experience in there, and I'd only been in the job for two years. I was brought up a catholic,*

*although I don't go to Church or anything else like that. And I'd been on the shift for maybe three months, and they'd taken a wee while to get to know me and the rest of it, and one Saturday morning there was a lodge having a march and they started outside Dunfermline Fire Station. I have to say being brought up down in England, I never understood a lot of the catholic/protestant, orange stuff and all the rest of it. The band started playing and the next minute I got called down to the watch room so, off I goes like, you know, and then three of the older firefighters got the engine room doors open, threw me outside all shouting "catholic, catholic" like, you know, all with big smiles on their faces, and this huge orange band was outside and all of that, but to me they'd just said, look you're just one of us now, you know." (That could have been quite frightening?) "It could have been, yes" (Was that an indication that you were now part of the watch?) "Yes, it most definitely was, yes." (It wasn't in any way a kind of harassment because of your religion?) "Not at all, no. I never perceived it as that and, at the time, the whole shift, there was probably about 14 or 15 on the shift at the time, all at the doors, they're not all protestants like, all laughing their heads off at it like, you know, and sure enough I mean the doors are opened back up and they dragged you back in, all laughing and joking, so it was never perceived as being nasty or threatening. So, on a personal basis, that's how I felt I was accepted over there." (Respondent E).*

8.6(e) The fact that there was little movement between watches, the reality of working long shifts together (the night shift lasts for fourteen hours) and the attraction of the dangerous and masculine nature of the task to "*certain people*", meant that the cultural realities of Fire Service life were entrenched, normalised and "*very strong*". It was perceived that watches would see themselves as a well-defined unit, within which individuals would look after each other and sort out any internal difficulties that may arise in relation to the group.

*"Yes, I think so. Yeh, cause there's things happen on watches that never comes out, eh, they're resolved."* (Lothian and Borders Respondent A).

*“Bonding yeh. I don’t like to get involved in the stuff about, you live with these people, if you’re on the station you sleep with them, you know what I mean, you eat with them, you socialise with them and I don’t like to say but there’s always the possibility that you’ll die with them, so as long as that continues which it will, it will continue forever as long as there is a Fire Service crewed by human beings, you really need to have that wee bit of bonding.”* (How strong is it?) *“Very, very strong. I think, personally I think it’s strong enough to say that they would lie their hearts away in order to save your chum, but whatever if it was a discipline case, I think they would”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

8.6(f) In this cultural reality where team values were emphasised, the most important and peer-enforced cultural imperative was to fit into the team.

*“You’ve got to join the team and be put into the team. The Fire Brigade is not an individual’s job, given the choice between a long-distance runner and a rugby player, I’ll take the rugby player because he’s used to playing as part of a team”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

8.6(g) Life for individuals who did not fit in could be made very difficult. The established teams did not welcome those who did not fit into the dominant culture or who were seen as being in any way different. The cultural imperative in those circumstances was to fit into and be part of the existing and dominant culture. People who joined the Brigades had it made very clear to them from the beginning of their service that they were part of a team where everyone was required to work together, and the actions of individuals could affect the reputation of the whole Brigade. Therefore, it was self evident to those embedded in the culture that compliance was a requirement for new members of the team. In return for acceptance within the Brigade and the existing support networks given to individuals, those individuals were required to comply with the norms of the Brigade, and any deviation from those required norms was likely to be met with strong pressure towards compliance, pressure applied by the peer group of that individual. At watch level, individuals could be targeted through *“verbal abuse”* designed to expose their perceived

weaknesses and encourage acceptance of the necessary norms. On occasions, this peer group pressure could take the form of physical attacks thinly disguised as horseplay.

*“It’s just when they’re sitting bored about the stations and whatever else and they’ve nothing else to do but pick on the weakest”* (Fife Respondent B).

*“I mean that’s how I felt, I felt intimidated from them all the time”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

*“I have to say like the for example water fight mentality at every opportunity the buckets and stuff like this. It could be construed, depending if we did it too many times to one individual as bullying, if you know what I mean. If the one individual kept getting the bucket of water over them then it was a good laugh but at the same time the individual could, offence could possibly be taken”* (Strathclyde Respondent A).

8.6(h) However, the most common method used to ensure compliance to the prevalent group norms was based on rhetoric, in particular nicknames applied to individuals based on something that the individual had said or done, or some physical characteristic which was related to their perceived inability to ‘do the job’.

*“It can manifest itself straight away in a nickname. Some nicknames are in good fun, some are just pejorative and intended to make people feel uncomfortable. It can start with a failure to include people in social events and things like that. Failure to include them in jokes, all the myriad little indicators throughout the day that you’re not really part of the group, you know”* (Fife Respondent C).

8.6(i) Or, as one Respondent put it in a story about “*fat Boab*”,

*“I met a colleague from Strathclyde and he was relaying a story to me, he was supervisory for a retained station and he was phoned to the house and asked to come*

*in urgently, one of the firefighters wanted to speak to him. He went in, took the individual aside, he says what's your problem? The individual says I'm not happy Sir. What's the problem? This is a true story, he said I've been bullied. He took it very seriously, right okay now that's a bit of a serious accusation, can you be more specific? They are calling me nicknames. Who are? I don't want to say, Sir, cause I'll get into trouble. It's a very difficult situation, you have to tell me more detail. If you want me to deal with it I need to know who is doing it. He says I don't want to do it because you know there are consequences if I do tell you. Well, I'll find it very difficult to assist you if you don't. I mean I can speak to the watch in general terms but if it's an individual specifically, he says so who was it? It was Fat Boab. Now Fat Boab's obviously got his nickname because he was rather rotund. So if you make a mistake they'll try and put a nickname on you for that, if your shaped a certain way or you happen to be losing hair, they'll probably put a nickname on you"* (Strathclyde Respondent A).

8.6(j) However, those who were strong enough to withstand these social pressures, could in time become accepted as a watch 'character'.

*"Having said that I think the Fire Service tends to attract people who are strong willed and individualistic anyway and a lot of people can cope with that quite easily, in fact I've met people who have positively celebrated the fact that they're not quite in there with the rest of them you know, and they come to be tolerated and that's just him, that's just his way, and although they're not part of the group maybe the tension eases off after years and they just tend to be looked upon as someone who's a bit odd"* (Fife Respondent C).

8.6(k) The dominant cultural framework within the Brigades could therefore be described as white, male and macho in nature. It was historically predicated on an autocratic management style and it existed within a hegemonic and masculine framework of identity, a framework that clearly prescribed who was worthy of inclusion within the culture and who was not, particularly with regard to those who could 'do the job'. This framework resulted in a number of behavioural issues within

the Brigades, all of which could be linked to a process of establishing domination in the workplace, not only between individuals and groups at watch level, but also between the groups that made up the Brigade structure. These behavioural demonstrations of conflict over meaning were used to establish or challenge respective positions in a kind of ‘pecking order’. Individuals could be subject to extreme personal pressure, which could on occasions lead to the threat or actuality of physical violence. In order to establish managerial dominance, firefighters would be shouted at and dominated in the name of hierarchy and autocracy.

*“The culture of the Fire Service, the culture itself, what’s the right way to put this, it’s been white male macho”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

*“I remember it well and bullying was just a way of life back then. I personally suffered it, I think for about 18 months when I look back”* (Strathclyde Respondent A).

*“I remember being ridiculed if you got it wrong, if you got it wrong at a fire situation somebody shouted at you”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

*“Well, I think the hierarchical culture runs all the way down, straight down, you know right to station level and I think certainly in my experience of station level, that there still is this subculture of experience and inexperience or that the recruit is still, you know, the sort of lowest form of life sort of idea”* (Strathclyde Respondent B).

*“I think personally Brian as long as we are strutting about in uniforms, as long as we have the rank structure, then we are always going to have that sort o style of management that comes from that”* (Strathclyde Respondent B).

8.6(1) A number of these issues can be brought together through a consideration of the ritual of retirement from the Service (see Appendix D). This significant ritual emphasised the masculine nature of the Fire Service through an emphasis on sports, and the ability to carry out the critical, physical and dangerous task of fighting fire,

through the stories that were told. It highlighted the internal separation of the Service into groups where the firefighters did not really mix with the other groups that were present at the retirement ritual. In particular, it was noticeable that women formed groups that were separate from the men (or vice versa). This separation was further reinforced by the language when the term ‘*tarts*’ was used by men to describe women, and subjugated men, in a hegemonic manner. The masculine identity of the firefighter, was glorified through the story about firefighters sticking together when Peter was threatened. Thus, the strong feelings of being part of an honoured team of men, and the loyalties that this engendered, were reinforced, not only for Peter’s generation but also for all of the younger firefighters that were present at the function. This ritual also brought out a certain ironic scepticism with regard to the autocratic style and discipline within the Service. It highlighted the pleasure taken in individual victories against the backdrop of a broad base of discipline (“*getting away with it*”) and individual incompetence’s in the system (inevitably to do with somebody of a higher rank than the storyteller). It also indicated a very strong loyalty to the Service and the people who delivered it “*my boys*”.

## **The contemporary culture of the Scottish Fire Service: Some interpretive conclusions**

### **8.7 The formal organisational framework**

8.7(a) With regard to this study, the formal structures and management style adopted within all three Brigades studied were traditional, hierarchical and autocratic in nature. The management style was militaristic, as demonstrated and confirmed by all the trappings of rank such as uniform, rank markings, saluting, size and style of office and standing up when a more Senior Officer entered the room. The militaristic and autocratic organisational imperatives of the Service, which emerged from the interpretations of the data regarding both the Service’s history and its formal socialisation processes, were both confirmed and emphasised by the data on the contemporary culture of the Service, presented in all three case studies. The autocratic managerial style demonstrated within the Brigades seemed to be accepted,

and by implication approved of, by the majority of people employed within the Service. These values and behaviours were driven from a top-down perspective but they were also displayed at all levels of the Service, at its worst the resultant formal systems were based on an atmosphere of fear and bullying. In particular, it would seem that any dissent or deviation from the prescribed norms would be dealt with through disciplinary procedures or promotion-based sanctions.

8.7(b) In each Brigade studied a new set of espoused values were being articulated in an attempt to change the nature of the formal organisational framework, however the introduction of change was proceeding to a different extent in each Brigade. In Fife, it would seem that the espoused values had resulted in little change within the organisation. In Strathclyde, it would seem that change was being espoused but was not yet happening. In Lothian and Borders, it seemed that attempts were being made to reduce the hierarchy, become mistake tolerant, build consensus and develop a more democratic managerial style, however, at the time of writing, even though some change was being introduced, it was not clear whether or not these attempts to change would be successful.

## **8.8 The acceptance of equalities**

8.8(a) In each of the Brigades studied there was an espoused welcome to women, and Respondents gave the impression that they personally had no difficulty with the acceptance of women in the Fire Service. However, despite some evidence of women being accepted into the Service, particularly in Lothian and Borders, this espoused welcome was not carried through in practice. The Fire Service was believed by Respondents to be a dirty and dangerous job that required both physical and mental strength to carry it out successfully. They indicated that for any individual to be accepted into the Service they must be able to 'do the job' and demonstrated that within the current dominant culture it was considered to be self evident that women could not do this, fighting fire was obviously a 'man's job' and therefore women could not really make good firefighters. The cultural realities of the Service meant that women would find it difficult to be accepted in the Service, and there was



evidence in all three Brigades that the introduction of women as firefighters was being, and would continue to be, resisted. Even in the Brigade that seemed to have made most progress (Lothian and Borders) there was a view expressed that women could only enter the Service because the standards of entry had been lowered to favour them. It was also evident in all three Brigades that racist views persisted and that people from minority ethnic backgrounds would not be welcomed into the Service. However, it did seem that minority ethnic men would be more acceptable than women would, as they were less of a challenge to the masculine self-defined identity of the Service.

8.8(b) Therefore, it is argued that the Scottish Fire Service can be seen as a “*masculine workplace*” (as defined by Alvesson and Du Billing (1997), and Telford (1996) in Section 4.8 above). Brigades will be particularly resistant to the acceptance of women in the Service, as the people employed within the Service and ingrained in its culture perceived women as unable either mentally or physically to ‘do the job’. It was also evident from the data gathered, that people from a minority ethnic background would not be accepted within the dominant culture of the Fire Service, although the resistance to men from minority ethnic populations did not seem to be as pronounced as the unacceptability of women.

### **8.9 Systems of meaning**

8.9(a) It is evident from the data that the systems of meaning in the Scottish Fire Service comprise a network of normalised rules, which are strong, binding and very similar in all three Brigades studied. These normative and often internalised rules are based on a strongly valued, organisationally defined masculine identity, which governs what it means to be a firefighter, how one should look, how one behaves and the values and beliefs required to be adopted, and demonstrated, by accepted Service practitioners. The formal organisational structures, clearly observable within the Service, are differentiated both horizontally and vertically in the same way within all three Brigades. This differentiation leads to the development of strong ‘in groups’ at different hierarchical levels and in different geographic locations in the Service.

Within these groups the male ideal type, encapsulated in and based on the fire fighting role, is celebrated through both formal and informal rites, rituals and ceremonys, which promote the belief that everyone else, apart from those in the 'in group' is somehow less of a 'real man', and therefore less capable of doing 'the job'. These values and beliefs, together with the behaviours that reinforce them, lead to discrimination against anyone who is seen as different from the idealised norm. These factors, which have existed for many years within the Fire Service, are both normalised and internalised by actors in the Service, they inform the development of a Service structure comprising a hegemonic hierarchy of horizontal and vertical layers, with the use of rank and demonstrations of masculine identity, to challenge for or maintain dominance within the workplace. This multi-layered and multi-faceted cultural reality leads to organisational resistance to change, and in particular to resistance to the acceptance of women or other under-represented groups in the Service. In these circumstances, resistance is often characterised by those demonstrating it as humour, even though it is used to dominate women and colonised males.

*"If you can't take a joke you shouldn't be in the job"* (an often heard remark in the Fire Service).

This humour can, all too quickly, turn into physical and mental bullying and harassment.

8.9(b) Within the Service, humour is also used to denigrate supervisors and more Senior Officers and to glorify a culture of 'getting away with it' within the workforce, as demonstrated through the ritual of the retirement ceremony (see Appendix D). All of these methods of glorifying the male, heroic firefighter are constantly reinforced through discourse at different organisational levels within the Service. In these ways the systems of meaning evident in the Brigades demonstrate the adoption of a masculine identity as described by Cheng (1996), Collinson and Hearn (1996), Ackroyd and Thomson (1999) and others in Section 4.6 above, and defined in Paragraph 4.11(g) as it is understood and internalised in the Service.

8.9(c) The systems of meaning, demonstrated within the Scottish Fire Service, allow for enhanced socialisation and control within the Service. However, the results of these control mechanisms are not always predictable in their application by those attempting to use them to manage the Service, in particular those who are attempting to engender cultural change. The systems of meaning in the Fire Service reinforce the heroic and masculine status of the firefighter, and this reinforcement is based on being able to do 'the job', engage in the masculine behaviour of practitioners in the Service and give and take the humour 'like a man'. Those who accepted and support this approach to the Service are rewarded by being adopted into the 'brotherhood'. This adoption brings with it a strong sense of worth and identity, the feeling of being part of an essential emergency service that ensures the safety of the public, being part of a service that is always there to help people in times of great personal need and often in dangerous circumstances. Moreover, all of this is founded on the sense of identity, belonging and self worth that is in the minds of those who practice it, the ideal reality of that heroic and masculine being, a true firefighter. Through these processes, the systems of meaning evident within the Scottish Fire Service do allow for a powerful system of integration for its members, however, in the current context of the Service it does not seem that these integrative processes are supportive of any change to the Service or its dominant culture. Moreover, while the culture is integrating in the sense of providing a consistent identity for its members, it is not necessarily integrating in support of the organisation's objectives as defined by the formal leaders of the Service, and suggested by the proponents of the corporate culture project.

### **8.10 The informal cultural network**

8.10(a) The systems of meaning outlined in the preceding section, and the conflicts over reality they engendered, have over a considerable period of time resulted in a relatively stable negotiated order, as described by Reed (1992), in the cultural reality of the Scottish Fire Service. As can be seen from the data presented in this chapter, there are many similarities between the cultures of the three Brigades studied. The most striking similarity is a pride in delivering a physically demanding and often

dangerous operational Service when fighting fires, and this was evident from virtually every Respondent, no matter which Brigade or which section of a Brigade they came from. The Respondents articulated this shared value as a pride in delivering a special, essential and often dangerous emergency service. It was based almost entirely on the operational task of fighting fire, a task that required both physical strength and mental toughness, this in turn meant that the Fire Service was not a job that everyone was either capable of, or actually wanted to carry out because, *“as everybody else runs away you go towards it”*.

8.10(b) The development of this heroic self image adopted by both individuals and groups within the Brigades studied is reinforced by a strong perception that the role carried out by the Fire Service is one that demands and receives a high status within the wider Scottish society, and is held in high esteem by the general public.

8.10(c) The cultural reality for those who worked in the Service, particularly those who are based at fire stations, although this reality was demonstrated in the research throughout all areas of the Service, was one of being a member of a strongly bound team. Many pressures and sanctions, together with a peer driven requirement to ‘fit in’, bind these teams. For those individuals who cannot or will not fit in, there are limited options as strong peer pressure will be applied to those who are seen to deviate from the culturally prescribed norm. This pressure to comply will often be disguised as humour, a kind of Fire Service gallows humour, but at its worst, it comprises personalised attacks that are in reality a form of harassment or bullying. In some cases, this pressure to conform may become physical, with attacks on individuals disguised as horseplay. Therefore, the choice for deviant individuals is to support, conform to and demonstrate culturally prescribed beliefs regarding what a firefighter should be, how one should look, how one should behave and so on, or leave the Service. A third option for those who are physically and mentally strong enough to cope with or oppose the culturally prescribed imperatives is to become the watch ‘character’. This adoption of a new identity in the eyes of the individual’s peer group can result in the individual concerned being accepted, looked after and often

defended by the rest of the team as one of us, “*he may be a character but he is our character*”.

8.10(d) The strong team-based approach to the Service has resulted in a fully defined cultural reality. It is particularly unwelcoming to outsiders or those who are seen as being different to the culturally prescribed norm. It has been established over many years of Fire Service history and it is fully normalised in the minds of those who deliver the Service. Therefore, the Scottish Fire Service cultural reality provides a process and a framework within which the overwhelmingly male members of the Service adopt a strong masculine identity. A process and framework within which distinctions are made about us and them, as described by Parker (2000), where ‘us’ are those who can be firefighters and ‘them’ are those that cannot.

8.10(e) This dominant cultural reality and its associated masculine identity, for both individuals and groups that make up the Fire Service within Scotland, is constantly claimed, reinforced and contested. However, its current reality is commonly accepted and normalised, by both individuals and groups in the workplace, and it is seen by Fire Service actors at all levels as being highly appropriate. This reality makes the current dominant culture an accepted negotiated order, existing in a relatively stable steady state, which is likely to be extremely resistant to pressures for change. The culturally driven control mechanisms, which enable the current steady state of the Scottish Fire Service, comprise both normative and applied controls. The normative controls are adopted as group norms within the Service, they are enforced through the acceptance, promotion, and propagation of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace, a propagation that is enhanced and enforced by dominant individuals at all levels. In this way, the dominant culture, and its methodology for enforcement, is passed on from older group members to newer members through a long-established process of socialisation, initially through the recruitment and training process. The dominant culture is then further enhanced when individuals are posted onto a watch, by similar processes of control at the group level.

8.10(f) These normative controls are encouraged and reinforced by applied controls used by managers in the application of militaristic principles and discipline, as indicated by the militaristic artefacts of rank and uniform, and are demonstrated by practitioners at all levels within the workplace. At the individual level, the prescribed cultural norms adopted within the Service bring a requirement to embody a physical and mental toughness, together with being part of 'the team'. This in turn requires a capability to 'give and take it' in terms of joke taking and pressures, both subtle and more overt, to conform. Thus ruling out both women, and men who were in any way 'different' to the culturally prescribed ideal, a cultural ideal that is the embodiment of the masculine and heroic firefighter as it is established in the minds of those in the Service.

8.10(g) Therefore it can be seen that the Fire Service provides a cultural organisational framework where men can display group solidarity with other men, physical toughness and resistance to both authority and danger as described by Hearn (1992). This provides the culturally prescribed ideal in the Fire Service workplace and it strongly influences masculine behaviour by providing the socially defined description of real men in the Service, providing an ideal type or standard against which firefighters measure themselves (Telford 1996). In this way, the job becomes a basis for their identity and what it means to be a man. It allows men to express the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity through their speech, dress (uniform), physical appearance, activities and relationships, and it provides a framework within which behaviours acceptable to the group can be constructed (Messerschmidt 1996), an internalised guiding principle.

8.10(h) For these reasons the Fire Service attracts men who are eager to prove their manliness to themselves and others and this has resulted in a male dominated workplace, a masculine organisation that reinforces the subordination and domination of women and alternative masculinities. The Service itself can be seen to have colluded with its members in developing the culture by supporting more formal systems of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, individuals feel free to adopt hegemonic masculine positions in the workplace confident that this has been verified

by the organisation, and that others will support and validate the behaviour which results, in the way described by Telford (1996).

8.10(i) In the cultural realities of the Service therefore, it is important to be able to swear and articulate in an overtly sexual way and be able to give and take a joke 'like a man'. In this way, interactions in the Service may appear humorous but they are also insulting and degrading to others. New members of the Service may be teased incessantly to see if they can take the "*piss taking*". Those who can are accepted as part of the Service while those who cannot are likely to be kept at a distance or at best tolerated (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Humour is a key part of the punitive and protective aspect of self-organising in the Fire Service and new firefighters will often have jokes played on them so that they learn their place within the hegemony. It is often argued by those in the Service that this is necessary to develop the ability to watch out for each other and develop a high level of awareness and solidarity.

8.10(j) Therefore, it can be seen that the Scottish Fire Service displays virtually all of the characteristics of hegemonic and masculine workplaces outlined by Connell (1995).

### **8.11 Differences between the Brigades studied**

8.11(a) Even though there were many striking similarities between the Brigades studied, there were also a number of differences. However, the differences indicated by the data seemed to be more in emphasis, as opposed to being significant with regard to the accepted underlying cultural reality, which was normalised as the prevalent and dominant culture in the three Brigades studied. The cultural make up of these Brigades could therefore be conceptualised as comprising the same base culture with differences in emphasis being overlaid in a kind of translucent opaque build up. This leads to an understanding of the three cultures being basically the same, in the makeup of their realities, but having their depth and edges slightly different, blurred, or alternatively magnified as a result of a different emphasis in the build up that resulted in their contemporary culture. Therefore, each of the three

different Brigades can be seen as having the same underlying, normalised and taken for granted cultural foundation, brought about by a very similar history, tradition and initial training, but with differences in emphasis between the Brigades, as a result of them being managed as different organisations with different structures and formal technologies. These differences in emphasis can be usefully conceptualised as a series of opaque overlays in multiple layers, layers that soften or bring into sharper focus the cultural reality of the common Fire Service cultural foundation adopted throughout Scotland.

8.11(b) Notwithstanding the above interpretation regarding the commonalities within the cultures of the three Brigades examined in this study, there was one significant and potentially major difference between them. This difference was in relation to how the dominant cultures within the Brigades had responded to attempts by senior managers to change them, through changing or amending the existing organisational values on which they were based. In each Brigade studied, senior management was espousing a new set of values. These new values were all based on a desire to change the Brigades into organisations that were less autocratic and hierarchical. In addition, there was an attempt to transform the organisations into ones that were more accepting of differences, the intention was for this to lead to a workforce that more reflected society and which was inclusive as far as women and people from minority ethnic backgrounds were concerned. The introduction, and more importantly, acceptance of these new values was being resisted with differing degrees of success in the different Brigades. In Lothian and Borders, senior management had been espousing the new values for some time and there was evidence that they were slowly being accepted, even though there existed a residual commitment to the old values within the workforce, and a certain amount of doubt that the change would be followed through to a fundamental shift in the underlying culture. In Strathclyde, the dominant belief was that even though the new Firemaster was espousing the new values, the majority of managers and the workforce did not support them, and it was believed that it was unlikely that the change process would succeed. In Fife, the attempt to change the values was linked to a new and unpopular Firemaster who had been ‘imported’ into the Brigade. That Firemaster had retired on ill health grounds



and the Brigade was actively and enthusiastically reverting to the previous dominant cultural realities, as the data for this report was being collected. This change dynamic will be further considered in Chapter 9.

## Chapter Nine

### **Culture and Change in the Scottish Fire Service: The Effect of Masculine Identities: Some Findings**

9.1(a) Chapter 1 of this thesis outlined a superficial analysis regarding the culture of the Fire Service and the change dynamic to which it is being subjected. It also indicated that prosaic assumptions regarding culture, identity and change are no substitute for appropriate research-based conclusions if an understanding of the issues of culture, identity and change as it relates to the Fire Service and its contemporary context are to be developed. This chapter is intended to bring together an understanding of the complex interactions between what are themselves complex organisational dynamics, in a way that represents “*multiple realities without getting lost in the jungle of different accounts*”, based on a thorough, constant comparative analysis (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). Therefore, what is presented here is based on detailed research into how masculinity is bound up in the traditions of the Service and the ways in which identity has been developed, reproduced and constituted as a means of resistance to change in the Scottish Fire Service.

9.1(b) The intention of this chapter is to further develop the ‘rich picture’ presented in the previous chapters of this report, by way of an interpretive analysis on how the culture of the Scottish Fire Service, and the change pressures to which it is being exposed, are affected by the adoption of masculine identities within the Service.

#### **9.2 Introduction**

9.2(a) As can be seen from preceding chapters, there has been a major change in the social context within which the Fire Service is required to operate since the 1970s. Of particular relevance to this study are the social changes regarding equalities and health and safety in the workplace. In contemporary British society, it is now becoming accepted that women are able to perform the same work tasks as men and are entitled to the same pay as their male counterparts for carrying out those tasks.

As indicated by Bradley (1999), this is likely to be due to a number of factors: the fact that physical strength is less important in an age where machinery has largely replaced manual labour; that women's aspirations have changed and they are more likely to aspire to work in areas that were previously the exclusive domain of men; that employer attitudes towards women in the workplace have changed; that trade unions are more likely to be supportive of equalities in the workplace; and that these realities have been enshrined through the introduction and enforcement of equal opportunities legislation. In addition, the risk welcoming approach to the delivery of the Fire Service and the heroic self-image of the firefighters who embody its values has also been under pressure from the social changes required by the Government's introduction of health and safety legislation.

9.2(b) These factors form the backdrop to the politically applied pressures for change in the Fire Service. Political pressures that, it would seem, are being applied through a sequential process described by civil service Respondents as an invitation to change, a directive to change, an imperative towards change through re-organisation or financial leverage and finally, if these pressures do not work, legislative imperatives to change will be introduced. It would seem that despite all of these mechanisms being deployed by Government over recent years, and the fact that the social context of the Fire Service has also changed dramatically in the last 35 years or so, the underlying dominant culture of the Fire Service in Scotland has not changed in any meaningful way. This challenges the view of Schein (1992), Tayeb (1988) and Anthony (1994) that in order to survive organisational cultures must adapt to changes in their environments.

9.2(c) This chapter is designed, through an interpretation of the available data, to provide an understanding of why, despite considerable pressure from the Government, the Fire Service has so far successfully resisted any change to the internalised, normalised and dominant culture described in previous chapters.

### 9.3 Government applied pressures for change

9.3(a) Following a series of reports into the Fire Service in the 1980s and 1990s, which all concluded that the Fire Service may be held in high regard by the general public and may be well managed and indeed effective in the task of fighting fire, but that it was not particularly effective in improving the poor record of fire deaths and injuries in the United Kingdom, and neither was it a cost effective service (The Audit Commission Occasional Paper; Value for Money in the Fire Service 1986, In the Line of Fire; The Audit Commission 1995), Government Ministers embarked on a process of applying pressure in order to effect change. As this pressure was being applied, two further government imperatives were developed. Firstly, it was made clear that the Government did not believe that the Fire Service had a good equal opportunities record in relation to the recruitment and retention of under-represented groups, and that this had to be improved. Secondly, ministers outlined a mechanism to require change through the Best Value Regime (The Scottish Executive: The Scottish Fire Service of the Future 2002).

9.3(b) Mike O'Brien was the first minister to outline the "*modernisation*" requirements of the Government for the Fire Service, through a series of speeches starting in 1999. In these speeches, he indicated that there was a necessity to modernise the Fire Service and its management, and that changing the Service's approach to managing risk would result in better value for the public purse. He indicated that the Government intended to achieve change through the articulation of aims and objectives for the Service and the setting of clear and measurable targets within a best value regime. He also signalled that the legislative route would be used to introduce a new statutory duty for community fire safety. In O'Brien's view, the introduction and application of a set of challenging targets and the public reporting of progress towards their implementation would improve the safety and equality record of the Service. In addition, the new approach to managing the Service would improve the record of the United Kingdom with regard to fire deaths and injuries, while at the same time making the Service more cost effective. He indicated that the imperatives to change would be given teeth through an enhanced inspection and audit process.

9.3(c) Having articulated this agenda, in which he both encouraged the Service to change and indicated that legislation would be used to change the role of the Service, O'Brien introduced the threat of structural change. Because in his view a regional approach, or collaboration between Brigades, would realise economies of scale and would therefore provide a second mechanism for reducing the costs of the Service.

9.3(d) In 2001 a new minister, Dr. Allan Whitehead was given responsibility for the Fire Service and he confirmed a commitment to articulating the purpose of the Service and setting objectives and targets to be obtained, in a reflection of O'Brien's approach, although the rhetoric he used was somewhat different and less confrontational. In softening his language, he argued for an agenda that would be built on partnerships and incentives, and in this way, he hoped that the Government's agenda would win the support of everyone concerned with delivering the Fire Service. His approach was, he explained, about achieving the required changes to the Service through the development of a discourse around *shared values* and *common objectives* (my emphasis), however, change and modernisation would be necessary in any event. During his period of tenure, Whitehead also introduced a new and significant requirement for change when he introduced, for the first time, an overtly stated requirement for the Service's culture to be changed. Indeed, he indicated that *the single most important issue for the Fire Service over the subsequent ten years would be to change the culture of those who delivered it* (my emphasis).

9.3(e) In bringing a rational and analytical approach to the Fire Service workplace, the Government have indicated that they intend to change their approach to the Fire Service. Moreover, by insisting on clearly defining the tasks to be performed by the Service and setting standards and measurable targets to be achieved, the Government have clearly outlined their intention to use their power to control the Service and to require it to change. In this way they have indicated an intention to ensure that the Service is reliable, predictable and most of all efficient, an approach to the Fire Service based on a mechanistic metaphor for the delivery of a Service fit for the future (Morgan 1997).

9.3(f) However, despite the considerable pressure brought to bear on the Fire Service, its staff, and its structures and the way these pressures were applied by the Government, little seemed, at the time this data was collected, to have changed in the Service, or in the cultural approach of those who actually deliver it.

#### **9.4 Cultural resistance to change**

9.4(a) It was clear from the data gathered during the course of this research that the culture of the Service was considered by the Government as being very strong, internalised in the realities of those who delivered it and extremely difficult to change. Respondents believed that the Fire Service culture was based on an historical tradition going back many years if not centuries, and it was founded on a set of deeply held values and beliefs. It was also considered that the culture would be very difficult to change.

*“I mean people talk about securing a change in culture quite glibly as though it is an easy thing to do. I don’t think it is easy at all and particularly as regards the Fire Service. There will have to be a cultural change, but it is going to be difficult for the Service to get that cultural change implemented in the individual fire stations in the minds of the individuals who are the Service”* ( Civil Service Respondent B).

9.4(b) O’Brien (2001), in an interview he gave to *Fire* magazine in August of that year, indicated that while people in most organisations feared change due to an inherent insecurity and fear, this characteristic was enhanced within the Fire Service,

*“the institution of the Fire Service as a whole is reluctant to change. It does fear change and it fears change unnecessarily”* (O’Brien 2001, pg. 11).

9.4(c) He also went on to indicate his view that this reluctance to change was orchestrated by the Fire Brigades Union, which he described as conservative with a small c in defending or resisting change to their members’ conditions of Service, and indeed with regard to change of any sort in the Fire Service.

9.4(d) Two issues in particular support the view that the Fire Service would be difficult to change and clearly show the inertia that was inherent in the Service, health and safety and equal opportunities. In the 1970s, two pieces of legislation were passed by the Government in relation to these issues and, while these Acts of Parliament were not aimed at the Fire Service specifically, the Service was legally required to comply with both of them. For many years, the Service acted as if neither of these Acts was of any relevance to Fire Brigades and no change at all was initiated in any of the Brigades studied. In fact, it took many years before the Service started to address the requirements of the legislation, and this was only given any impetus as a result of action external to the Service. With regard to the equal opportunities legislation, Brigades only started to change their practices and procedures as a result of a number of individual actions against specific Brigades in relation to cases of sexual harassment in the workplace. In fact, even in 2005 only 2.4% of the Fire Service workforce in Scotland was female, despite the fact that women make up over 50% of the population (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services for Scotland 2005), and this is despite the equal opportunities legislation being in place for 30 years. With regard to the health and safety legislation, change only started to happen as a result of improvement notices being served on individual Brigades by the Health and Safety Executive. As one Respondent from Strathclyde stated,

*“my perception as a Junior Officer and as a Firefighter, was that they ignored the safety issues on the basis of the culture of the world is changing but we don't need to”* (Strathclyde Respondent G).

9.4(e) In fact, there was a clear perception on the part of the Respondents from the Service that both the equal opportunities and health and safety legislation were more of a hindrance than anything that would improve the Fire Service, or would have to be taken seriously. It was seen as being obvious that women could not do 'the job' and therefore there was no need to change the masculine culture of the Service in order to attract more women to it. It was also a clear perception amongst members of the Service, and arguably amongst members of the general public, that the work of the Fire Service was inherently dangerous and that compliance with safety standards

would prevent real firefighters from carrying out their heroic task in the way it should be carried out. These factors underpinned a strong and effective resistance to change within the Service.

## **9.5 Contested realities based on discourse**

9.5(a) In considering the pressures for change on the Scottish Fire Service and the resultant resistance to it, it is difficult not to conclude that the dominant culture of the Fire Service has, so far, successfully resisted the Government imperatives towards change, through contesting the realities of the Service and how it should or would be delivered. In order to understand how this has been accomplished it is necessary to consider the process of change and resistance in a series of discourses at two levels: a grand discourse with the Service at national or societal level and an internal discourse at the individual Brigade, or organisational level.

## **9.6 The societal discourse**

9.6(a) It would seem to be evident that the Government in the United Kingdom is putting forward an inclusive agenda for society, based on making improvements in the equal opportunities environment and improving the health and safety of the population, particularly in the workplace. In this way, the intention is to improve the well being of all, and establish a society based on equality and fairness. In many ways this discourse has been concluded at the national level and while it could be argued that not everyone in the United Kingdom has accepted or adopted the approach the Government desires, the imperatives for compliance with both health and safety and equal opportunities have been enshrined in legislation. With strong sanctions for those who do not comply in the organisational setting (The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, The Sex Discrimination Act 1976). These societal imperatives have now been in place under successive Governments for over 30 years, and it would appear self-evident that in general terms most people within the work environment have accepted the health and safety requirements. However, this case is more arguable when it comes to social equality issues and in particular equality of



opportunity within the workplace. Bradley (1999) and Casey (1995), for example, have argued that even though gender segregation may be a persistent factor in the workplace things do seem to have changed since the 1960s, as the physical and social imperatives of the workplace have shifted. This has led to writers such as MacInnes (1998) indicating that the proportion of women in the workplace has increased dramatically and Halford and Leonard (2001) arguing that the gender issue is declining as a divisive factor in work organisations. However, it can also be argued that gender bias and sex discrimination continues to be found in organisations (Morgan 1997). Moreover, masculine values can continue to dominate some workplaces, and organisational cultures can be used to construct and impose gendered power relations and masculine identities in these circumstances (Burke and Nelson 1998).

9.6(b) This would certainly seem to be the case in the Scottish Fire Service where, despite the increased political scrutiny brought about by the inception of the Scottish Parliament, very few women and almost no people from minority ethnic populations are employed in firefighting roles. In addition and unlike almost all other work organisations, the health and safety imperatives imposed by the Government seem to have been ignored by a significant number of firefighters in the operational context.

9.6(c) This societal discourse has resulted in a number of areas of contestation through rhetoric, which is carried out at industry or Fire Service level, and is between the Government and the Fire Service as an entity. Within this discourse, there is agreement between the parties that the Fire Service culture is both strong in its depth of normalised acceptance within the Service and conservative in its nature. It is also commonly agreed that the culture of the Service will be very difficult to change and even if change was possible it would be a long and slow process.

*“Yes, absolutely, the Fire Service is steeped in history and people get quite comfortable with what they’re in, what they’ve joined. I don’t believe anybody accepts change easily but I suspect the Fire Brigade would be on the very guilty side of that, we don’t like change”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent B).

*“I mean, I doubt if the culture on a station has changed that much from what it was when I joined 32 years ago. It’s like cutting back ivy, if you stop cutting it back it very soon just grows out where it was again”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

*“The Fire Brigade are very traditional in their culture of finding a hurdle that you can’t get over, they’ll bring that hurdle forward very quickly”* (Strathclyde Respondent F).

9.6(d) There were also clear indications that the primary role of the Service, in fighting fires and carrying out other emergency operations, was accepted by virtually everyone who delivered the Service, and this was fully embedded in their cultural realities. The role (often described as the Service’s values by Respondents) had been taught to firefighters for decades during their initial training and they were to save life, to protect property and to carry out such humanitarian duties as may be necessary. This role was widely internalised as being inextricably linked to the physical operational task of fighting fire and carrying out rescues in emergency situations, it occupied a culturally iconic status in the eyes of the Respondents and was fully accepted in the Service. Very few people other than senior managers saw any reason for any change to the role of the Service at all, and even at senior management level, there was full support for this area of work continuing to be the primary role of the Fire Service.

*“I think the role has served us very, very well. I don’t know what else you’d like to see...there’s, you know the main three issues, which were saving life, saving property, and providing humanitarian Services. I don’t think we’ve changed a great deal from that. I think the Service does that well, and I just don’t see a reason to change it now”* (Fife Respondent E).

*“I don’t think there is any desire at all to change from our traditional role by the workforce, represented by the Fire Brigades Union, and there is no real desire by politicians, both local or national, to change. I mean they want change but they don’t necessarily want change in our role”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

9.6(e) With regard to the culture of the Service it was clearly indicated by the data that there was an internalised and strong support for maintaining the “*core culture*” of the Service, even amongst senior managers. A clear indication was given through rhetoric that in the view of the vast majority of people in the Service, it was the culture of the Service that had made it an effective emergency Service. Moreover, changing the masculine values that underpinned it may well result in a less effective emergency capability and a Service less able to deal with the realities of Fire Service operations, operations that required strong team work, determination, physical and mental strength and courage. While these attributes are not exclusively male in their application, in the eyes of those who deliver the Service they were seen as predominantly masculine in nature. Through ironic rhetoric, it was implied that firefighters would have to change if women entered the Service, and these attributes would be lost to society if the Service changed its dominant culture by softening its masculine approach and accepting under-represented groups.

*“What I’m saying is the core culture does not have to change”* (Fife Respondent H).

*“The locker room culture at the end of the day wants to stay locker room culture, in the main it wants to stay that way”* (Strathclyde Respondent E).

9.6(f) And if women were to enter the workplace,

*“you cannot tell dirty jokes and firemen are concerned that this aspect of their working lives will be restricted if women are allowed to join”* (statement made by a watch-based Officer Lothian and Borders).

9.6(g) And,

*“this is not a job that is suitable for women, the men may have to clean up their language”* (statement made at a watch meeting by a firefighter from Lothian and Borders).

9.6(h) However, in developing an understanding of other issues in the discourse at this level, it was evident that different groups in the Service had somewhat different views and approaches to promoting them, particularly when it came to why the Service had not made changes.

9.6(i) Senior manager Respondents argued that changes to the culture of the Service would be difficult, due to the restrictions imposed on the Service through the national frameworks within which managers had to operate and over which they had no control. Frameworks such as the national standards of fire cover, the recruitment and promotion regulations and the nationally negotiated conditions of Service for firefighters. Senior managers believed that they were prevented from making appropriate changes by a perceived lack of power invested in the management of the Service, a lack of power that meant that leader-driven change in the Fire Service was impossible. As one senior manager put it,

*“if you’re saying to me that as the head of an organisation I should spend 50% of my time directly trying to change culture I would say no, that is probably beyond the ability of even the best of managers in the Service. The only way you could really change the culture quickly would be to have power, which we haven’t got. Power such as you would find in a private organisation where, for example, if you wanted to change the culture then you would come in, you would make a relatively quick assessment of everybody’s strengths and weaknesses and some of the team would leave and some would stay and you would bring in new people that were more likely to suit your management style and therefore would be more likely presumably to try and influence the culture. You can’t do that. You’re dealing with people that have come up through the watch culture, through station culture onto divisional culture and so on. With a single tier entry system nobody would have time to make significant change, all you can do is keep working at it and hope that over your five or ten years, depending on how long it is, you can influence it to some extent. But, I think if you were going to be measured by changing the culture in the Service you wouldn’t get very high marks.”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

9.6(j) The Respondents from the Fire Brigades Union had a very different perspective with regard to change in the Fire Service. They argued that the union had always been in favour of change when it came to improving the Service, or their members' working conditions. However, they only made this argument in service-delivery-related areas such as improving equipment, fire safety and conditions of service, and not in the area of cultural change. They also argued that the duties of firefighters should not be expanded into areas such as firefighting at sea, and that the conditions of service, training methodologies and other areas should not be changed unless it was to the benefit of their members and by their agreement. Here, it would seem that while the union agreed with, and indeed argued for, change in certain areas, they only made these arguments where they were in agreement with the need to change. They were, conversely, strongly opposed to changes in the culture of the Service and other areas, areas where they did not agree that change was either necessary or appropriate.

*“At the moment, we’re currently changing over to this training for competency which, as a Union official, the FBU line is that we are opposed to it”* (Fife Respondent E).

*“But there have been people who have tried to push us in directions that I don’t think the Service should be going. The main one like that has been firefighting at sea. I have never understood the desire of Brigades to move the whole of a land-based Fire Service into an off-shore environment. I believe there is need for some form of fire cover for shipping but I don’t believe it’s land-based Fire Services. I strongly disagree”* (Strathclyde Respondent D).

9.6(k) The Union also saw themselves as being in a classic struggle with the Government over financial resources, and they believed that the main reason that the Fire Service could not change was a lack of money with which to fund the necessary change process. They also implied that in their belief the Service was currently under-funded and that the Government were intending to make further reductions in, or “cuts” to, the Service’s budgets.

*“I think the other thing, and I’m being too supportive of management here, I think budgetary problems that we have at the present time, as well, hasn’t helped them at all. A lot of the Health & Safety legislation, and the equal opportunities stuff actually required quite an input from a resource side of things which meant money, sending people on courses, making sure they were aware of legislation, and the Councils weren’t prepared to actually increase budgets to assist Brigades in doing that and, instead, what we had was a piecemeal situation where we had officers, good ones, who weren’t being given the education to try and implement either the Sex Discrimination Act legislation, or the health & safety” (Fife Respondent E).*

*“It was because this is forced on the Fire Service but in order for Firemaster x to carry it out, he really needs to deploy people in that area and he doesn’t have the people to deploy in that area because if he does that, then he’s taking that away from such and such and this is how I keep going back to finance as that’s what happened in my opinion.” (Strathclyde Respondent E).*

9.6(1) The trade union Respondents believed that Government had always underfunded the Service and that value for money was a Government code for reducing the Brigade’s share of the public purse, through making financial restrictions on the Service. They also believed that the Best Value initiative was just the latest mechanism through which the Government intended to restrict the funding of the Service.

*“I see Best Value as just the exact same as everything else that we’ve had. It’s all part of the exact same thing of trying to do the Service the same, for cheaper. The problem is I don’t believe the people who are saying it, if they’re trying to say that we’re trying to give the best value to the people who are paying their taxes, to get the best Service they can. then fine. But I don’t believe that’s what it is about. I believe it is about trying to cut what we had and, basically, that’s what I believe it is about” (Strathclyde Respondent D).*

*“The angle of best value that I don’t support is more, as I said, the kind of Charlie Chaplin kind of movie of the factory, you know, they’re trying to get more out of you for less”* (Strathclyde Respondent D).

9.6(m) Through promoting the positions outlined above, through rhetoric in the political and budget setting spheres and by invoking the support of the wider society for the emergency aspect of the Fire Service, virtually every group of people employed to deliver the Service have successfully argued for the status quo to be maintained. Moreover, through these processes they have resisted change within the Fire Service and its dominant culture.

### **9.7 The internal discourse**

9.7(a) In collecting the data for this research, three relevant groups were identified as being significant to the study at this level: senior managers, middle managers and the workforce as represented by the Fire Brigades Union. Internally within the individual Brigades, these three groups have developed different and distinctive positions in the contested realities evident within the Service. Senior managers have recognised the Government imperatives towards change and are trying to facilitate cultural change, in order to adapt to their changing context, in the way proposed by proponents of the corporate culture project (Shein 1992, Salaman 1997). Moreover, even though there was little support for change in the primary role of the Fire Service from the majority of managerial Respondents, the need for ‘cultural’ change was espoused by brigade managers at all levels.

*“Organisationally, the culture has got to change. The culture has got to be more responsive”* (Fife Respondent H).

9.7(b) The trade union Respondents, on the other hand argued that the Fire Brigades Union had always ‘pushed’ for appropriate change within Brigades and indeed had found it necessary to encourage or cajole managers to make changes that would improve the Service.

*“The Fire Brigades Union has always been pushing for fire safety issues and always pushing community fire safety, always been pushing for life rather than property, and I think, as much as that view was shared it hasn’t really been until the last 10 or 12 years that the Fire Service has seen an avenue there, apart from just pure fire safety, fire prevention inspections, I think the actual going out into the community and being part of the community is always something that the Fire Brigades Union has believed in, get rid of the spit and polish, and let’s get out and do fire prevention, fire safety. So I think the Union has always been pushing that direction”* (Strathclyde Respondent D).

*“I think management’s been dragged along”* (Fife Respondent E).

9.7(c) However, senior management saw the resistance to change as being orchestrated by the Fire Brigades Union.

*“They are a very strong organisation; very dogmatic, very focused”* (Fife Respondent H).

*“If you look at trades unions in general they are perhaps the most conservative of organisations. It’s just this unwillingness to change I think”* (Lothian and Borders Respondent C).

9.7(d) And in one Brigade (Fife) there was a perception on the part of Senior Officers that middle management supported the union in its opposition to change.

*“This is where I think a lot of it is very difficult, we would like to go down a managerial route. Our middle management we are trying to bring on board, under that ethos, and there is resistance there.”* (Where is the resistance coming from?)  
*“The Fire Brigades Union and middle management. I think it is coming from middle management with a lot of influence from the Fire Brigades Union”* (Fife Respondent H).



9.7(e) These internal tensions have resulted in change being promoted by senior managers in all three Brigades studied. However, the changes being articulated by senior managers have been accepted, or contested, to varying degrees in each of the three Brigades. Even though it can be seen that the three Brigades were subject to very similar contextual pressures, and within each Brigade the requirement for cultural change was being both espoused and driven by the relevant Firemaster, the process of accepting the need for and achieving change was very different in each Brigade. In Strathclyde those working in the Brigade did not yet trust the changes being proposed, or the commitment of senior managers to them. In Lothian and Borders, the change process had been under way for some time and was starting to show some signs of acceptance within the Brigade, acceptance that may in time result in a change of culture in the eyes of Respondents. In Fife, a new Firemaster had started an attempt to change the dominant culture within the Brigade, this change process was strongly resisted by most members of staff, including managers at all levels, and at the time of the current research the Firemaster had retired on the grounds of ill health. The dominant culture was, at this time, vigorously reasserting itself.

## **9.8 The effect of masculine identities**

9.8(a) As indicated in Chapter 4 male identity is often predicated on the work men carry out, and the jobs they do can therefore allow for the adoption of a masculine identity in the workplace, which in turn reinforces feelings of being self reliant, powerful and competent (Cheng 1996, Burk and Nelson 1998). Within organisations that reinforce a masculine identity in this way, group solidarity with other men, physical toughness, resistance to authority and risk taking can all be valued and promoted within a cultural framework (Hearn 1992, Messerschmidt 1996). In these types of organisations, a masculine identity is bound up in relations of dominance at work and the absence of, or separation from, women, together with the emphasis on what are perceived as masculine values and practices (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). In considering these factors Connell (1995) has developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which emphasises a gender ordering amongst men and can

also be related to the dominance of women and subordinated, marginalised males in the workplace. Therefore, certain occupations and workplaces are likely to attract men who are eager to prove their manliness to both themselves and others. In these workplaces, the desire to construct the meaning that work has in terms of masculinity is likely to be strong and consistent with the broadly shared values of physical strength and courage, values associated with masculinity and indeed the Fire Service. These values and beliefs will inevitably be challenged by the presence of women in the workplace.

9.8(b) The same concept may also be related to the construction of relations of domination regarding internal organisational relationships with managers, and individuals considered not yet experienced enough to be worthy of the valued masculine identity. To construct 'the job' as highly masculine and then to demonstrate the embodiment of its ideals is a way to gain self-respect and a desired public esteem (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997). In some circumstances, these imperatives can lead to an extremely male dominated workplace, which is not tolerant of women, men from a minority ethnic background, or individuals and groups who are in any way different from the locally prescribed, culturally idealised masculine norm.

9.8(c) In considering these issues, three dominant themes can be observed running through the development, propagation and lived meaning of the contemporary Fire Service culture in Scotland. These three themes have emerged from the research: the development of a masculine identity reinforced by and claimed within the existing cultural framework (see Paragraph 4.11(g) for a definition of masculinity, as it is understood and internalised within the Fire Service). As well as tensions internally between the workforce and managers together with external tensions with the Government, and the exclusion of women from the hallowed task of firefighting.

9.8(d) The data indicates that an effective starting point for a consideration of the adoption of a masculine identity within the Fire Service could well be the requirement of the main work task, the task of fighting fire, and the culturally

prescribed physical and psychological requirements for those who undertake that task. Fighting fire is a dangerous and often dirty job, it requires physical and mental strength and it is often stated by firefighters that not everyone has the necessary abilities to carry it out successfully. There is also a strong element of risk taking required in carrying out the task, and from time to time firefighters are seriously injured or killed in the practice of their profession. In addition to the physical nature of the task, there is a necessity to carry out rescues of persons from fire, persons who can be seriously injured, burnt or overcome by smoke and this adds a heroic dimension to the task in the eyes of the public. When dealing with incidents such as road traffic accidents or persons trapped, for example in machinery, firefighters are also often required to deal with those who have been seriously injured or killed. This requires a certain mental strength, particularly when children are involved. Historically, these factors have led to the socially accepted proposition that the Fire Service is obviously a job for ‘real men’, a job carried out by ‘disciplined heroes’ who will risk their own physical and mental well-being to fight fire, save life and protect property. The research undertaken during this study indicates that the historical antecedents for this belief go back into the mists of time and they have been reinforced throughout the history of the Service, particularly following the Second World War when many ex-servicemen were recruited into the Scottish Fire Service. As Cunningham (1971) put it,

*“it is the element of risk and the demand for courage which sets the fireman’s job apart from others”* (The Cunningham Report 1971, pg.22).

9.8(e) These culturally prescribed imperatives have resulted in the normalised and unquestioned, subconscious adoption of a strong working class masculine identity that is readily accepted by the majority of firefighters, and is reinforced by public attitudes towards the Service and those who deliver it. This has led to the adoption of a heroic, masculine cultural identity, which is claimed, promoted and publicly demonstrated by individuals and groups within a Fire Service context, using a variety of claims regarding what it means within the dominant cultural reality to be a firefighter. Within this dominant and hegemonic cultural reality of the Fire Service,

only those who have had firefighting experience or are currently involved with fighting fire are considered to be truly part of the real Fire Service culture, and it is those people who are accepted as the embodiment of the heroic traditions kept alive within the Service.

9.8(f) The ongoing claims to masculine identity and its adoption within the workplace require a definition describing who can embody the hallowed role of firefighter and thus lay claim to the culturally desired masculine identity. This in turn requires the definition of the in-group of firefighters. Moreover, and by extension, this also identifies those individuals and groups who are less than the culturally prescribed definition of 'real men' in a Fire Service context, i.e. women and subjugated males. The resulting meaning making contests between the various groups, in a struggle to ensure that they are recognised as deserving of the hallowed identifications, lead to a continual contestation of competing realities for dominance within a hegemonic framework, for individuals and groups who deliver the Fire Service. These factors, in turn, lead to the second and third themes that have emerged from the research, meaning making contests with both managers and the Government over the power to dictate both what Services will be delivered and how the Service will be managed and the exclusion of women and other 'less worthy' males.

9.8(g) Historically, it has been seen as self-evident within United Kingdom society that the Fire Service is not a job for women, however this position has been challenged over the last thirty years and the Government, and potentially more women, now see the Fire Service as a job that women can successfully carry out. However, the acceptance of women, and potentially the acceptance of minority ethnic groups or other males who do not fit the mould, is seen as a fundamental challenge to the adoption of a masculine identity for firefighters currently within the Service. Men cannot be 'real men' in the presence of women (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999) and therefore the acceptance of women in the Fire Service is being resisted through the current dominant Fire Service culture. A number of strategies have been adopted in order to achieve the exclusion of women from the role of fighting fire through rhetoric and resistance. It has been argued that women are not

physically or emotionally capable of carrying out the tasks necessary in the Fire Service, that men will have to modify their behaviour if women are accepted into the Service, that there are no suitable facilities for women in the Service or even that the men's wives would not accept their husbands working the long night shifts with women. Moreover, when women have entered the Service they have been subjected to a variety of efforts to exclude them, both subtle methods of exclusion and more direct sexual harassment.

9.8(h) The data also indicates that members of the Service have formed tight working groups of men, who throughout history have entered into conflict for dominance and control. Whether that has been internally over issues of discipline, or 'getting away with it' between groups comprising management and the workforce, or between members of the Service and Government over issues such as funding or control over the role and direction of the Service.

## **9.9 Conclusions**

9.9(a) It is clear from the data collected for this research that the Fire Service in Scotland is being pressurised by Government to change its priorities, and move from a Service entirely based on fighting fires, to one that sees its first priority as fire prevention. There are also Government imperatives towards changing the masculine, militaristic culture of the Service and its management, to make it more accepting of women and people from a minority ethnic background and the health and safety agenda. The existing, predominantly male members of the Service, at all levels, are resisting these changes.

9.9(b) The resulting contestation can be understood as a conflict in two layers. The first layer relates to a surface application of power and control in the Service and a corresponding resistance to the application of that power. This layer of contestation relates to Fire Service structures and its formal systems. The second layer of contestation relates to the normalised, taken for granted realities of the Service and its cultural frameworks. It applies to normalised ideas with regard to what it actually

means to be a firefighter – what one should look like, how one should behave and what values and beliefs one should have. In short the informal systems or culture of the Service.

9.9(c) Therefore, the underlying resistance to change within the Fire Service can be seen to be based on a pre-existing organisational reality, which requires the adoption of a masculine identity in the workplace, together with the ongoing necessity to propagate, support and reinforce the cultural meanings upon which that reality is based. These imperatives are manifest through supporting articulation, claims of superiority for masculine approaches to the Service, struggles for domination and behaviours designed to reinforce the culturally accepted dominant realities of hegemonic masculinity within the Service. This culturally prescribed framework of values has resulted in a negotiated order, which is embedded in Fire Service realities. However, this steady state, with its exclusion of women and other under-represented groups is not imposed at a distance by those in authority in order to control the workforce, as indicated by Kunda (1992). It is in fact imposed in a very individual and personal way by the dominant culture of the Service in a determined effort to propagate and maintain the heroic masculine identity of the firefighter.

9.9(d) The outcome of this cultural reinforcement over many years has been a dominant culture that is normalised, unquestioned, exclusive, excluding and self-perpetuating. It is supported both consciously and unconsciously by the majority of individuals and groups within the Service, as opposed to being applied or required by the organisation, and it is therefore extremely difficult to change. In this light, the Fire Service can be seen as a system of culturally-based rules, giving collective meaning and value to masculine behaviours and activities in the workplace, as indicated by Scott and Mayer (1994), but not necessarily integrated into schemes promoted by those in power such as the Government. In the case of the Fire Service, virtually all of those employed by the Service actively promote these culturally-based imperatives. In the existing Fire Service reality, the dominant culture has been promoted and imposed by both the management and the workforce at all levels within the Service, and these elements are currently opposing the changes being

required by Government and espoused by the senior managers of the Service. This power play has resulted in a network of power relations within a system of attempts at control from within the organisational context in the form of the Government, and resistance to change from the dominant culture of the Service, which attempts to support and reinforce the current negotiated order and its dominant cultural realities.

9.9(e) For these reasons the main conclusion that can be drawn from this research regarding change in the Fire Service is that the underlying resistance to change within the Service is based on a pre-existing organisational reality, a culturally prescribed organisational reality that requires the adoption of a strong hegemonic masculine identity in the workplace.

9.9(e) This masculine identity fully matches that defined in Paragraph 4.11(g) and it drives the ongoing development, support and reinforcement of the cultural meanings upon which that identity is based, through all those who wish to embody the ability to 'do the job' in the eyes of the other predominantly male members of the Service.

## Chapter Ten

### Conclusions

#### 10.1 Introduction

10.1(a) The purpose of this chapter is to draw appropriate conclusions from the research undertaken in the development of this thesis, conclusions that are properly grounded from a theoretical perspective. Moreover, the chapter aspires to recommend the potential for further research in the area of organisational culture, change and the effects of the adoption of a masculine identity within a workplace culture.

10.1(b) The initial intention of this thesis was to develop a clear understanding of the Fire Service's structures and culture, together with the pressures for change to which it was being subjected. As the research developed, the issue of the adoption of a masculine identity within the Service emerged from the early data collection. This drew attention to the need for a critical examination of the relationship between organisational culture, gender and identity formation, as proposed by Whitehead (1999). In order to progress the search for understanding in these complex areas of study, while maintaining the necessary academic rigour, Chapter 5 indicated that the research could usefully be structured around the research question.

*Will the politically applied pressure for change in the Scottish Fire Service be resisted by the Service's existing culture, and the masculine identifications of those who provide the Service?*

#### 10.2 Conclusions

10.2(a) The interpretations contained in Chapter 9, based on an examination of the interaction between the formal organisational structures and the informal cultural realities of Fire Service life (Schwartzman 1993), have enabled a number of



conclusions to be drawn from the data regarding the culture of the Scottish Fire Service.

10.2(b) Firstly it can be concluded, with some confidence based on the data collected, that there is a clearly defined and dominant culture observable within the Service. This culture is demonstrated through the contemporary cultural realities of life in the three Brigades studied. It is linked to centuries of history going back to Roman times, times that were the start of the militaristic management style adopted by the Service, a militaristic style that was reinforced through the years, particularly following the two World Wars and a style that can still be observed within the Fire Service of today. This management style and the culture of which it is a part, were further entrenched, reinforced and to a certain degree normalised, immediately after the Second World War, when there was a large influx of people from the armed forces into the Fire Service.

10.2(c) There does seem to be a view that the Fire Service has not been seen as a job for women, either by those employed to deliver the Service, or by the wider societal culture within which it is embedded. Attention has been drawn to this issue through the literature review (Alvesson and Du Billing 1997, Hall, Hockey and Robinson 2007) and may be based on the mobilisation of perceived or accepted differences between groups of people in the workplace (Whetton and Godfrey 1998, Burk and Nelson 1998, Parker 2000,) within society. This interpretation of both societal and Service perception has been supported by my research, through the words of Respondents and in the data gathered from the documentary analysis. Indeed, it would seem that even at one of the most difficult times for Western society, the Second World War, while women were employed in the Fire Service, they were not allowed to carry out the task of fighting fire. Instead, they were confined to jobs that were seen by society, and those within the Service, as being more suitable for women, such as driving, cooking or dispatch riding. Once the war was over and "*the men returned*", women went back to domesticity and jobs that were perceived to be more suitable for them in the eyes of society, and those within the Service.

10.2(d) There were very few Black or Asian people in Scotland immediately following the Second World War, and only one black person was employed in the Fire Service in Scotland at that time, as far as it is known. While that person did seem to be accepted in the Service to a certain extent, it was also evident that he faced some discrimination, particularly with regard to opportunities for promotion, despite achieving a relatively senior rank in the Service prior to retiring. He believes that his relative acceptance in the Service was due to his abilities on the sports field, and this belief tends to confirm a culturally-based requirement in the Service to have the masculine attributes of physical strength and endurance, in order to be perceived as being able carry out ‘the job’ of a firefighter.

10.2(e) The Service’s historical development outlined in Chapter 6, together with the long working hours and the watch-based shift patterns, have led to strongly bound teams within the Fire Service. These teams live, work and socialise together and these factors, in combination with the physical and mental strength required to do ‘the job’, seem to have resulted in the formation of a culture that is both masculine in its character and potentially excluding of others. The adopted and supported cultural realities of the Service are, in the minds of Respondents, further reinforced by the dangerous nature of the task carried out by the Fire Service, and admiration from the wider society for those who carry it out. All of this has resulted in the perception of firefighters as heroic masculine individuals who work in an essential emergency service to the benefit of society and often at great personal risk to themselves. To a degree, this stereotype would also seem to be adopted within the wider societal culture, within which the Service is embedded.

10.2(f) The ethnographic evidence gathered from contemporary Respondents and presented in Chapter 8 supported the superficial analysis relating to the perception of Fire Service culture, outlined in the introduction to this report. The dominant culture of the Fire Service does therefore seem to be firmly intertwined with masculine values and predicated on the physical and demanding task of fighting fires. These formative imperatives can be seen to have resulted in an internalised, often self-defined, masculine culture, which is hegemonic in nature and is further enhanced by

the apparent public perception of firefighter as hero. Accepted and promoted by its supporters at all levels within the Fire Service, this culture evokes a strong moral commitment to both the Service and its dominant culture from those who deliver it. The culture, being at least partially internalised for the majority of people within the Service, seems to be both exclusive in the minds of its proponents, and excluding of others who do not live up to its ideals. It would also seem to be a strong and persistent culture that is passed on through socialisation, not only within the workplace but also as a major component of the selection and training processes for those who join the Service. For individuals in the Service there is an imperative to 'fit in' to the team with regard to the dominant culture and to demonstrate masculine values and behaviours, together with a pride in being able to fulfil the physically and mentally demanding task of fighting fire. These requirements, or cultural realities of the Fire Service, can be seen to be consistently claimed, idealised and demonstrated, by the majority of people in the Service, on a regular and frequent basis.

10.2(g) Even though it appears evident that the dominant culture is normalised throughout the Fire Service, it would be a mistake to conclude that this has resulted in a view of Service culture as a totally unifying force, as different and conflicting hierarchical layers can be perceived within the Service. Three hierarchical layers can be distinguished in the formal structures of the Service: senior management comprising principle Officers, a middle management layer and a workforce layer, often claimed and represented by the Fire Brigades Union. A consideration of the management and workforce layers indicates that while they may be both underpinned and characterised by the common Fire Service culture described above, they are nonetheless arranged in a hegemonic hierarchy. This hegemony seems to have resulted in a hierarchical and autocratic management style, with all the trappings of rank, uniform and discipline, displayed in a masculine manner by managers of the Service. The workforce culture can also be seen to espouse, display and support the dominant Fire Service culture, however, it can also be defined as being in opposition to the managerial hierarchy of the Service. Therefore, while the dominant and internalised Service culture may be underpinned by common values and beliefs, and the different layers within the hierarchy may agree on, and glorify, the dominant

masculine identity of the Service, there are perceptible horizontal layers caused by the autocratic element of the formal structures adopted by the Service. These structural layers, management and workforce, may both be based on the same underlying normalised culture, as they display the same cultural characteristics and beliefs, but they are also in opposition to each other within a conflict for hegemonic domination over power in the workplace. This hegemony appears to result in meaning making contests displayed through rhetoric and behaviour, designed by each group to lay claim to being the rightful defender of traditional values in the Service, traditional values that are currently perceived by those who form the culture as being under attack from the Government. In addition to the horizontal layers that can be perceived within the Service's formal structures, the competitive masculine values demonstrated by the Fire Service culture, as observed in this study, also lead to vertical separations and tensions between individuals, watches, stations and other work groups. These tensions are even more pronounced in the rhetoric used to describe under-represented groups, or groups working within the Service that do not have a direct fire-fighting component to their role. In this way, I would argue that the male members of the Fire Service engage in a process of identity claiming, claimed in relation to those 'other' groups and individuals, in a reflection of Collinson's (1992) work.

10.2(h) For these reasons, I believe that Fire Service realities can be understood as a mosaic of cultural groupings, both united and divided by a common culture. United in their adoption of a masculine identity (as defined in Paragraph 4.11(g)) and encapsulated within the cultural glorification of firefighter as hero. However, they are also divided by a system of hegemonic masculinity, demonstrated through values, attitudes and behaviours that are displayed by all of the different groups within the Service. Moreover, despite the differences in emphasis, and the different strengths of the cultural realities found in the three different Brigades studied, the underlying cultural reality as it is lived, understood and internalised by those who provide the Service is the same in all three Brigades. The only differences being in the relative strength and determination with which the culture is lived and demonstrated by its participants.

10.2(i) It also seems to be evident from the data collected within the three Brigades studied that the changes being proposed by the Government will not be readily accepted by the current dominant culture of the Scottish Fire Service. The required changes in role, from fighting fires to preventing them, will undermine the physical and dangerous nature of the task. The acceptance of women will dilute the masculine identity of the Service. The acceptance of under-represented groups will challenge the hegemonic status quo within the Service. The reduction of autocracy and hierarchy in the management of the Service will reduce the militaristic power base of managers within the Service, and the requirement for Best Value will be seen by the workforce and the trade unions as a reduction in finance for the Service, ‘a cuts agenda’. The Best Value regime will also be resisted by the masculine cultural realities of the Service. This is because, the requirement to demonstrate the value of the Service to the public would challenge the Service’s current self-image of a powerful group in society, which does not need to be held to the same account regarding value for money as other sections of society.

10.2(j) Taken together, the changes being proposed by Government will challenge the heroic and masculine identity of the Service and its dominant culture and, if delivered, they would also change the relative hegemonic power positions of the component groups within the Service’s existing negotiated order and their relationship with Government.

10.2(k) Despite the resistance evident within the Service, it seems clear that the Government has decided to introduce cultural change in the Fire Service, in pursuit of its agenda to improve equal opportunities and introduce more women to this previously exclusively male workplace. Firemasters in the Service are aware of the proposals being put forward by Government and have recognised the requirement to change, in order to satisfy the contextual imperatives emanating from the political establishment. Even though the change process is being resisted even at this level, based on the argument that you should not “*throw the baby out with the bath water*”, Firemasters are attempting to use the managerial approach, advocated by supporters of the corporate culture project, to deliver the required cultural change. However, it

is evident that culture is difficult to change in this way as it is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon, much more complex than the corporate culture project would have us believe. It is also evident that the culture of the Scottish Fire Service, embedded as it is in hegemonic masculine realities, which are intertwined and irrevocably linked to a deeply internalised masculine identity adopted at all levels of the Service, will be particularly resistant to change.

10.2(l) Therefore, even though the masculine identity adopted within the Scottish Fire Service may not necessarily be unique as there are other workplaces that display hegemonic and masculine attributes (e.g. Addelston and Stirratt 1996, Jenkins Lucio and Noon 2002, Anastasia and Padavic 2002, Miller 2004), in my view it does form a classic site of resistance to change. This resistance is based on the adoption of a gendered identity and a process of self-organising, as described by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), with echoes of Collinson's (1992) description of workers identity claiming, formed in distinction to other groups and especially managers (and in this case the Government).

10.2(m) It can therefore be concluded that the underlying normalised resistance to change at all levels in the Service can be seen to be based on the adoption of hegemonic masculine identities in the Service. Moreover, the Fire Service can be usefully understood as a site of cultural resistance to the acceptance of women in a previously defined 'man's job', enhanced by the understanding generated through a consideration of gender and identity formation, within its cultural realities. Therefore, even though there are a number of areas of contestation evident within the Service, it can be concluded that the Scottish Fire Service provides a classic example of a culture which is informed by, and infused with, masculine identity. Moreover, it will resist the entry of women, or indeed any other change that would challenge or dilute the ability for firefighters to adopt, demonstrate and support a culturally defined heroic masculine identity in the workplace.

10.2(n) In particular, the adoption of community fire safety, where firefighters prevent fires through engagement with householders and fitting free smoke alarms, is

likely to be resisted by firefighters. This type of work does not require the same physical or mental attributes or the application of courage in its application. Therefore, this kind of interaction, in the minds of those in the Service, will reduce the ability to adopt a masculine self image, where firefighters are seen as heroes who are called out in an emergency and who then courageously fight the fire and carry out rescues, to the benefit of both individuals in trouble and society in general.

### **10.3 Recommendations regarding further research**

10.3(a) While this thesis is confident in its analysis of the dominant Fire Service culture, masculine identity in the Fire Service, the pressures to which that culture is being subjected and its conclusions regarding the change dynamic, there are a number of areas where understanding could be improved or further explored through additional research.

10.3(b) Recruitment to the Service is carried out by people from the Brigades themselves. This means that the people carrying out the recruitment of personnel to the Service are fully socialised into the Service's culture. This has drawn attention to an interesting sub-text, in that people who can demonstrate the skills to be successful firefighters may have become perceived as somehow being 'the wrong type' (too macho?). On the other hand some of the rhetoric-based resistance to women joining the Service seems to be carefully gauged, to avoid sexist based positions and is therefore predicated on statements regarding facilities, or what firefighters wives would feel about women in the Service, etc. There seems to have been little credible research carried out into the actual physical requirements of the firefighting task in recent times and this area would benefit from appropriately defined research.

10.3(c) The thesis has described the Fire Service culture, in its hegemonic realities, as excluding people who do not fit the culturally defined definition of the masculine firefighter. One of the areas of exclusion raised is related to ethnicity, and it seems that people from minority ethnic groups will also be excluded from the culturally prescribed ideal firefighter type. However, this tendency to exclude black people did

not seem as pronounced as the desire to exclude women. Therefore, it was postulated that this was because black men did not pose as much of a threat to the male identity of the firefighter as women. For this reason, it is not clear whether ethnic minorities are not welcome in the Fire Service cultural reality due to their ethnic origins, or to the tendency of the culture to exclude anyone who was in any way different to the current white male identity adopted in the Service. This uncertainty could only be resolved through further research, which concentrates on the ethnic component of the Fire Service's current cultural realities.

10.3(d) If, as argued by Hofstede (1980) and others, the culture of the wider society has an effect on organisational culture, then the national culture evident in Scotland will affect the organisation culture of the Scottish Fire Service. While there has been some work done on the attitude of Scottish society towards the Fire Service, there has been no academically valid research into the effect that this might have on the culture of the Service. Once again, this area would benefit from further research.

10.3(e) This thesis relates to the Fire Service in Scotland, based as it is on data gathered from three Brigades, the Scottish Training School and the Civil Service in Scotland. However, it is silent as to whether or not this research would be transferable to Fire Brigades in the rest of the United Kingdom, or for that matter elsewhere in the world. While I feel that it is likely that it would, based on personal experience of a number of other Fire Brigades in a number of countries, this is no substitute for further research in the field.

10.3(f) Finally, while it is clear that the Fire Service culture has successfully resisted the changes to its cultural realities proposed by Government, it is not yet clear if this resistance will continue to be successful with the passage of time. This will only become clear if further research into this change dynamic is carried out in the future.



## Postscript

The research on which this thesis is based was carried out, in the main, between 1999 and 2002. In particular, all of the data collected through the interviews was collected during those years.

At the tail end of 2002, as a result of a pay claim by the Fire Brigades Union and a desire on the part of the Local Government Employers to change the working practices in the Service, the Fire Service entered into a long and bitter dispute. This dispute was ended in 2003 through the introduction of a pay and conditions deal and a new legislative base for the Fire Service was introduced through the Fire Services Act 2005. In this way, many of the changes proposed by Government and outlined in Chapter 2 were introduced to the Fire Service. Amongst many other changes, the Service now has a statutory requirement to carry out community fire safety and firefighters are now engaged in this type of work.

Additionally there have, over time, been changes in the relatively complex political context within which the Fire Service is required to operate. During the period in which the research for the thesis was being carried out, the agenda of Government, both in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom, with regard to the fire service, could be seen as fundamentally synonymous. However, there have been two major changes in government since then. In 2007 a minority Scottish National Party Government came into power in Scotland and in 2010 a coalition Conservative Liberal Democrat Government was formed in the United Kingdom.

This thesis cannot analyse the effect that these changes may have on the underlying and internalised culture of the Fire Service; this could only be done by further research as indicated in Para. 10.3(f) above. However, I have worked in the Service for many years, continued to do so through the dispute and did so until June 2010. As a result of my experience and many observations carried out through the course of my work, it is my considered opinion that the vast majority of people in the Service continue to support a culture which is predicated on a masculine identity and glorifies the firefighter as hero. In this respect, it is likely that the culture and identity

formation described by this thesis continues almost unchanged in the Fire Service of today.

It can be, and often is, argued by those in the Service, that it is this very culture that enables the difficult and dangerous task of fighting fire to be carried out successfully. This may or may not be true, and understanding of this potential dichotomy could only be achieved through a different piece of research to that presented here.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Best Value

A Scottish best value task force was set up to take forward the Government's manifesto commitment to 'best value' in the public sector following the 1997 general election. The first report of the task force was published in July 1997. This report set out the four key principles of accountability, transparency, continuous improvement (within a planning framework), and ownership, which would be required to underpin each local authority's approach to Best Value. It also set out a three-year implementation plan and highlighted that the required Service review process should be based on the four C's (Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete) with an emphasis on consultation with citizens, customers and staff. The Task Force published its second report in July 1998. This report proposed four criteria that would define whether or not an individual authority was delivering Best Value: an established performance management framework that delivers continuous improvement; a clear commitment to the four C's; and a rigorous approach to analyzing Service delivery mechanisms and processes. The 1998 report also indicated that Best Value would require a change of culture in local authority working leading towards a more responsive, customer focused and businesslike approach.

The Fire Service was brought into the Best Value process in 1999.

The final report of the Best Value Task Force was published in 1999. This report recommended that public performance reporting should be required, as "*increased accountability would be essential to achieving significant improvement in Service delivery*". Public performance reporting would also require authorities to be responsive. In particular, they would be increasingly required to show how they have reacted or adapted in response to feedback or criticism of their performance. This

report also recommended that Best Value should become a statutory responsibility as a legislative requirement would underline the importance of Best Value and may be required to keep it “*on course*”.

The recommendation to provide a statutory footing for Best Value was implemented in 2003 when the Local Government in Scotland Act passed into law. Amongst other things it told local authorities (including Fire Authorities) what they would be expected to demonstrate in fulfilment of the statutory duties which make up the Best Value ‘regime’ required by the Act. Of particular interest to this study was:

- *The duty of Best Value, being to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance (while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost); and in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities requirements and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;*
- *The duty to make arrangements for the reporting to the public of the outcome of the performance of functions.* (The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003: Best Value Guidance, pg. 3)

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview schedules**

#### **Interview Topics for retired members**

How old are you?

When did you retire?

What did you do before you joined the Fire Service?

How and why did you join the Fire Service?

What rank did you hold if any?

What was the training like?

What was the job like?

What were the working conditions like?

- Pay
- Time off
- Living Conditions

What were the relationships with other watch members like – on and off duty?

How close were the watches?

How did you pass the time when things were quiet?

How did people know when they were accepted by the watch?

Were there any indoctrination ceremonies or rites of passage?

What were the relationships between Officers and men like?

What was the discipline like?

Was the uniform seen as being important to discipline?

How was the Brigade run?

Were there any golden rules that must be obeyed, either on the watch (peer group) or in the Brigade?

Could anyone be a firefighter?

Could women do the job in those days?

Did you have any contact with black people in the Service?

Were there any financial restrictions to what you wanted to do?

### **Interview topics for Training School Officers**

What do you see as the role of the Fire Service?

Is there anything you would change in that role?

Do you think that Fire Brigades are in any way “Special organisations”?

How do you think Brigades carry out their duty to the community?

How do you see the existing culture of the Service?

Is there anything you would change in that culture?

Do you think that the Fire Service has to change its culture either now or in the future? If so, how and why?

Can anyone be a firefighter?

Is there an ideal type of person who would make a firefighter?  
Do you think the Service is welcoming to people who don't fit the mould?  
How are women accepted in the Service?  
How are black people accepted in the Service?  
When recruits come to the School, what is it that you teach them? Can you describe how that is done?  
What style of management would you say is adopted in the School?  
What are the principles by which you run the School?  
Are there any underlying values that are adopted in the School?  
What is the discipline like?  
What are the rules?  
How are they enforced?

### **Interview topics for FBU officials**

What rank do you hold, if any?  
What is the role of the FBU in today's Fire Service?  
Has that role changed over the years?  
What do you see as the role of the Fire Service?  
Is there anything you would change in that role?  
How do you think Brigades carry out their role now?  
Is there anything you would change in *how* the Service goes about doing its job?  
What are the pressures you see on the Service currently and in the future?

- Financial
- Best Value
- Social
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

How do you see the existing culture of the Service?  
Is there anything you would change in that culture?  
Do you think that Fire Brigades are in any way "Special organisations"?

Are there any of the rules that are applied to Local Government Services that you feel should not apply to the Fire Service?

How do you see the relationships between the roles of Westminster, Holyrood and Local Government in relation to the governance of the Fire Service?

Do you think that the Fire Service has to change its culture either now or in the future? If so, how and why?

What is the training like?

What is the job like?

What are the working conditions like?

- Pay
- Time off
- Living Conditions

What are the relationships between watch members like – on and off duty?

How close are the watches?

How do they pass the time when things are quiet?

What are the relationships between Officers and firefighters like?

What is the discipline like?

Are there any golden rules that must be obeyed, either on the watch or in the Brigade?

How is the Brigade run?

How are women accepted in the Service?

How are black people accepted in the Service?

Are there any financial restrictions in the Service today?

How do people become accepted on watches?

### **Interview topics for middle managers**

What's it like to work here?

How do you get things done?

Values

- What are they?

- Are they the organisation's values?
- Do individuals share them?

Are there strong traditions?

- What are they?

Do you consider the Brigade to be successful?

- Why/why not?

Discipline

- How strong is it?
- Are there any Golden Rules?
- Would it be OK to break the rules?
  - ◆ Under what circumstances?
  - ◆ In the Brigades interest?

Is there a dominant culture? How would you describe it? How strong is it?

Are there any sub-cultures?

Where are they located?

Do they support or challenge the dominant culture?

How strong are they? How do they impact on the Brigade?

What effects do the Trade Unions have on the running of the Brigade?

Do you think Fire Brigades are in any way special organisations?

Do you think you fit into the dominant culture?

Why/why not?

How does the Brigade deal with individuals who don't fit in?

Do people who work here have a strong sense of fitting into a team?

What kind of people work here?

What kind of people are successful here?

Do people get the recognition they deserve when they do a good job?

Is the Service welcoming to women?

Is the Service welcoming to black people?

What style of management is adopted in the Brigade?

Is the management style autocratic or democratic?

Do people prefer an autocratic or democratic style?



Is it considered important to go through the proper channels when decisions are being taken?

Is it considered important for people to have only one direct manager?

Should managers be able to answer questions raised by their subordinates?

Are subordinates able to disagree with their managers without fear?

### **Effect of Key Events**

1970s

- Holroyd
- Cunningham
- Industrial unrest/strike
- Health & Safety at Work Act
- Sex Discrimination Act

### **Interview topics for Principal Officers**

What do you see as the role of the Fire Service in modern society?

Is there anything you would change in that role?

How do you think Brigades carry out their operational role now?

Is there anything you would change in *how* the Service goes about doing its job?

What are the pressures you see on the Service currently and in the future?

- Financial
- Best Value
- Social
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

How do you see the existing culture of the Service?

Are there any sub-cultures in the Brigade?

Do they support or challenge the dominant culture?

How strong are they? How do they impact on the Service?

Do you think that the Fire Service has to change its culture either now or in the future?

- If so how and why?

Effect of key events?

1970s

- Holroyd
- Cunningham
- Industrial unrest
- Health & Safety at Work Act
- Sex Discrimination Act

Do you think that Fire Brigades are in any way “Special organisations”?

Are there any of the rules that you would apply to Local Government Services that you would not apply to the Fire Service?

How do you see the relationships between the roles of Westminster, Holyrood and Local Government in relation to the governance of the Fire Service?

What style of management would you say is adopted in your Brigade?

Is it OK for people to argue with their boss?

Is it important that people only have one boss?

What are the principles by which you run the Brigade?

- Values
- Beliefs

Are there any strong traditions or traditional values in the Brigade?

Can anyone be a firefighter?

Is there an ideal type of person who would make a firefighter?

Do you think the Service is welcoming to people who don't fit the mould?

How are women accepted in the Service?

How are black people accepted in the Service?

What is the discipline like? – uniform

What are the rules?

How are they enforced?

Are there any rules which must be obeyed?

## **Interview topics for politicians**

What do you see as the role of the Fire Service?

Is there anything you would change in that role?

How do you think the Service carries out its role currently?

Is there anything you would change in *how* the Service goes about doing its job?

What pressures do you see on the Service currently and in the future?

- Financial
- Best Value
- Social
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

How do you perceive the existing culture of the Service?

Is there anything you would change in that culture?

Do you think that Fire Brigades are in any way “Special organisations”?

Do you think that the Brigade is a successful organisation?

Are there any of the rules that you would apply to other Local Government Services that you would not apply to the Fire Service?

How do you see the relationships between the roles of Westminster, Holyrood and Local Government in relation to the governance of the Fire Service?

Do you think that the Fire Service should change its culture either now or in the future?

If so, how and why?

Do you think Brigades are responsive to the needs of politicians?

Do you think that Brigades are organisations that are responsive to changing circumstances and are able to change their way of doing things as circumstances change?

## **Interview topics for civil servants**

What do you see as the role of the Fire Service?

Is there anything you would change in that role?

How do you think they carry out their role now?

Is there anything you would change in *how* the Service goes about doing its job?

What are the pressures you see on the Service currently and in the future?

- Financial
- Best Value
- Social
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

How do you see the existing culture of the Service?

Is there anything you would change in that culture?

Do you think that Fire Brigades are in any way “Special organisations”?

Are there any of the rules that you would apply to other Local Government Services that you would not apply to the Fire Service?

How do you see the relationships between the roles of Westminster, Holyrood and Local Government in relation to the governance of the Fire Service?

Do you think that the Fire Service has to change its culture either now or in the future? If so, how and why?

### **Interview topics for Fire Service Inspectors**

What do you see as the role of the Fire Service?

Is there anything you would change in that role?

Do you think that Brigades are successful in carrying out their role now?

Is there anything you would change in *how* the Service goes about doing its job?

How do you see the relationships between the roles of Westminster, Holyrood and Local Government in relation to the governance of the Fire Service?

What are the pressures you see on the Service currently and in the future?

- Financial
- Best Value
- Social
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

What is it like to work with Fire Brigades?

How do things get done in terms of the Inspectorate influencing Brigades?

Do Brigades have any common values?

- What are they?
- Are they set by Brigades' leadership or do individuals share them?  
Are there strong traditions that are common to all Brigades?
- What are they?

Do you consider Fire Brigades to be successful organisations?

- Why/why not?

Discipline

- How strong is it?
- Are there any Golden Rules?
- Would it be OK to break the rules?
  - ◆ Under what circumstances?
  - ◆ In the Brigade's interest?

Is there a dominant culture within the Scottish Fire Service?

- How would you describe it?
- How strong is it?

Is there anything you would like to see changed in that culture?

Are there any sub-cultures either between or within Brigades?

Where are they located?

Do they support or challenge the dominant culture?

How strong are they/how do they impact on the Service?

Do you think that the Fire Service will have to change its culture either now or in the future? If so how and why?

What effects do the trade unions have on the running of the Service?

Do you think Fire Brigades are in any way special organisation?

How do Brigades deal with individuals who don't fit in?

What kind of people work in the Fire Service?

What kind of people are successful in the Fire Service?

Do people get the recognition they deserve when they do a good job?

Is the Service welcoming to women?

Is the Service welcoming to black people?

Is there a common style of management within Brigades?

Is it autocratic or democratic?

Do people within the Service prefer an autocratic or democratic style?

## **Appendix C**

### **Rites and rituals**

Beyer and Trice (1988) define rites as,

*“Relatively elaborate, dramatic, planned sets of activities that consolidate various forms of cultural expression into organised events, which are carried out through social interaction, usually for the benefit of an audience”* (pg. 142).

They identified a number of types of rite, including the rite of passage, which they believe often comprise a managerial or occupational training programme, and in its pure form including three distinct stages: the *rite of separation*, this is where the persons in question are separated symbolically, and often physically, from their existing status; the *rite of transition*, this is where the persons in question are given instruction, including new information and lore about the status to be assumed – at this stage they are often put through various ordeals that represent the problems, difficulties and responsibilities associated with the new status to which they aspire; and the *rite of incorporation*, at this stage they are confirmed into the new status. Beyer and Trice suggest that these rites can be used by powerful people to control a form of communication that can help to reinforce or change existing distributions of power. It would seem clear that this type of rite could be used to convey important messages about the existing structures of power in an organisation like the Fire Service, and in this way facilitate both primary and secondary systems of control as recruits are accepted into their Brigades.

Alvesson and Berg (1992) group the cultural phenomena of rites, rituals and ceremonies together under the title of collective action patterns. These collective action patterns are defined as cultural phenomena that are characterised by having a relatively high symbolic content which indicates that the way in which they are performed may well be as important, or in some cases even more important, than their instrumental output. These collective action patterns also tend to stay relatively stable over time. From Alvesson and Berg's perspective, rites are collective activities with a low degree of formality. In contrast to rites, rituals confirm and reproduce given social patterns. Ceremonies are patterns of a solemn and formal nature that often express feelings of tradition and history.

### **The passing out parade: a significant ritual**

One of the most significant events in a firefighter's early career is the completion of their initial recruit's training course. This event is marked by the ritual of 'passing out' from the school.

Families and friends of trainees are invited and each Firemaster receives an invite for himself and a guest. The invitations to Firemasters indicate that medals will be worn.

When they arrive, the families and friends of the recruits are directed to the viewing area which is at two sides of the drill ground, a large tarmac square, which is situated at the rear of the main building. There are some seats but most guests will have to stand. The guests are entertained by the Lothian and Borders Police Pipe Band as they wait for the parade to begin.

When the Firemasters or their representatives (on this occasion two Firemasters attended and the rest were represented by their Deputy or Assistant Firemasters) and their guests arrive they are directed to the V.I.P. (the school's terminology) car park. Once parked, they go to a coffee lounge with large windows that overlook the drill ground. There they are met by the Commandant (a retired Firemaster) and offered a drink from the bar of wine, spirits or orange juice. Uniform jackets are taken off and

there is a relaxed atmosphere. The 'inspecting Officer', who is always a serving Firemaster, arrives looking a little nervous as it is his first parade. At 12 midday a bell is rung and the Commandant announces "ladies and gentlemen lunch is served." There is little movement from those in the room and the Commandant goes up to a nearby coffee table at which mainly women guests (wives and partners of Firemasters or secretaries) are seated and says "ladies first". The women then start the queue for lunch and are soon joined by the rest of the guests. Lunch is a good buffet with chicken, beef, salmon and assorted salads followed by a choice of three sweets and coffee. Over lunch there is talk of who has applied for or got which promotion and banter or gentle put downs regarding the size/competence, etc. of the different Brigades represented, together with some discussion of recent professional changes and larger operational incidents.

At 12.55pm the Commandant takes the Firemasters and representatives from each Brigade together with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services downstairs and to the edge of the parade ground. They form up in pairs and march across the parade ground to a raised podium with chairs placed on it. The Commandant and the Inspecting Officer take the lead. On the podium the Officers stand to attention while the recruits march onto the parade ground. The recruits form up in ranks of three and the Station Officer who is in charge of them marches over to the podium, stops, comes to attention, salutes and shouts, "Recruits squad ready for inspection, sir". The Inspecting Officer salutes, and says "Thank you, Station Officer". The Station Officer then leads the Commandant and the Inspection Officer across the parade ground to where the recruits are standing. They then 'inspect' the recruits by passing down each row in turn looking up and down the recruits to ensure that they are well turned out and smart. The Inspecting Officer stops at every third or fourth individual and speaks to him or her (there is one female recruit on this course). The Commandant and Inspecting Officer then return to the podium and take up their places. The podium party stand up (they had been seated while the recruits were being inspected).



The recruits are then marched around the parade ground, when they come level with the podium the Station Officer shouts the order “Eyes right”, turns his head sharply to the right and salutes. The recruits all turn their heads to the right while they pass the podium and the Inspecting Officer salutes. When all the recruits have passed the podium the Station Officer shouts, “Eyes front” and the recruits sharply turn their heads to the front. The recruits march around the parade ground and halt at attention in their original places. The instruction “Left turn” is given and the recruits face the podium at attention. The Station Officer marches back to the podium, salutes and shouts “Permission to carry on, sir.” The Inspecting Officer salutes and responds “Permission granted, please congratulate the recruits on an excellent march past”. The Station Officer then marches back across the parade ground and shouts the order “Fall out”. The recruits run out of sight of the audience and change into their protective firefighting uniform. The podium party sit down and the audience applaud.

There are three or four different styles of firefighting uniform dependant on which Brigade the recruits are from.

There is then a series of demonstrations of the practical skills the recruits have learned during their sixteen weeks of training, including pump and hose demonstrations, ladder climbing demonstrations and two simulated incidents. One incident is in a building requiring a casualty to be rescued and a fire to be extinguished. And the other is of a road traffic accident that includes a petrol tanker and necessitates the rescue of casualties from a car with the use of heavy cutting gear and the ‘making safe’ of the tanker.

The final drill involves a large male firefighter dressed in women’s clothing and located on the fourth floor of the drill tower. He/she is engulfed by smoke and shouts “Help! Help! I have burnt the dinner, save me” and “ooh, he’s a nice boy, I like that one”. A ladder is put to the window and a male firefighter climbs it very quickly and climbs into the window. Obscured by the smoke, the casualty and rescuer change places, and the female/male carries the firefighter down the ladder. Half way down the firefighter lifts the female’s dress and pats his/her buttocks. At the bottom of the

ladder the female/male collapses and the firefighter calls for help. Two men run onto the parade ground carrying a stretcher between them. They have a green light strapped to their heads and are wearing long white coats. One has MEE in black lettering on his back and the other has MAW. As they run onto the parade ground one shouts “mee” and the other shouts “maw” in parody of a two-toned emergency horn. When they reach the casualty they go through a routine that involves exaggerated mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and facing either both inward or both outwards when lifting the stretcher with the casualty on it. Eventually the casualty falls off the stretcher and all three run off the parade ground.

The audience and podium party applaud at the end of each demonstration and laugh and applaud at various points during the last one.

The podium party then march back across the parade ground in the same formation that they marched out in, and go back up the stairs to the coffee lounge. The other guests are directed to the gymnasium, which is at the rear of the parade ground and is laid out with rows of seats. At one end there is a podium with a lectern and a table with various cups and shields upon it. When all are seated the Senior Officer representatives walk down the central isle and take their reserved seats at the front right hand row. The recruits are already seated on the front rows on the left hand. On each side of the podium and facing the audience there is a seated row of instructors. When everyone has taken their appointed places and are seated an announcement “all stand” is made and the Commandant and Inspecting Officer march down the isle taking their seats on the podium. The Commandant goes to the lectern and welcomes all the friends and families to the “passing out parade” of the recruit’s course. He welcomes the Firemasters and their representatives individually by rank, name and Brigade and acknowledges that the School depend on the support of Brigades. He then welcomes Her Majesties Chief Inspector of Fire Services and the representatives of the Scottish Executive who are members of the Civil Service. Again he does this by name and he says that the school always receives excellent support from the Civil Service, without which it could not survive. He introduces each instructor by rank name and Brigade (instructors are seconded to the School from different Brigades)

and thanks them all for their support. Each instructor stands up when his name is called out. The Commandant then welcomes the recruits, emphasising their hard work and dedication which was necessary for them to have passed the course. He then introduces the Inspecting Officer, giving a resume of his career and achievements.

The Inspecting Officer comes to the lectern, he starts his speech by praising the recruits for their determination to “get into the job” against very strong competition and the standard they achieved during their training. He tells them that they are embarking on a career that will give them the opportunity to get to the very top, as all Firemasters start off as firefighters. He encourages them to seek promotion if that is what they want. He emphasises how difficult the training was and congratulates the recruits for passing the course. He thanks the families for their support emphasising that they were “part of the team” and says that their support will still be required, as the firefighters present would have difficult and traumatic jobs to do in the future. He talked about the professional role of the firefighter. Finally, he congratulates the Commandant and his instructors for the fine job they have done in transforming raw recruits into competent firefighters.

The Commandant then comes to the lectern and says that the next part was the bit he enjoyed most because “only four people in this room know the results.” The Inspecting Officer then presents prizes for:

- The four mile road race
- Best first aid results
- Best squad
- Best ladder squad
- Best pump squad
- Best fire safety results
- Runner up for Firemasters Prize
- Firemasters prize (awarded to the ‘best recruit’)

As each result is called out the recruit named comes up to accept their award of a shield or a cup. The squad prizes are collected by the squad instructor.

Once this had been done the Commandant announces that the recruits have raised £5,000 for charity by doing a ladder climb. He reads out the local charities that the money will go to. He then thanks everyone for coming to the passing out parade and says that they would be welcome to join him for tea and light refreshments in the canteen. He and the Inspecting Officer then walk back down the aisle, followed by the Senior Officer guests.

Everyone then goes to the canteen where tables are laid out by Brigade with tea and cakes. The Senior Officers mingle with recruits from their Brigade and their families, 'welcoming them to the Service.' Recruits stand up or come to attention when the Senior Officers approach their table.

The values and beliefs being passed on, through socialisation, to those who were inducted to the Fire Service were encapsulated in the ritualistic ceremony of the passing out parade. Here a strong respect for autocratic hierarchy was demonstrated by the fact that the Firemasters and their guests were treated very differently to the recruits. Recruits were expected to stand up when approached by a more Senior Officer and saluting was commonplace. Within the demonstration of competence by the recruits there was an emphasis on marching and saluting. All in all, a strong militaristic emphasis was demonstrated throughout the passing out parade, and there was an obvious denigration of women and other professional groups (the ambulance service), although this was disguised as humour. In addition the entire event demonstrated the cultural importance of competition, hard work and fitness as a means of demonstrating an ability to enter the hallowed profession of firefighting.

## **Appendix D**

### **Retirement: a significant rite of passage**

As part of the research into this subject, it was possible to observe a number of retirement functions. Typically, middle managers took part in at least two celebrations of retirement, one to which only managers were invited and one to which all staff received invites. The following passages relate to the retirement functions in relation to one middle manager who retired after a career spanning thirty years, but they are relatively representative of those carried out in the Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade. The first outline refers to a function carried out in the Fire Brigade Social Club to which all staff were invited and the second to a function carried out in a city hotel to which only managers were invited.

For the first function, an invitation to all staff was circulated via the Brigade's e-mail system. Approximately 100 to 150 people attended. Partners were not invited, however, a number of women were present from administration staff and the control room; no women firefighters attended, although a number of firefighters from the retiree's old watch and station, both retired and currently serving, did attend. Both the atmosphere and style of dress were informal, with no ties, and informal shirts, etc. were worn. The room was large with tables and chairs arranged at one end and around the edges. There was a bar opened at the end of the room with most tables.

The gathering broke down into groups, with people tending to congregate with those they worked with or the levels of the organisation they were in. So there was a group of administrative women, a group of control women, a group of retired men, together with groups of firefighters, a watch group, a group of Officers and a group of Senior Officers and administrators. The groups were not totally fixed and people did move between them. As the evening wore on the groups fragmented a little but tended to remain as they originally were.

After a couple of hours, Jimmy \*\*\*\*\*, the retiree's second in command went to a microphone that had been set up at one end of the room. He welcomed everyone to the retirement 'do' and said that Peter (the retiree) had requested that there be no formalities, speeches or collection for a present, however "*we couldn't let it go at that*" and there had been a collection and indeed a present had been bought, in the form of a reclining chair.

*"We are not going to have any speeches but I am going to ask Mike \*\*\*\*\* to say a few words."*

Mike (a serving firefighter and someone who played football with Peter) thanked a number of people for helping him with the speech, in particular Jim \*\*\*\*\* (a manager at the same level as Peter) for getting him access to Peter's personal file. He talked about Peter's work as a joiner before joining the Brigade and told a story about Peter working on the then new fire station at Crewe Toll which involved nailing in floor boards. Peter put in a row of nails but did not realize that they were above a water pipe. There was a major water leak and when the board was lifted, a row of fountains was formed. This is when Peter got the nickname 'Piccolo Pete'. Mike then went through Peter's career and read a poem which included the piccolo story, indicated that Peter had done a number of things that could have got him into trouble if he had been caught at them and concluded that Peter had always been good to work with and popular with firefighters.

Peter responded by thanking every one for attending, confirmed that he always tried to "*look after his boys*" and said that if half of the things he had done were known he probably would not be lifting his pension. He concluded that he hoped that everyone present would have a good time and his demeanour was one of pleased embracement.

A supper of sandwiches, sausage rolls and meat pies was laid out in an adjoining room and Jimmy asked people to go through.

During the course of the evening Peter told a story about when he was a Station Officer at a fire in a block of tenement flats. A male person wanted to enter the flat on fire. Peter told him that he couldn't enter and the guy pulled what Peter thought was a knife. The two police Officers that were in attendance disappeared and Peter was afraid that he would be stabbed. Just then two members of his watch came from behind him and stood one on each side of him. They took out their firefighters axes and one said to the male *"If you make a move towards him (Peter) I'll bury this axe in your head"*. The male then backed down and left. Peter said, *"That's what you get from your watch, they're my boys"*.

The second function was arranged by a Divisional Officer in the personnel function of the Brigade. All Officers of Assistant Divisional Officer rank and above were invited by e-mail (this included non-uniformed managers) and a number of retired Officers were also invited at Peter's request. In addition, an external consultant was also invited at Peter's request.

On arrival at about 7.30pm, the guests gathered in the hotel bar where Peter bought everybody a drink. At about 8pm, everyone moved into a private function room in the hotel. In this room there was a 'top table' at which sat the Firemaster next to Peter who sat in the middle with the Deputy Firemaster next to the Firemaster and the Assistant Firemaster sat to Peter's left. The seating arrangements were mixed and depended on the order that people came through from the bar, although a group of retired people from the same generation sat together. There were a couple of non uniformed managers present and one of them was female. Everyone wore suits and all of the men wore ties.

A three-course meal was served by waitresses followed by coffee and Peter ordered a round of liqueurs with the coffee. At the beginning of the meal, the top table was moved from its position in a slight alcove a few feet forward at a slight angle to be "more in the body of the kirk".

The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly with a buzz of conversation around the room during the meal and a good deal of laughter.

When the coffee was served, the Firemaster rose to his feet and brought the room to order by clinking his spoon on his coffee cup. He thanked everyone for coming on the occasion of Peter's retirement. He then made a speech, which talked about Peter's early years in Leith (in an amusing way) before joining the Service. He told a story about Peter and his friends drinking in a bar in Leith and Derek \*\*\*\*\* (an Officer who was present) was part of that group but younger, as Peter had to pass screw topped bottles out to Derek who was on the stairs outside the bar. He then talked about Peter being a joiner and working on Crewe Toll fire station before joining 'the job'. He went on to talk about Peter's career and promotions in the Service, linking this to Peter's football career in the Brigade team by saying that these promotions depended on how well the team was doing. He also said that Peter's football career threatened his Brigade career because most of what was on his personal file was sickness due to football injuries. He then talked about Peter's unblemished record, indicating that it was only unblemished because Peter hadn't been caught. He then said that Peter's unblemished record was spoiled near the end of his career when Hearts were in the cup final and Peter disappeared, unfortunately this time he was actually caught at the match. He then wished Peter a long and happy retirement and presented him with two statuettes of working firefighters. The first was of working firefighters wearing breathing apparatus and directing a jet of water and the second was a firefighter, dressed in kit that was current when Peter joined the job, rescuing a baby. At this stage one of the firefighters called out "*one of them's a tart by the way*" (this was a reference to two issues firstly Peter's view that women do not make good firefighters and secondly to a well-known story where Peter was responsible for introducing a new style of helmet to the Brigade. These helmets were heavier in construction than the previous style of helmet and they generated a number of complaints from firefighters. Peter went to a watch that had made a number of complaints to explain the position. During the debate that followed things got heated and Peter lost his temper saying "*The helmets are too heavy for you? You are just a bunch of tarts!*")



Peter was then presented with a retirement certificate from the Lothian and Borders Fire Board by the Firemaster.

Peter then rose. He thanked everyone for coming and said how lucky he felt to be in the Fire Service. He talked about having his chest measured during the recruitment process by way of a steel tape measure with the first measurement coming out at 89 inches, that wasn't right so the Sub-Officer had another go and got 58 inches, that still wasn't right so on the third go he got 42 inches and the Sub-Officer said that that was close enough. He then talked about his probationary period with the Brigade and referred to a sheet of paper that had been taken from his personal file (he said it was borrowed not stolen and the Firemaster could have it back). He read from the paper, which was a report into the fact that his probationary reports were missing from the file. The report concluded that they had been completed with regard to the probationer (Peter) and it was now too late to do anything about the fact that they were missing. The inference that Peter put on this story was that the reports were probably negative but that he "*had got away with it*". He then made some amusing comments about a number of Senior Officers who were present, both retired and currently serving. He referred to the Firemasters comments regarding going missing for the Hearts cup match saying that both his pager and mobile phone must have got accidentally switched off and that this had resulted in him getting a "*great bollocking*" from the Firemaster. He concluded by saying that he loved the Fire Service, he had had a great thirty years in it and if he could do it all again he would want it exactly the same.

Following the speeches, everyone went to the bar where, in a relaxed atmosphere, a number of stories were told by Peter and others. These stories were mainly about games people had played in the workplace, 'getting away with it', big fires they had attended and individuals that had worked in the Fire Service in the past. People slowly left during the course of the evening and the last six or seven left at about 2.45am.

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