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In search of perfect people: Teamwork and team players in the Scottish spirits industry

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ABSTRACT

Much of the mainstream and critical literatures stress the potential of teamwork for normative integration through socialization and peer pressure. This article utilizes case studies in the large bottling halls of spirits producers in Scotland to explore the characteristics of and limits to such integration. A multi-dimensional model of teamwork and an examination of both practices and attitudes enables the research to identify the variety of managerial objectives and outcomes across and within the plants. Though the extent of integration varies between the teams, the overall results lead to scepticism about whether team members can be considered as socially engineered individuals who have internalized company normative demands. These findings, it is argued, are compatible with the majority of comparable case study research.

KEYWORDS

corporate socialization ■ governance ■ normative integration ■ self-socialization ■ teamwork ■ team dimensions model ■ team players ■ technical competencies

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing amount of research concerned with the introduction of 'high performance', and 'self-managing' teams. Though economic and technical rationales such as flexibility and market responsiveness have been predominant, many commentators have also accepted that teamworking will require or result in significantly higher levels of normative integration. This article critically evaluates such assumptions. The article is based on a research project undertaken within the Scottish spirits industry.¹ The empirical research is concerned with two organizations, United Distillers (UD, now UDV following a merger) and Allied Distillers (ADL), and two bottling operations in each of these organizations. The discussion of the empirical findings is located within contemporary debates in a variety of social science literatures, in an attempt to examine the often polarized accounts of the 'co-operative' psychological, and the 'coercive' sociological and critical literature. Our research is sceptical about the claims and expectations of both companies and commentators about normative integration. It identifies clear tensions and boundaries between the objectives of the companies and the orientations of the teams themselves.

A persistent criticism of the teamwork literature is concerned with poor definitions of criteria, characteristics and context (Buchanan, 2000; Marchington, 2000). This research is based on the Team Dimensions Model. In an attempt to interpret the wide variety of practices which are included under the teamworking banner, Thompson and Wallace (1996) and Findlay et al. (2000), have used a three-fold distinction between the technical, governance and normative dimensions of teamwork (Figure 1). The *technical* dimension is at the heart of the current wave of managerial interest in teams, and is concerned with issues directly related to the actual tasks undertaken by team members (e.g. problem solving, flexibility). Teamwork must, however, also rest on changes in the *normative* (e.g. socialization of team members and changes in attitudes and behaviours), and *governance* dimensions (management of teams including increased responsibilities and decision making).

Given distinctive corporate and cultural contexts, the dimensions are likely to vary significantly and the model allows an understanding of those variations, while still being able to identify commonalities of experience and practice. In turn, the model highlights the way that dimensions are influenced by company-wide 'support systems' that impact on the narrower sphere of work organization (e.g. reward and industrial relations systems). This is consistent with the growing recognition of the importance of 'bundles' of reciprocally interactive human resource practices at the heart of enhanced performance in work systems (MacDuffie, 1995). A multi-dimensional approach thus enables the variety of managerial objectives and configurations of actual practices to be identified and more adequately understood,

and the model has influenced approaches taken by a number of other researchers (e.g. Delbridge et al., 2000; McCabe, 2000). While this article focuses on the normative dimension, we indicate how other dimensions of the model intersect in theory and practice.

Finally, much of the research on teams uses attitudinal responses as a basis for judging the success of the venture, a process that can generate considerable difficulties (Parker, 1996). Instead of asking employees to make solely value judgements about teamworking, we have developed a methodology that examines not only employees' attitudes towards teamworking, but also their understandings of the objectives of such initiatives and the extent to which these have been put into practice.

Theorizing the normative dimension

There is a tendency for critical and sociologically informed writing to see teamwork as a package combining work intensification, enhanced surveillance

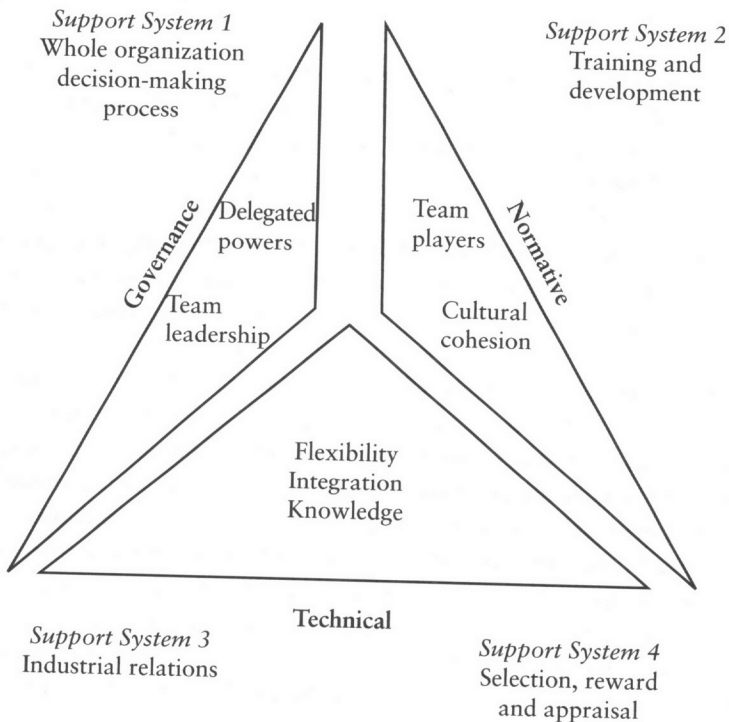


Figure 1 Team Dimensions Model²

and cultural control (Thompson & Wallace, 1996). This is distinct from the psychological and behavioural stream of research that strongly endorses group working in terms of both benefits to employees and employers (Wall et al., 1986; Parker & Jackson, 1993). However, writers from both streams emphasize the expanded opportunities or increased requirements for normative integration. From such discussions we can identify at least three senses in which the cultural or normative is invoked, thus restoring greater complexity to an analysis of teams, managerial objectives and employee behaviour.

The first regards teams as a focus for general *corporate socialization*. According to Robertson et al. (1992) in their case study of a Japanese transplant in Canada, teams served as a vehicle to try to communicate management values. Sharpe (1996) also details how Japanese managers used induction courses to socialize new recruits. Explicit analogies to a football team were made, backed by the need for actual teams to overcome western individualism and aim for consensual, supportive attitudes and practices. In this sense such initiatives are oriented towards using micro-level practices to promote the 'big team'. Similar processes have been found within Europe and the USA. Mueller (1994) argues that teamworking can be a socialization device to resolve tensions between individual goals and organizational rationality.

There is less emphasis on such factors from psychology, but there is some evidence in the recent literature that teamworking may not be very successful at promoting corporate socialization. Podsakoff et al. (1997) demonstrate that employees may perceive the requirements of the organization as working against the best interests of the team. Whereas measures focused on intra-team behaviours such as increased 'helping' on workgroup performance, the broader-based 'civic virtue' associated with employee responsibility to and participation in the life of the company, lacked any predictive relationship.

The second, more micro, notion of the normative focuses on the *creation of team players*. For example, Dawson (1991: 5) speaks of the creation of new value and belief systems that support collaborative workplace arrangements, while marginalizing conflict and resistance. This is unlikely to be created or sustained primarily at the macro-level because organizational structures and processes are too disengaged from teamwork practices. There is evidence to suggest that micro-level managerial goals of greater team cohesion, trust relations, communication and responsibility (for example 'owning problems', avoiding blame) are likely to be reinforced by some variant of behavioural or 'soft-skills' training (e.g. Wright & Edwards, 1998). However, the problem of aligning employee attitudes with required team-member behaviour can also be addressed at the selection gateway. This is more likely

to be located within the psychological literature, which has shown interest in the selection of individuals based on a balance of personality or behavioural types that are required for effective team performance (e.g. Belbin, 1981).

Finally, there is *self-socialization*, related primarily to changes in the governance sphere. Influenced by Foucauldian perspectives, a number of studies have emphasized the social technology of self-surveillance associated with cultural internalization of devolved responsibility and peer pressure (Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998). This is particularly associated with Barker's theorization of concertive control in which the team workers in the case company, ISE, were 'under the eye of the norm and in the eye of the norm' (1993: 435), the result – a new iron cage whose bars are invisible to the employees. The internal culture of the team becomes defensive, resents any deviation from the new practices, and 'punishes' those who break the normative rules: 'This negotiated consensus creates and recreates value-based discourse that workers use to infer "proper" behavioural premises: ideas, norms, or rules that enable them to act in ways functional for the organization' (Barker, 1993: 412).

The psychological literature also addresses the issue of the interrelations between normative integration and self-governance. Devolved responsibility encourages employees to engage in behaviours which the critical literature believes are coercive: self-observation, self-reinforcement, self-reward and punishment and self-expectation (Schnake et al., 1993). A climate needs to be created where employees perceive that they possess high levels of autonomy and influence, can act without consultation of permission, and therefore affect decisions made by supervisors (James et al., 1992). James et al. (1992) suggest that this sort of environment is also related to behavioural outcomes such as lower absence, improved job performance and superior intra-group relationships.

Across these different terrains, we can see that the critical sociological literature and to some extent the psychological literature tends to view teamworking as a vehicle for regulating individualism. But whereas psychology tends to take the view that a collectivist orientation is vital for developing cooperative and productive teams (Eby & Dobbins, 1997), critical accounts tend to view teamworking as a coercive device through which employees are socialized and subordinated to corporate power (Casey, 1996).

It appears on the surface that the two traditions focus on the same issues, but talk past one another, although this is misleading. Though both are concerned with the potential for and obstacles to normative integration, the literatures are directed towards different objectives. One of the dominant concerns of the psychological research involves the dynamics of teams. In critical writings the focal point is the relationship between team formation

and characteristics, and wider systems of production and power. However, although the consensual assumptions of the psychological literature constrain a realistic analysis of teamwork, this focus does address significant issues of theory and practice largely ignored or marginalized by sociologically oriented writings.

While there are valuable insights from both traditions, we argue that both psychological and critical sociological accounts of contemporary teamwork have a tendency to overstate the extent of normative integration and underplay the complexity of its characteristics. The nature of teamwork in the case studies and the variations between teams, particularly with respect to governance, help to restore some of the complexity; aided by the capacity to identify distinctive configurations through the Team Dimensions Model.

Methodology

Our investigation focused on 92 employees from 10 shop-floor teams. There were two teams from each of the UD plants, Leven (labelled Teams 1 and 2), and Shieldhall (Teams 3 and 4), plus two teams from ADL at Kilmalid (Teams 5 and 6), and four teams from ADL's Newtown (Teams 7 to 10). Over 80 percent of participants were female, and the teams ranged in size from 3 to 12 members (though they were almost all at the higher end). To familiarize ourselves with the functioning of the team, and to allow the teams to become comfortable with the researchers being present, wherever possible we observed at least two meetings per team, and maintained contact over the period January 1996–December 1997. While these observational data are not directly reported here, they provided useful background information on intra-team dynamics, relations with team leaders, and extent of autonomy.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of teamworking, we devised a multi-stage procedure that enabled us to examine employees' understanding of the rationales for the introduction of teamwork; whether or not teamworking had been put into practice, and whether or not employees regarded this form of work organization as legitimate. As part of the broader project we have undertaken interviews with managers,³ team leaders and union representatives. This material has not only allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of the justifications behind the introduction of the teamwork initiatives, but has also fed into information we have about the company background and support systems for teamworking. For the team leader interviews, we covered, as far as possible, the same questions for teams, so as to be able to crosscheck the data. All the teams with more than six members were divided into two groups, in order to make the groups manageable.

Though there are potential problems of dominant personalities influencing discussion, using two groups helped to validate the data provided, by comparing the information from each group.

Awareness

The first stage of the research was to present two questions to the participant groups in order to elicit the extent to which employees were *aware* of management's objectives in relation to teamworking. This was to help us assess how well the teamworking message had been communicated and understood, and the extent to which employee and managerial perceptions of teamworking overlap. All discussion was recorded, with the consent of the participants, and later transcribed. The questions that were asked focused on managerial motives influencing the introduction and design of teamwork. A content analysis of the data was undertaken and then it was analysed in the light of the other data collected and integrated into the rest of the study.

Action

Much of the data were collected through adapting Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique (CIT), to map practices across the three teamworking dimensions, both with respect to managerial objectives and to the implementation of teamwork initiatives. In this process we attempted to elicit details of incidents, including the people involved and the behaviours observed, in order to assess the extent to which the skills and behaviours associated with the dimensions of teamworking were actually observed in the workplace. In order to operationalize CIT, we asked the 10 teams of operators a set of questions about their practices since the introduction of teamworking. Each team was divided into two groups and the two groups were interviewed separately, but at the same time. The interviews with the groups lasted for approximately one hour, and each interview was recorded on audiocassette and subsequently transcribed. We asked each group six questions, i.e. two questions concerned with each of the three teamworking dimensions. All the questions were phrased in the following way – 'Can you give me an example of when members of your team were able to . . .', followed by 'Can you give me an example of when members of your team were unable to . . .'. There are a few problems frequently associated with CIT, which we attempted to overcome. Respondents are often asked to remember a particular event, but the reasons for their choice are not always evident and they may fail to remember important facts or rationalize events to impose a post-hoc logic. Although by no means foolproof, we attempted to overcome these problems by using groups

of respondents, instead of individuals, and thus more incidents were likely to be recalled and cross-referenced in greater detail.

The group environment gives the opportunity to hear different accounts at the same time of the same incident. Each incident is therefore aligned and clarified, in order to catch and condense a range of different voices. The transcripts for all groups were analysed and coded in terms of identifiable themes, and the abridged outcome with respect to the normative dimension is described in the section reporting on results.

Endorsement

To avoid common method variance problems, the third stage of this research used a short questionnaire to determine whether team members endorsed the concept of teamwork. The questionnaire was composed of six statements:

Employees should be willing and able to do any job that management specify. There is no room in our team for people without a positive attitude.

It's not fair that team members have to take responsibility for decisions that should really be made by management.

Employees can solve problems through their own experience and common sense without the need for training.

Unless we all trust each other the team won't work effectively.

We had more control over our day-to-day work before teamworking was introduced.

Team members' ratings were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. There were two statements each referring to the normative, governance and technical requirements of teamworking, and these items were analysed in terms of endorsement as a whole and in terms of the three distinct dimensions. The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended question on employees' overall feelings about the impact of teamwork (see Results section).

Industry and organizational context

Declining markets combined with the need to be responsive to an increasing number of products has led to companies having to enhance operating efficiencies, combined with increased flexibility and innovation in the labour process. In turn this has led to a greater willingness to invest in new technology and experiment with new forms of work organization. The focus for

attempted innovation is the bottling halls, which generally operate high-volume, heavily automated production lines. This work environment offers comparatively limited opportunities for employee discretion and interaction. However, management believed that teams offered the possibility of much greater flexibility and involvement in continuous improvement.

United Distillers (UD)

UD undertook a large restructuring programme in the early 1990s, and on the back of this came Towards World Class (TWC), a strategic organizational change programme in which building and refashioning organizational culture on the shop floor was deemed as important to competitiveness as enhancing operating efficiencies. Developing a closer relationship with the unions was also central to the TWC initiative and after a period of debate the 'Positive Partnership' agreement was reached which involved a package based on job security (for three years), pension enhancements and share ownership in return for flexibility, teamworking, skills development and increased business awareness.

Teamwork was the core element of the work organization element of the change package. It was introduced first at the start of 1993 at the Leven bottling plant in Fife. This in itself was interesting in that it had a normative rationale. The plant was in an area with strong union and labour movement traditions and had a reputation for difficult industrial relations. Management believed that if the initiatives could be accepted here, there would be no difficulty in directing change in work organization in the remaining UD bottling facilities. Paradoxically, however, at the beginning, the initiative was task-focused and lacked any substantial normative component. Teamworking was introduced overnight in one 'big bang'. The impact was limited for employees and management. In the words of a senior HR manager,

We have made this really significant structure change, it's not going as well as we want . . . we wanted better attendance levels, more peer pressure, better contributions from people, and we weren't getting them. We wanted people to participate in team meetings and it wasn't happening. We wanted different types of behaviours and weren't able to observe them.

In January 1994, Leven management introduced Team Skills Training (TST) – a programme designed by American consultants – in an attempt to rectify this situation, with compulsory attendance from all employees. The emphasis was on behavioural rather than technical skills, including conflict

resolution and customer–supplier relations, with the objective of helping individuals learn what makes a successful team. TST was supplemented by a variety of other support initiatives, including literacy and numeracy programmes, Springboard (a personal development course for women) and New Steps (an equivalent course for men). Within the programmes, emphasis was put on developing the governance capacities of operators, accompanied by standard empowerment rhetoric. Team members in Leven were sceptical about the value of the behavioural skills training. Despite these reactions, management began to feel that there was an improvement, evident from better behaviour in team meetings and more effective communication and employee contributions on the shop floor. There was also significant progress in terms of the key performance indicators – enhanced line efficiency, improved customer service and lower absence rates.

Shieldhall, UD's high-volume bottling facility near Glasgow, opened in 1979. Despite a good productivity record, teamwork initiatives were significantly less successful than at Leven. TST was not introduced until 1996, despite the fact that a previous phase of work reorganization had been undertaken three years previously, and reactions were even more negative. There were some extremely harsh comments concerning the content of TST. 'That was brainwashing', 'That was just killing time for them. . . . Stupid questions. . . . That was their games.' As with Leven, initiatives such as New Steps, Springboard and the literacy and numeracy programmes were more strongly endorsed than the TST although there were considerably lower take-up rates. Absence of guidance from the top, due largely to the rapid turnover of plant management, did not help. Lack of union support for work reorganization was also crucial. At Leven key full-time and lay union officers were committed to teamworking and supported the concept of TST, despite some initial shop-floor resistance. The more positive outlook was further facilitated by the partnership agreement that encouraged the workforce to accept improvement in efficiencies without any apparent risk to their jobs. At Shieldhall, experience of the partnership agreement was more negative, leading employees to resist both principle and practice in varying degrees.

Allied Distillers (ADL)

At the start of 1995, ADL introduced an *operational* change programme – Project STAR (Skilled Teams Achieving Results). This was different from UD's *organizational* change programme, as shop-floor work organization was the main focus of the Project STAR agenda. STAR was championed by a senior operations manager, and was to be adopted in parallel in ADL's two main

bottling plants, Kilmalid and Newtown. The aim was a flatter hierarchical structure, with shop-floor lines working as 'teams'. Deeply embedded restrictive practices were to be eliminated, with reward systems and grading aligned with the new way of working. Skill development and education were to be provided for all employees.

In sequencing, events proceeded in the opposite manner to those at UD. The goal was to begin with a substantial normative component, including team training and problem solving. The behavioural training was designed by another American company, Development Dimensions International (DDI), and consisted of a set of standards-based training tools. Managers generally supported the training, 'I thought the ideas were good that was coming from them. Just the empowerment and working in teams and getting along with one another, and taking time out to speak which was a thing that was never done. Maybe if the DDI had been right across the hall [bottling], instead of falling at the first hurdle it might have made a difference'. As the quote indicates, employees did not accept the message as readily, 'I went on DDI training and I was coming back with all these ideas. They thought I was a person from another planet'. Crucially, the unions also felt that the DDI training was demeaning and childish.

As a result, only about 50 employees underwent DDI training. The company's apparently integrated view of how to introduce teams was gradually set aside. In terms of the original objectives, by the end of 1996 there were still no employees operating as teams at the two bottling plants. This, however, is somewhat misleading. In practice, management settled for a much scaled down version of teamworking that focused almost exclusively on the technical dimension. As our research was to show (Findlay et al., 2000), operators, facilitated in part by a legacy of job rotation, were generally flexible and highly competent in multi-tasking. Not only was the soft-skills training abandoned, there was little attempt to change the supervisory structure and develop devolved responsibilities. The situation was accurately described by one plant manager, 'There is the basic infrastructure for teamworking but there is still the need to change behaviour and attitude'. One of the key problems was the location of the STAR initiative in operations and its separation from wider managerial support, notably from the HR function. This meant that though 'soft-skills' training had been attempted, there was a lack of cultural preparation for teamwork, either in terms of a broader change programme or new employment relations.

In 1998 ADL started to confront training and normative issues once again. A 'Change Agenda' agreement between management and unions has stated that all employees must have enhanced technical training focusing on multi-skilling. However the company is also committed to 'Personal

Effectiveness' training for all employees, while managers are to be trained in 'facilitation, counselling and coaching, etc.'.

Results

Awareness

We asked: 'What do you think management's motives were in introducing teamworking at [specific plant]?', and 'What do you think management wants from team members?'. Answers in both companies demonstrated that employees identified the technical dimension of teamworking as dominant: 'They thought it would make the company more efficient' (1).⁴ Many operators saw the governance and normative implications: '. . . for people to work together with little or no supervision. . . . Make their own decisions, be self-motivated. That's the theory' (2); 'increase communications' (8). However, the tone of many of the comments was critical, employees linking teams with work intensification: '. . . more for us to do and less for them to do. Ain't that right?' (6). Responses at ADL were noticeably more critical. Reflecting the incremental and uneven implementation of teamwork, operators were often unwilling to accept that anything was different: 'I don't know because it has not actually started in here. Well I don't think it has' (10).

Answers to what management was looking for in team members overlapped both with the responses to the first question and with management objectives. UD employees were more explicit: 'More skills. More trust in each other – make your own decisions' (2); 'Everybody has to have a positive attitude now. Think of the company, and be company oriented. Your first thought in the morning and your last thought going to bed at night' (3). But some were more critical. It is worth quoting one team member in detail as she states more articulately what others did in a more fragmented way:

. . . actually they would have to get rid of the old workers and bring new ones and totally brainwash them. That's what they really need. Somebody that has not a clue about the whisky, so obviously it's like a new-born bairn, learning new skills all the way they want you, because we've still got our old habits in the way we work. . . . If they had a rubber they would rub us out and draw us in again and maybe not even have a mind of our own, but be treated like a robot (2).

This robot-like image came up again and again. Similarly another team member said that, 'They are looking for perfect people. . . . The only way

you will get one that is perfect is one that is man-made' (2). Even a team leader referred to 'Robocop – that's it'.

Action

The incident-based questions on the normative dimension focused on the skills and behaviour within teams that facilitate communication, and issues concerned with social cohesion and conformity associated with the demands of becoming 'team players'. Although ADL teams frequently referred to the fact that they had only just become 'teams' if at all, they all had a clear idea about the normative requirements from their past experiences of working in groups. The teams in both companies were positive about their ability to communicate and all teams provided appropriate examples. Responses frequently indicated a high level of team cohesion and sense of identity that is used to work more effectively. 'You all have to work together. You cannot have a wee individual that wants to do their own thing and say they will do it their own way' (6). Participants in ADL were less able to provide concrete examples. This is likely to be due to having less opportunity to work autonomously.

However it was notable that all except Team 1 in Leven had constructed their sense of identity in partial opposition to the formal structure of authority, overflowing into communication difficulties with their team leader. There was a strong feeling in Team 2 that their own improved communicative competencies were constrained by governance problems: 'No matter what people said, it always goes back to this rule and that'. In addition, all teams are highly protective of their members, but this phenomenon was stronger in Teams 1 and 2: 'Aye and we look after them if they had some problem at home or at work. You tell them "go and get a cup of tea, we'll cover your job, you get yourself sorted out and come back when you are ready"' (1). Perhaps because of this they are careful about the likely 'fit' of any incoming employee. In replacing someone who was unhappy with the technical and organizational changes taking place, Team 1 had an unusually high level of influence. They examined a range of options from the general business group and, 'we came up with only one person's name that we thought would be good in the team and put it to the team leader. He put it to the person and to the rest of our team, and everybody agreed that the person would fit in and left it up to us'. Other teams were also aware of the need for team members to be compatible. 'There will be clashes of personality, but there are people sometimes, that maybe cannot overcome that, so that the team is not really a team then' (9). Although all teams had a strong sense of their identity, the comments were less positive from the Shieldhall and ADL

teams. The difficulties may be related to less stability in membership and organization: 'You get used to working with people but it may take people some time to kind of settle down. Then you get settled and you have got another change again' (4).

This sense of cohesion led the majority of teams to have a high sense of their own worth, which was often at the expense of relationships with other teams, or the plant as a whole. 'We are one of the best teams in here' (5); 'I would say that we are the best team in the whole factory. There is other lines that just don't run like that' (9). However there is some evidence to indicate that team cohesion was not necessarily at the expense of conformity, especially at Leven. A member of Team 2 commented that, 'If anybody does something that's wrong, we'll tell them, but we'll make a joke about it, whereas on other lines they would talk behind their backs, or they'll let the person make the mistakes before they say it'. With respect to Team 1, the team leader argued even more strongly that:

... they are bonded as a team but I think they are beyond a normal team insofar as they will criticize one another and they will not necessarily defend one another *carte blanche* against outside comments. Sometimes they will close ranks but other times they will have a go at one another.

An indication of this balance of cohesion and creativity is demonstrated by the capacity of the team to operate on a basis of a high level of internal democracy. An example was given about how they coped with the disruption of a change in personnel: 'One person came up with a rota, I don't think any of us thought it was going to work out, but we said right we'll try it. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work and we'll think of something else' (1).

Within a number of these examples are clear indications of how experience of the governance dimension affects normative integration. Indeed there were fundamental differences in terms of governance practices between the Leven and Shieldhall teams and even more so between the UD and the ADL teams. In Leven both teams were generally positive about taking additional responsibilities and gave a large number of examples of taking decisions themselves, including changing procedures for ordering materials, work methods and allocation of tasks. This is reflected in attitudes such as 'Me, personally, I like working without a supervisor. I think it's good that we could make up our own mind, if you've got a good team, without a supervisor' (2).

Even within Leven, there were tensions at the boundaries between team member and team leader roles. Team 2 raised an issue with their team leader, but were still not happy, '... so we went right to the plant director ... we

all felt frustrated because nobody was listening to us'. The relationship between team leader and team seemed to be primarily consultative: '. . . our team leader will more or less say, "What do you think we can do about it to make it better?"'. In Shieldhall this was a much more general problem. Operators seemed to have very little opportunity to take responsibility for acting independently of the team leader: 'They will say well it is your decision and you can make as many decisions as you like, but, until you decide what the team leader wants you to know, then you can forget it' (3). Teams were sometimes able to take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the lines, but primarily in terms of *absence* or *allowance*, the gaps left in the supervisory function: 'Sometimes if you can't find a team leader you have to make your own decision' (4); 'The team leader lets you do all that yourself. Not every team leader does. But certain ones aye' (3).

At ADL, some felt that they had a little more control since the introduction of teamworking: 'We have responsibility for doing the end of orders, end of vats and everything ourselves now, whereas it used to be the team managers that did that' (6). Generally, however, operators felt that they had minimal control over their work and could give few examples of devolved responsibility: 'We run what we are told to when we go in and we just follow the order' (5). An interesting contrast emerged between the rationales of team leaders and members. The former attributed the problem largely to intra-team dynamics, in particular persuading anyone other than the 'natural leaders' to take responsibility: 'You are sort of telling everybody, but are eyeing one person and telling her this is what is going to happen. And they are well down the road with that' (team leader). Members viewed it differently. They felt that it was predominantly leaders that were limiting their responsibilities: 'We can make the line run without a team leader until something goes wrong. Until we need a part, or something has got to be changed, then you need to go and get someone. But we have done it before' (7).

Endorsement

To analyse responses to the survey questions we applied a one-way analysis of variance across plants and of variance across teams. Table 1 shows the differences between the plants in terms of overall endorsement of teamworking and in terms of the separate dimensions – normative, technical and governance. Within all plants the normative dimension was endorsed more strongly than the other two dimensions.

Leven produced a substantially higher mean than at least two of the other three plants in terms of overall endorsement of teamworking and of the governance dimension. A post-hoc test indicates that Team 1 from Leven

Table 1 Results of one-way analysis of variance for endorsement by plant

Dependent variable	Leven (1)	Shieldhall (2)	Kilmalid (3)	Newtown (4)	F	Bonferroni
Total endorsement	3.70	3.24	3.29	3.19	6.53**	1 > 2,4
Normative	4.06	3.84	3.56	3.96	1.19	
Technical	3.47	3.00	3.25	3.17	1.45	
Governance	3.58	2.89	3.06	2.45	10.17**	1 > 2,4

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$ (United Distillers in bold)

Table 2 Results of one-way analysis of variance for endorsement by team

Dependent variable	1 (1)	2 (1)	3 (2)	4 (2)	5 (3)	6 (3)	7 (4)	8 (4)	9 (4)	10 (4)	F	Bonferroni
Total endorsement	4.1	3.3	3.3	3.2	2.9	3.5	3.6	2.9	3.0	3.2	6.9**	1 > 5,8,9,10,4,3,2 7 > 8
Normative	4.2	3.9	3.7	4.1	3.3	3.7	4.3	3.8	3.4	4.0	1.8	
Technical	3.9	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.6	3.3	2.7	3.1	3.2	2.1*	1 > 5
Governance	4.1	3.1	3.2	2.6	2.7	3.3	3.2	2.3	2.6	2.3	7.9**	1 > 8,10,9,4,2

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$ (United Distillers in bold; number in brackets refers to plant; see Table 1)

also showed a significantly higher mean than the other teams in terms of overall endorsement, and the endorsement of the technical and governance aspects of teamworking. Again, all teams had higher means for the normative dimension than for governance or technical dimensions.

When Team 1 was removed from the analysis there was no difference between any of the plants either in terms of overall endorsement ($F = 2.74$) or in terms of endorsement of governance ($F = 3.48$) (see Table 2). The only real differences between any of the teams was the strong endorsement of the governance and technical aspects of teamworking by Team 1 and the strong overall endorsement of teamworking by the same Team. The overall means suggest that the majority of the teams feel positively about the principles of teamworking, despite most teams having limited opportunity to put them into practice.

The results of the open-ended question about endorsement of teamworking tell what appears to be quite a different tale and provide some of the clearest insights into the extent and character of normative integration. The wording of the question was: 'The reason that the company says teamworking has been introduced is to "motivate employees to come to work and feel positive about the business". Does teamworking make you feel like this? Please explain your answer'.

This question was answered by approximately 90 percent of team members. The rest left it blank, while many simply answered 'yes' or 'no', but there was also a wide range of additional answers. We divided responses into positive, negative and ambivalent (a small number of yes/but, or no/but answers; see Table 3).

Overall the responses from Leven were positive: 'Yes – makes your work more interesting, all the tasks you do now stops you from being bored'. A section of employees were positive about certain aspects of teamworking but also had specific reservations: 'Teamwork is learning me to be more positive, but sometimes the management ask far too much. More pressure. Gets you down'. The story was a very different one in Shieldhall with a decisive majority of employees expressing cynical views about teamworking: 'No because you are still not allowed to think for yourself'.

If there was ambiguity in the responses at UD, there was little at ADL where responses were overwhelmingly hostile. The few positive responses indicated that a minority of operators felt teamwork had led to an increase in work satisfaction: 'I feel better since teamworking came about. Before I was zombied between only doing menial tasks where now I feel more confidence about the knowledge I have learned recently. Coming to work is exciting'. That was cancelled out by other operators who felt that there was no difference either to the work or to their attitudes to that work: 'No, I still don't see any great change in the bottling hall'; 'Teamwork is part of your daily job and does not motivate me to come to work'. Many employees were

Table 3 Results of qualitative responses

	Yes	No	Ambivalent
Newtown	25%	75%	0%
Kilmalid	20%	80%	0%
Shieldhall	0%	80%	20%
Leven (overall)	54%	14%	32%
(Team 1)	64%	0%	36%
(Team 2)	43%	29%	28%

specific about the reasons that made them negative or sceptical: 'No, because the management we have just now don't have a clue and are running the place into the ground. No job is safe in here now'; 'No, because most feedback to management is ignored on a daily basis'.

There were large differences between the companies, and in the case of UD, between plants, as well as some differences between teams within the plants (see Table 3). The information obtained from this question relates the endorsement of teamworking to the specific work environment of the employees and thus team members were more likely to indicate endorsement in terms of their own experience. This is unlike the other part of the questionnaire, which was more likely to elicit responses that refer to an individual's general endorsement of the teamwork principle. If the responses in both companies are categorized on a broad spectrum which moves from intrinsic work factors at one end, to contingent or contextual issues at the other, it can be shown that at ADL hostility is largely tied to a variety of the latter factors, with insecurity, change fatigue and management deficiencies prominent.

Discussion and evaluation

In this final section we discuss the results of the case study in the context of the different dimensions of teamwork and of normative integration, and in relation to the multi-stage methodology outlined earlier. As we have seen the two companies made quite different 'investments' in the normative. UD, particularly at Leven, had extremely ambitious aims to develop employees equipped with the appropriate attitudes and behaviours for teamworking. For example, management interventions focused primarily on the micro, team-player level, but they also wanted to use teams to create greater business awareness through more direct exposure to information on competitiveness, and to a lesser extent use peer pressure as a means of internal discipline. ADL, once the initial attempt at soft-skills training had failed, implemented teamworking incrementally. This was largely through the development of technical competencies, with little explicit value-orientation.

Given the diversity of investments in the normative and associated governance competencies between and within the two companies, we would expect to see substantial differences in employees' responses. Yet, as Proctor and Mueller (2000: 19) note, 'There is no simple relationship between what management do and the attitude employees take'. There is certainly evidence for a behavioural impact, but the awareness and attitudinal responses are less clear cut. If we consider the qualitative evidence concerning awareness and

the results on endorsement from the survey, despite some variations, employees from all four plants understood the rationales behind teamworking and were well disposed towards its general principles. In other words, there is a good degree of endorsement of teamworking regardless of whether the associated behaviours are being practised. Yet practices do matter. The significantly higher means in the survey from Leven's Team 1 for overall endorsement and the governance and technical dimensions is consistent with the significantly greater demonstration of competencies in the critical incident questions.

In general, the 'action' responses provide data that appear to be much more in keeping with the company investments in the normative. Some management objectives such as positive attitudes, risk taking, individual and group responsibility and supportiveness had been achieved, albeit very unevenly. All teams were positive about their ability to communicate with each other, and about their levels of cohesion, but the Leven teams, and Team 1 in particular, took this a stage further. Team 1 was sufficiently cohesive that they were able to address problems within the group without any threat to team functioning. Although this could be attributed to the quality of training, or a fortunate mix of individuals, we should not underestimate the influence of governance practices. In particular, they had a team leader who devolved more responsibility and gave employees more latitude in decision making than other teams were allowed or able to take. Though they were distinctive in this respect, other evidence indicates that management had achieved its teamwork objectives more successfully in general at Leven. Indeed the plant was named UK Manufacturing Plant of the Year in 1998.

The responses of members when asked whether teamworking made 'people feel positive about coming to work' revealed significant differences between those that were given real opportunity to work as a team and those that were more constrained. In this respect there is an association between the exercise of work group autonomy and normative behaviours, similar to that found within the socio-technical systems and psychological literature (e.g. Goodman et al., 1988). The fundamental problem with much of the psychological literature is that such studies are largely concerned with the relationship between governance (particularly in terms of autonomy) and individual normative issues such as job satisfaction (Trist et al., 1977). While the lack of consideration of group-level issues is one that has been acknowledged (Parker & Wall, 1998), there continues to be an underestimation of the constraints on such autonomy from existing relations of control and competitiveness.

We should, nevertheless, exercise caution before accepting a view of team members in Leven and elsewhere as socially engineered individuals who

have internalized company normative demands. Such a perspective, popular elsewhere in some of the teamwork literature, is insufficiently differentiated at a conceptual level. As we indicated earlier, an examination of theory and practice on teamwork reveals that there are three senses in which the normative is generally invoked – as corporate socialization, as a micro-level emphasis on the creation of team players, and as a form of self-socialization through peer pressure and other mechanisms. Distinguishing between these elements helps to reveal the complexity of intent and outcome among managerial and employee actors. To illustrate that in this case, we return to each of the three senses.

Much managerial emphasis, particularly at UD, was placed on the creation of team players. However, there is evidence from the critical incident methodology and the questions on awareness of teamwork that explicit investment in diffusing normative objectives may be problematic. For example, whether or not the soft-skills training had an impact on practices, other than making employees aware of the principles of teamworking, is unclear. Certainly many employees had a poor perception of soft-skills training in both companies, describing it as ‘pointless’ or a ‘waste of money’. It could be that training and more indirect cultural messages got through despite employee scepticism, particularly when those messages are reinforced by teamwork practices themselves. This is certainly what managers believe and can be supported by some of our own observation of team meetings and teams in action. However, it is interesting to note that courses which were more concerned with the support systems for teamwork – numeracy, literacy and personal development – were viewed much more positively: As one employee observed, ‘It was not forced upon you. It was done under your own steam . . . they showed you what to do and it made you feel a wee bit better within yourself’. In other words, where employees felt an absence of coercion and the potential for mutual gains, allied to the practical development of work-related competencies, soft-skills training is likely to be better received.

To return to a theme of earlier discussion, the creation of new value systems to support teamwork practices at the micro level is undermined when there is a gap between the practices and those values. For example, team members at Shieldhall were very aware of such inconsistency: ‘Teamwork has allowed me to learn new skills and gain experience about different departments, but I feel we are not allowed to make the most of what we know, and cannot use our initiative.’ With respect to such tensions, we can see some integration between the three dimensions of teamwork, how they interact in practice and in the attitudes of operators. Team members, even at Leven, were concerned and sometimes disillusioned with teamwork, because it has

become associated with increased work pressures. A recurrent theme of comments is 'abuse' of flexibility and a feeling that the gains from continuous improvement and enhanced efficiencies are used relentlessly to reduce the size of teams: 'Did we not have a wee thing that said "Work smarter not harder". They have got it mixed up in here. You are working harder, but are not working smarter' (see Findlay et al., 2000 for more detail). This type of finding is not uncommon in both the sociological and psychological literature. Martin and Wall (1989) found that a combination of high demands and high production responsibility had negative consequences for employees' well being.

On the question of the exercise of *self-socialization* through peer pressure, emphasized in the Foucauldian literature, we are much more sceptical. Our evidence indicates that, whatever 'iron bars' may accompany the operation of teams, members are aware and critical of them. Employees at UD had varying though clear boundaries of what is acceptable in the normative sphere. As we saw earlier, they are highly critical of the normative demands and any sign of 'brainwashing', or the search for the 'perfect'. The fact that we did not pick up similar comments at ADL reinforces the point about acceptable boundaries. Given employee scepticism about whether teamwork has been introduced or is different from what they have always been doing, ADL employees are still viewing teamwork primarily as 'outsiders', therefore such criticisms are likely to be less pertinent to their experience.

McCabe (2000) and Pollert (1996) also observed similar comments from employees about 'brainwashing'. In McCabe's case it is a welcome indication that Foucauldian influenced research can demonstrate sensitivity to the way in which employees engage critically with managerial discourses and resist 'the standardising pressures to conform' (2000: 218). Clearly there is scope for variation in the character and extent of normative integration. There may indeed be instances where it is higher than our own cases. For example, Barker's (1993) evidence is convincing, yet he does not consider the extent to which it is generalizable from what may be a highly specific context. Overall, we believe that our sceptical interpretation concerning normative integration is consistent with much of the wider evidence. McKinlay and Taylor's (1996) well-known Phonoco case in a Scottish electronics plant demonstrates that the 'best' of managerial intentions can unravel as employee suspicion and resistance to self-discipline through peer review led to the implosion of the system. Other studies such as Dawson (1991), Robertson et al. (1992), Sharpe (1996) and Stephenson (1994) also identify signs of dissatisfaction, lack of commitment and actual or potential resistance, often based on sub-cultures within the team system.

In addition, we would argue that the high levels of cultural cohesion

are largely self-generated by and within the teams, rather than imposed by or internalized from management. This sense of self-organization comes across very strongly when teams discuss their practices and attitudes. They are clear about the continuity of that cohesiveness. For example, a member of Team 1 commented that, 'We are a good team, we get on well together. But none of the training has come into it – it's how we all feel about each other'. While they do value 'positive attitudes' towards work and working together as a team, employees are protective of social difference within their ranks as exemplified by these responses from different members of one of the Shieldhall teams to one of our questions about 'team players': 'People will always have wee quirks about their personality'; 'They will never change anybody'; and most important given the title of this article – 'Nobody is perfect'. Similarly, an ADL operator commented that, 'Everybody is an individual, we have all got personalities and lots of different things. You will not get everyone to agree, that is an impossibility' (10). The length of time that teamworking has been implemented within the plant, and the team had been together appeared to have a positive association with cohesiveness. This is consistent with the findings of Wright and Edwards (1998: 64) who found that 'a situation of cohesive work groups, underpinned by high levels of job tenure, encourage acceptance of teams.' In terms of the psychological literature, such observations appear to confirm that cohesive/compatible teams are the most productive, but fail to corroborate the belief that teams need to be created in this manner, rather than it being an evolutionary process.

Finally, with respect to *corporate socialization*, our evidence from questions on awareness of motives for teamwork and other sources demonstrates that many employees are more mindful of business issues, arising from taking increased responsibilities and being exposed to additional company information. This can, however, be a double-edged sword. Both companies in recent years have shed hundreds of jobs in their bottling operations, and the responses from the team members indicate that they were aware of the vulnerable position of plants and the competitive pressure that they are under. Responses frequently demonstrated that attitudes towards teamwork were being filtered negatively through expectations of employment insecurity and organizational upheaval, particularly at ADL and in Shieldhall. This echoes Buchanan's (2000: 35) findings that the current pattern of disruptive change is damaging the broader psychological contract, but that teamwork may act to tie employees to more 'local', production-based norms.

The wider context emerges in other ways. For example, the defensive mentality of many groups confirms that the development of teamwork embodies a tension between the micro and macro level. At ADL, because

teamwork was also sold in more general terms as a way of creating 'one big team', it became vulnerable to perceived failures to deliver: '... everybody works together – but that has got to include management in here as well and it is not happening. They do not tell people on the shop floor what is going on. We have heard it all before. We don't trust the management now' (10). Support systems are also significant in this respect. The establishment of an effective partnership agreement with trade unions at Leven was a crucial factor in creating a positive climate for work reorganization. In contrast, at ADL the significance of the failure to develop a fully realized version of teamwork had a lot to do with the difficulty faced by operations management in introducing such extensive changes without support from the HR department.

Taking our overall evidence, we have been critical of those views that see teamwork as a vehicle for high levels of normative integration, whether seen as positive intervention to design compatible groups or as coercive social engineering. Teamwork acts less as a transformation vehicle than its advocates and critics at either end of the spectrum often assert. That is, in part, a consequence of complex contextual factors, including the previous patterns of management control and worker experience (Marchington, 2000: 73). In this respect while our evidence *does* support a positive association between normative integration and the exercise of meaningful team autonomy, that needs to be offset against a number of other key factors. These include the boundaries of acceptable normative intervention set by team members, perceptions of high costs associated with the objectives pursued by management in the technical sphere, and the frequently negative mediating effects from the broader managerial and corporate context. The Team Dimensions Model can play a significant role in unravelling and understanding those complex interactions.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on research undertaken for 'The Manufacturing of Workplace Innovation in the Scottish Spirits Industry', funded by the ESRC Innovation Programme.
- 2 The support systems are not attached to any specific dimension.
- 3 Senior managers (10 in UD and 7 in ADL); plant managers (2 in UD and 2 in ADL); HR managers (3 in UD and 2 in ADL); team leaders (4 in UD and 6 in ADL).
- 4 The numbers in brackets refer to the number we allocated to the team. See Methodology section for allocation details.

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