INTO THE MYSTIC:
CULTURAL CHANGE AND TQM TEAMS
IN THE NSW PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

Cultural change in the guise of quality customer service was promoted in the NSW public sector by former Premiers Greiner and Fahey. This paper explores the impact of a management strategy of cultural change and TQM teams within one public sector agency - Buildcorp - of the former NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education (DIRETFE). The paper argues that cultural change failed to achieve its objective of a quality customer service culture because of workplace management practices which emphasised 'downsizing' of Buildcorp's workforce and the rationalisation of work processes. Moreover, workplace managers resisted the challenge to their prerogatives that TQM team recommendations represented. DIRETFE's strategy of TQM teams and a quality customer service culture also failed because of growing disenchantment by senior management at its inability to produce measurable productivity outcomes.
Governments in the 1990s have been encouraged to 'reinvent' their public sectors through the promotion of a culture which is 'mission' rather than rule driven (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993: 110). Such experiments with cultural change were enthusiastically promoted by the Liberal/National coalition government in power in NSW from 1988 till March 1995 - in particular by Premiers Greiner and Fahey (Greiner, 1992; Fahey, 1994b; Fahey, 1994c). Changing the culture represented part of this government's agenda to introduce private sector management practices into the NSW public sector. In the process the government sought to change the culture from one perceived as preoccupied with building bureaucratic empires, to one which strived to provide an improved quality of service to its customers (Greiner, 1992: 43). This focus on cultural change mirrors international trends and similar experiments have been undertaken by both British and North American governments in an attempt to alter the culture of their public sectors from supposedly unproductive bureaucracies to efficient and responsive customer driven organisations (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993; Pollitt, 1993). At a workplace level the quality culture seeks to 'empower' public service workers and provide them with an increased role in decision-making through the introduction of total quality management (TQM) teams.

This paper critically assesses the introduction of cultural change and TQM within the NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education (DIRETFE). This involved the promotion of a new 'vision', mission and set of core values under the guiding principle of 'True North', a metaphor for the department's search for its 'true direction' on its 'quality journey'. It also involved the introduction of TQM teams throughout the department. The
effectiveness of 'True North' and TQM teams is examined through a case study of one agency with DIRETFE - Buildcorp. Buildcorp's function within DIRETFE was to provide a portable scheme for long service payments to workers in the building and construction industry in NSW. Buildcorp was also at the forefront of the department's attempts to introduce process teams. Two of the four teams which had presented their recommendations by July 1994 to the DIRETFE Quality Council, comprised of senior management who monitored the progress of TQM teams throughout the department, originated from Buildcorp (Customer Service Project Officers, 27 July 1994). The data presented in the paper was obtained from both semi-structured interviews with senior public service management, workplace managers, workers involved in TQM teams and other workers within Buildcorp affected by the outcomes of TQM team deliberations. Interviews were also conducted with an industrial officer and workplace delegates of the NSW Public Service Association (PSA). The interviews were conducted between July 1994 and June 1995. The data gathering process also included analysis of documentation prepared by these groups as part of, or in response to, DIRETFE's 'True North' and TQM teams strategy.

Buildcorp's workforce at the time of the study numbered merely forty-two workers and as such it is not representative of workplaces within the NSW public sector. Therefore it is not possible to generalise the findings from this case study to broader populations, such as the NSW public sector as a whole (Yin, 1989: 21). But, they can be generalised to theoretical principles as the purpose of case study research is to provide 'a detailed examination of an event (or series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some
identified general theoretical principle' (Mitchell, 1983: 192). This suggests that case studies be chosen predominantly for their ability to test and build theory rather than on the basis of their typicality (Stoecker, 1991). Mitchell (1983: 203-7) maintains that the selection of case studies should be based on their explanatory potential and not on grounds of typicality as:

'The validity of the extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning'.

This paper proposes six arguments regarding cultural change and TQM teams which the case study of Buildcorp aims to test. These arguments are that:

(i) Attempts to alter workforce values through cultural change programs may falter in the face of workplace labour management practices which focus on rationalisation and cost minimisation.

(ii) TQM teams may provide workers with limited autonomy over decision-making while initial enthusiasm for participating in team activities may dissipate where workers are expected to undertake these duties on top of their existing work tasks.

(iii) The implementation of TQM team recommendations may be frustrated by workplace management resistance with senior management involvement to overcome such resistance increasing tensions within the management hierarchy.
(iv) A focus on 'internal customer service' may result in increased conflict between workers in different functional areas.

(v) Management may seek to use cultural change and TQM team activities to communicate directly to employees and avoid trade union involvement.

(vi) Cultural change and TQM teams may represent a temporary management fad or 'cycle of control' that may be abandoned where they fail to deliver measurable productivity improvements.

The paper is structured in the following way. The first section traces the Greiner/Fahey governments' focus on developing a quality customer service culture for the NSW public sector and DIRETFE's response to this policy directive. The second section examines the potential for this quality customer service culture to succeed in the face of existing labour management practices. The third section outlines the operation of two TQM process improvement teams within Buildcorp. The fourth section reviews the response of workplace management within Buildcorp to TQM team recommendations and the interaction between workplace and senior Departmental management. The fifth section details the responses of the workforce, or 'internal customers', within Buildcorp to TQM team recommendations. The sixth section examines the reaction of the NSW Public Service Association (PSA) to TQM teams. The seventh section explores whether 'True North' and TQM teams represent a short-term management fad within DIRETFE. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the main points of the paper.
Greiner, Fahey and Quality Customer Service

The quality customer service initiative in the New South Wales public sector began with the 'Face the World' statement by the former Premier Nick Greiner in 1992. This statement sought to provide the government's 'vision' for the NSW public sector and encouraged each NSW public sector agency to develop Guarantees of Service statements and establish Customer Councils as a demonstration of their commitment to quality customer service (Greiner, 1992). Guarantees of Service statements were to outline the agency's customers, the services these customers are provided with, and the avenues available to customers to lodge complaints or make suggestions regarding the quality of service that they received (Customer Service Project officers, 1994).

The momentum for Guarantee of Service statements was maintained by Greiner's successor John Fahey in two memorandums and a statement in 1994. In the first memorandum, in February 1994, Premier Fahey noted that Guarantee of Service statements were not static documents but needed to be updated (Fahey, 1994a). In response to this memorandum each agency was to provide details to the Office of Public Management regarding their customer service activities. An analysis of the reports by agencies to the Office of Public management, Premier's department, in August 1994 noted that 27 agencies had included a customer focus within their Corporate Plan and 13 had undertaken total quality management, quality assurance, benchmarking or continuous improvement. But, overall, the report conceded that 'many Government agencies have little experience in implementing quality customer service strategies' (Fahey, 1994c: 3). In December
1994, a second memorandum and statement was issued by Premier Fahey requiring agencies to initiate 'quality customer service' involving management strategies which went beyond Guarantees of Service and Customer Councils to include staff participation in improving service to the public sector's customers (Fahey, 1994b; Fahey 1994c: 1). Quality customer service was to be implemented within all NSW government departments. The next section explores its introduction within the DIRETFE.

DIRETFE was a diverse organisation which undertook 5 core functions. The department's private sector industrial relations services monitored the Industrial Relations Act 1991 (NSW) and the adoption of enterprise bargaining by the private sector. It also provided an awards advisory service handling approximately half a million enquiries a year from the public and an industrial inspectorate. The department's public sector industrial relations services monitored the spread of enterprise agreements in the public sector. The department's employment programs assisted the long term unemployed and its training function developed NSW government policy on vocational education. Finally, the department's further education arm was involved in the provision of English language education for migrant workers through the Adult Migrant English Service (DIRETFE, 1994a: 5-43).

DIRETFE responded to the requirement to prepare Guarantees of Service from 1992 and promote quality customer service from 1994. Each agency and section of the department developed Guarantees of Service statements throughout 1992-3 (DIRETFE, 1994c). The department also established a customer service corporate priority unit comprising two project officers to develop strategies consistent with the
government's quality customer service initiative and made 'Improving Internal and External Customer Service' a corporate priority for the 1993/4 and 1994/5 corporate plans (DIRETFE, 1994b).

In March 1994 DIRETFE revised its existing Guarantee of Service statement and in a letter to the Premier's Department, the Director General of DIRETFE in July 1994 pointed out that:

'At this stage 70% of the [DIRETFE] regions/product centres have produced a GOS document and 6 Customer Councils are operational with 5 more currently under consideration' (DIRETFE, 1994h).

DIRETFE also established a Quality Council comprised of senior management within the department to provide leadership and support for the quality customer service culture. The existing workplace culture which prevailed within DIRETFE was described by the customer service project officers as 'bureaucratic'. Business Unit Managers were perceived as consistently failing to delegate to or involve their staff in decision making and required strict adherence to rules and upward delegation. Staff activities also needed the approval of more senior levels within the administrative hierarchy (Customer Service Project Officers, 27 July 1994).

Senior management sought to change this 'bureaucratic' culture by defining DIRETFE's 'vision', mission and core values. This was to be achieved under the guiding principle of 'True North' - a metaphor for the organisation's search for its 'true direction' on the 'quality journey'
DIRETFE's vision was meant to provide a focus for the type of organisation it wanted to become. It stated that:

'By the year 2000, DIRETFE will be a model of excellence in public service that provides our customers with the best quality information, advice and assistance in industrial relations, employment, training and further education. We will be a dynamic and flexible learning organisation that is responsive to the needs of our customers and staff.' (DIRETFE, 1994f).

The Mission sought to provide insights in how the vision could be achieved and urged management and labour:

'To meet the needs and expectations of our customers by providing job opportunities, skills development and work practices in NSW through high quality advise, programs and services' (DIRETFE, 1994f).

Six core values emerged from an employee survey and conference with middle management throughout the organisation. These included: respect for people; customer satisfaction; working together; accountability; technical and professional competence; and innovation (DIRETFE, 1994e). The achievement of the organisation's quality customer service culture was to evolve from an acceptance by DIRETFE's workforce of 'True North's' vision, mission and core values.

An employee survey was conducted to gauge the response of the workforce to 'True North' and the department's definitions of its vision, mission and core values. The employee survey generated 492 responses, a response rate of approximately 30 per cent. (DIRETFE,
The employee survey contained a range of both positive and critical responses. Enthusiasts among the survey respondents (14 per cent) hailed 'True North' as 'An estimable and challenging goal'. Among the more critical respondents, (48 per cent) staff observed that 'Adequate resourcing in particular with regard to staff is necessary to achieve the vision', others noted that 'Learning organisation' is a jargon and trendy term', while the vision was 'perceived to be worded in motherhood statements that are meaningless and too long'. Constraints on the achievement of the vision and mission outlined by staff included 'lack of resources, ... poor leadership and bureaucratic practices' (DIRETFE, 1994g). A video extolling the virtues of 'True North', and featuring the department's Director-General, was filmed for the staff Christmas message (DIRETFE, 1994e). To compliment the employee survey, the customer service project officers sought to generate both senior and middle management commitment to the goals of 'True North' via a planning conference prior to Christmas 1994. The conference was attended by 140 managers from the senior executive service, local areas and product centres throughout the organisation and discussed 'True North's' proposals for 'vision', mission and core values (Customer Service Project Officers, 9 January 1995).

The diffusion of the quality customer service culture within DIRETFE was also to be achieved by the establishment of TQM process improvement teams throughout the department. Process teams comprised of staff at the 'coalface' within each agency and focused on eliminating waste and improving customer service. There were a maximum of six workers in each cross-functional team with members drawn from a range of areas across an agency. Each team elected its own team leader (Customer Service Project Officers, 27 July 1994).
July 1994 some thirteen TQM process teams were in operation within DIRETFE with a further six being contemplated (DIRETFE, 1994h). But, process teams were limited in their autonomy by middle management guidance teams. Guidance teams comprised the director and other middle managers within an agency and their objective was to provide 'leadership' for the process teams by reviewing the issues raised by workers and deciding which ones were suitable for a process team to investigate. This approach sought to minimise the risk of process teams developing recommendations that would then face workplace management resistance. Once they had accepted the process team's recommendations, workplace management were to develop an action plan which would then be integrated within the agency's business plan (Customer Service Project Officers, 27 July 1994). Guidance teams comprising middle management limited the freedom of process teams to examine work processes of their choosing.

PSA delegates within DIRETFE were critical of the department's focus on 'True North' and process teams. The secretary and chair of the Public Service Association of New South Wales (PSA) delegate committee within DIRETFE argued that 'True North' was foreign to the proper role and function of the New South Wales public service. The union considered that this management driven focus on instilling a 'vision' and mission was inappropriate for the public sector where the mission originated with the decisions of parliament and where the role of public servants was to implement these decisions as best they could, rather than develop their own agendas. The PSA delegates further maintained that public service workers react negatively to, and were alienated by, the language of customer service which many perceived
to represent a criticism of their ability to deal effectively with the public (PSA DIRETFE Departmental Committee Delegates, 22 March, 1995).

Moreover, PSA delegates within DIRETFE argued that public service workers would come off second best if the focus of process teams was the satisfaction of 'customer' expectations: 'if the two come into conflict, there is an overt expectation that it is the rights of the workers that will become subordinate' (PSA, 1995b, 2). The union maintained that by committing themselves to a particular recommendation workers in TQM process teams may be giving away their existing industrial rights by exaggerating their ability to undertake certain tasks. As the department was under tight budget constraints 'customer service' initiatives had to be either cost neutral or involve cost reductions. As salaries represented the largest item in the department's cost structure, the PSA feared that the department's customer service corporate priority represented a down-sizing exercise by stealth (PSA DIRETFE Departmental Committee Delegates, 22 March 1995). The union also believed that process team recommendations which raised occupational health and safety, technological change and training issues were also likely to be ignored because of their budgetary implications (PSA, 1995b, 4). The following section explores the potential for cultural change in the guise of 'True North' to succeed in the face of workplace labour management practices within Buildcorp.

**Cultural Change versus Workplace Labour Management Practices**

Cultural change, in accordance with the prescriptions of the normative total quality management (TQM) literature, has been actively promoted within the public sector (Osbourne and Gaebler, 1993: 172). TQM
emphasises the importance of creating a quality culture throughout the organisation (Linkow, 1989: 69; Wilcox, 1991, 18). Since the publication of the 'excellence' literature in the early 1980s managers have been encouraged to transform the culture of their organisations (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Culture can be defined as the 'habitual and traditional ways of thinking, feeling and reacting that are characteristic to a particular organization' (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990: 9). Cultural change involves a management driven initiative to change these traditional ways of thinking in an attempt to socialise workers into accepting management defined values, goals and objectives (Blyton and Turnbull, 1992; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale, 1985). TQM's quality culture also emphasises the commonality of interests between capital and labour. For Deming (1986: 148), one of TQM's leading 'gurus':

'Once the superficial, adversarial relationship between managers and workers is eliminated, they are more likely to pull together during difficult times and to defend their common interests in the firm's health'.

Unitarism clearly drives management's efforts to instill a total quality corporate culture (Fox, 1974; Kelly, 1995: 131).

Such unitarist attempts to mould corporate culture, and alter workforce values and behaviour, resemble the manipulative tendencies of Orwellian doublethink (Willmott, 1993: 535). While appearing to emphasise individuality, corporate culture seeks to ensure that workers identify with a managerially defined set of values, thereby reinforcing the hegemony of management 'by managing the impression of
respecting the distinctiveness and individuality of each employee' (Willmott, 1993: 526).

But, the focus on creating a corporate quality culture overlooks the potential for conflict to exist both within the management hierarchy and between management and labour (Dawson and Palmer, 1993: 128). Organisations may contain a range of different and conflicting subcultures which may have deep roots in the values of workers. An organisation's culture is therefore not something tangible that management possesses and is able to mould to satisfy its own objectives (Pollitt, 1993: 171). Moreover, management attempts to alter the values and beliefs held by shopfloor workers may, at best, result in minor changes in workforce behaviour while failing to alter the deep seated values that workers hold (Ogbonna, 1992: 83). Rather than identifying with the corporate culture, workers response can be selective and involve minimal compliance (Willmott, 1993: 541).

Similarly, the values held by public service workers may not be amenable to change in response to a short term cultural change program. Attempts to change the culture of the British and American public services 'have been either crude or contradictory or largely ineffective or some combination of all three' (Pollitt, 1993: 25). Were it possible for management to instill a 'strong' and unified culture, this may result in 'dysfunctional solidarity' with workers combining against, rather than in furtherance of, the interests of management (Legge, 1989, 38). On the whole, management's attempts to socialise management values and beliefs among workers may enjoy limited success beyond the ranks of management themselves. Indeed, this outcome may be deliberate
'to cocoon management within a world view that is secure against intrusion' (Anthony, 1990: 3-8).

The effectiveness of TQM's quality culture may also be constrained because it conflicts with existing workplace labour management practices. Kramar argues that 'unless those implementing the policies change their values and behaviours, the revised policies will not be implemented' (1992: 11-13). But, the likelihood of such a transformation in management behaviour may be constrained by competitive product market pressures or the onset of recession. This may give rise to management strategies of cost minimisation as management is compelled towards emphasising the 'hard' side of TQM - just-in-time, statistical process control - in preference to TQM's 'soft' emphasis on customer satisfaction (Wilkinson, 1992: 325). Pollitt (1993: 170) observes that changing the culture of a public sector organisation in Britain and North America would require a considerable allocation of management time, effort and expenditure which the political leadership dominant in those countries would be unlikely to condone.

The impact of DIRETFE's quality customer service culture of workforce involvement in decision-making may be constrained where it clashed with existing labour management practices which focus on increasing efficiency. Throughout the time of the case study Buildcorp was experiencing external environmental pressure in the form of public and private sector reviews of its operation, creating a fear of privatisation amongst workplace management. Buildcorp has been subject to Departmental reviews by DIRETFE, who management also feared could take over it's human resources and accounting functions, and by
two private sector accounting firms. Moreover, Buildcorp had been investigated by the Giles Royal Commission into the Building Industry, which was critical of the scheme. Management further feared that a private sector insurer could offer to run the scheme as had occurred to similar schemes in Queensland and Victoria (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994).

Workplace management responded to the threat of privatisation by maximising efficiency and minimising costs. Cost minimisation involved rationalising administrative costs whilst making work processes more efficient. For example, within the claims section of the industry services branch (which dealt directly with building workers), management claimed it had 're-engineered' the processing of building workers' claims. Whereas in 1987-88 it took between thirty and sixty days to process a claim, by 1994 this has been reduced to one to two days, while the number of staff involved in claims had been reduced from six to one (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994). Overall administration costs had also been reduced from in excess of $6 million in 1989 to $4.3 million for the 1994-95 financial year. As a result of this rationalisation the scheme costed approximately 50 cents per worker per week. Workplace management observed that this outcome compared favourably against private sector superannuation schemes which cost approximately 80 cents per member per week (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994). Management conceded that they were reaching the limits of their ability to rationalise further. On the basis of complaints by the public to their parliamentary representatives regarding the level of service provided by Buildcorp, management were aware that they had 're-engineered' the organisation to the point where
the rise in complaints from the public outweighed the advantages of further rationalisation (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994). Rationalisation had been most evident in the area of salaries - the organisation's largest cost - resulting in a substantial 'downsizing' of Buildcorp's workforce. Buildcorp employed approximately 143 workers in 1986 when it was established and this number has been steadily reduced to forty-two (or by approximately seventy per cent over nine years) through a combination of natural attrition, redundancies and redeployment. 'Downsizing' had occurred throughout all branches of Buildcorp. Within industry services, the number of workers handling telephone enquiries had been cut back. Within the finance branch, 'downsizing' occurred in response to the NSW government's decision to freeze Buildcorp's levy of building employers from 29 March 1993 to 31 December 1994 (Buildcorp, 1993a). This resulted in the loss of eight positions held by those involved in processing the Levy and the loss of twenty positions overall, mainly within the finance area. The PSA industrial officer conceded that there was little the union could do to save these jobs given the power granted to departmental heads under the 1992 Public Sector Management Act to delete or create jobs (PSA Industrial Officer, 2 November 1994). The PSA sought to ensure that appropriate channels were established by management to enable staff to be redeployed (PSA, 1993).

In contrast to TQM's advocacy of workforce 'empowerment' which aimed to increase employee commitment to the organisation, labour management practices such as the 'downsizing' exercises at Buildcorp increased stress levels amongst the workforce. It was commonplace for workers to perceive themselves as 'moving targets' as all positions
appeared to be under constant threat (Buildcorp Workforce, 1994; Buildcorp, 1993d: 1-5). Finance, information services and human resources staff felt particularly threatened as these sections could potentially be taken over by DIRETFE's head office. The reduction in the number of workers employed by the corporation as a consequence of the 'downsizing' exercises resulted in a greater intensity and pace of work for remaining staff. Buildcorp's workforce observed that they worked in a perpetual state of 'crisis management' with the added work pressure particularly acute during Buildcorp's peak work period from July to the end of each year, when employer certificates of the number of days service of their employees were received and the annual Notice of Service statements were posted to building industry workers (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

Again in contrast to TQM's quality culture, which aims to increase staff motivation and commitment to the organisation, the 'downsizing' exercises had a negative effect on workforce morale. On the whole, the workforce perceived management to be remote and unapproachable. During a customer service workshop held prior to the introduction of TQM teams, staff commented that management was alternately 'Always at meetings or stuck in their offices' and suggested that they should participate more in the work undertaken by staff at the 'coalface' (Buildcorp, 1993d: 2). Poor workforce morale was reinforced by a marked cynicism amongst staff towards the actions of workplace management. For example, new computers and training courses for staff were finally introduced in October 1994. In response staff ran a betting 'book' providing a range of odds for the week likely to be chosen by management for staff training on the new computer software. The 'book' was cancelled, however, when it became apparent that all staff
had picked the same week - the beginning of the peak period when telephone enquiries from building workers in response to the Notices of Service would be at its busiest. Workplace management subsequently introduced computer training on the week that the peak period began (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

Finally, workforce morale at Buildcorp was further eroded by a history of minimal consultation by management. While some managers had sought to provide staff with as much information as practicable, the workforce believed that management overall were reluctant to divulge information to them. Throughout the main periods of 'downsizing', workers maintained that management was reluctant to divulge which positions were to be abolished (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994; Buildcorp, 1993b). The workforce also felt excluded from involvement in day to day decision-making processes throughout Buildcorp:

‘front-line staff are not empowered to make obvious decisions where the policy is clear but the matter still had to be referred upwards...[with] advice given by staff at the counter or over the phone, based on policy, overridden by more senior staff' (Buildcorp, 1993d: 6).

Therefore, in contrast to the emphasis of cultural change on introducing quality customer service, workplace labour management practices within Buildcorp which focused on 'downsizing' and rationalisation increased workforce stress levels, reduced morale. The following section assesses what impact workplace management had on workforce participation in decision-making via TQM teams.
TQM Teams and Workforce Participation in Decision-Making

As part of the process of attempting to instill a quality culture, management may introduce TQM teams and seek (however superficially) to involve workers more in decision-making (Palmer and Saunders, 1992: 69). TQM teams are meant to empower public service workers nearest to the customer and invert the traditional hierarchy of organisational power and control (Morgan and Murgatroyd, 1993: 16-7). When introducing TQM teams, management may allocate considerable financial and time resources training team members in statistical analysis, pareto charts, cause and effect diagrams, communication skills and so on (Brown, 1992: 11). As a result of the prospect of greater participation in workplace decision-making, Hill (1991a: 565) argues that workers respond enthusiastically to TQM. For example, within Australia, the introduction of TQM teams at Colonial Mutual is credited with producing an 'avalanche of new ideas' or 'self initiated TQM' (Mathews, 1991: 19). Initial enthusiasm for quality initiatives, however, may diminish where workers are expected to participate in process improvement team activities on top of their regular work tasks (Allen, 1991: 54).

The actual extent of decision-making accorded to workers under TQM programs appears questionable. The involvement of workers in TQM teams may be limited to determining problems at the point of production. Wilkinson et al (1991: 28) found that decision-making by TQM teams in Britain was restricted solely to resolving problems of work organisation while, in Australia, Lever-Tracey (1990) found that employee involvement initiatives by management at Ford
Broadmeadow's car plant did not provide workers with any greater participation in workplace decision-making than had existed previously. Therefore, TQM teams may not present a challenge to management's prerogatives or control over decision-making. Management continue to retain control over how resources are utilised, what goods or services are produced and how profits are dispersed (Dawson and Palmer, 1993: 126; Dawson and Webb, 1989: 236; Kelly, 1995: 130; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992b: 111). Therefore, the degree of autonomy over decision-making ceded to workers in TQM teams may prove limited and initial workforce enthusiasm to participate in teams may diminish where workers are expected to undertake TQM team activities on top of their existing work tasks.

Two process teams commenced on October 28 1993 within Buildcorp: 'Cheque Mates' and 'Just Asc'. The 'Cheque Mates' team decided to investigate the processes being used to pay claims by building workers for long service payment (Buildcorp, 1994a: 1-2). Whilst workplace management allowed the 'Cheque Mates' team to conduct its research without interference, the 'Just Asc' team's terms of reference were limited to suggesting improvements to the process by which additional medical service credits were allocated to building workers who suffered injury or illness. Before the introduction of process teams into Buildcorp, problems with identifying and processing the allocation of medical additional service credits had been a major issue for Buildcorp. The 'Just Asc' team suspected that management chose this issue as it was not too controversial and had relatively predictable outcomes (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).
Both process teams conducted extensive research prior to submitting their recommendations. The 'Cheque Mates' team examined the branches of the organisation involved in handling claims and highlighted potential problems associated with this process (Buildcorp, 1994a: 2). The team highlighted time delays in the existing system for paying claims by building workers for long service. Building workers experienced substantial delays if cheques were lost or sent to the wrong address (Buildcorp, 1994a: 3). Also, the existing process did not permit immediate payment of a claim and 24 hours delay occurred between the time claims were lodged by building workers to the time they could be collected in person. The payment of claims was further delayed by postage of one to three days and took another four days to clear through the banking system (Buildcorp, 1994a: 3).

To find possible solutions to these delays, the 'Cheque Mates' process team consulted with the Australian Taxation Office, NSW Treasury, State Bank of NSW, Internal Auditors and State Lotteries. The team's research highlighted that financial institutions and State Lotteries were using electronic funds transfer. Within Buildcorp, despite reluctance from workplace management in providing information, the process team was able to ascertain that Buildcorp had the hardware to run electronic funds transfer, although a modification to the existing computer software was required (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

The 'Cheque Mates' team made three recommendations in response to the delays it found with the existing process. The team's preferred recommendation was to provide an electronic funds transfer service for building workers. The team's research demonstrated that electronic funds transfer was used by all major financial institutions (Buildcorp,
The cost of electronic funds transfer was estimated at $0.05 per claim above the current process. The major advantage of electronic funds transfer, in 'Cheque Mates' view, was its ability to expedite the payment of claims. This would enable building and construction workers to present a claim to counter staff and, once approved, to have the money delivered to their bank account by the next day. Moreover, as each bank branch had a separate bank state and branch number and independently checked account names and numbers, all failed transactions would come back to Buildcorp (Buildcorp, 1994a: 7). One drawback of this recommendation was that it could not be used if the customer did not provide an account number, in which case a second recommendation was to be adopted which involved a combination of electronic funds transfer and payment by cheque. A third recommendation by 'Cheque Mates' was to maintain the existing system. The team considered this to be an inadequate solution, particularly for those building workers who had travelled to Buildcorp and had to come back the following day to collect their cheque (Buildcorp, 1994a).

The 'Just Asc' process team recommended improvements to the process of paying additional medical service credits. In 1992/3 a total of 49,017 days of service were allocated to 238 workers, or an average of about five requests a week (Buildcorp, 1994b: 6). The 'Just Asc' team found delays occurred with the receipt of documents from building workers under the current system, with little publicity made available by Buildcorp regarding a worker's eligibility for additional service credits and even less about the documentation required (Buildcorp, 1994b: 5). The existing information contained in the annual Notice of Service statement was also found to be confusing. The Notice of Service stated
...if you were unemployed and suffered from illness or injury you may be able to have credits added to your record... (cited in Buildcorp, 1994b: 6). Workers who had been unemployed but not suffered injury or illness were not covered, and this ambiguity often proved frustrating for unemployed building workers, while the rejection of their enquiries resulted in more intensive workloads for membership services staff and did little to improve Buildcorp's image (Buildcorp, 1994b: 6).

In response to these problems, the 'Just Asc' team detailed three recommendations to improve the allocation of additional service credits. They recommended firstly, that a brochure be developed which clarified eligibility for additional service credits and which contained a Statutory Declaration for eligible workers to complete (Buildcorp, 1994b: 5). Secondly, that responsibility for the allocation of medical additional service credits be devolved to membership services staff rather than waiting for management approval (Buildcorp, 1994b: 11) and thirdly that the reference to additional service credits on the Notice of Service forms issued to all building workers be amended to overcome the current ambiguity.

Those workers within Buildcorp who participated in the 'Cheque Mates' and 'Just Asc' teams noted that they gained considerable satisfaction from participating in these teams. One process team leader commented that they found the experience 'extremely rewarding...It has provided invaluable skills in the coordination of a multidiscipline team, time management and enhanced communication and presentation skills' (DIRETFE, 1994j). Many process team members enjoyed having some input into making recommendations, learning a range of project
work and flow chart design skills (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

But, conflict between process team members emerged, as did frustration with the length of time and effort involved to develop process team recommendations. The inexperience of some team members was evident in both teams. Several workers coming from areas such as records, filing or the mailroom were unfamiliar with the legislation Buildcorp administered and one team leader commented that 'the imbalance in the team was my main source of concern' while the other observed that 'We looked at a very specific and complicated piece of legislation which 4 out of 6 team members had never heard of' (DIRETFE, 1994j). Such limited knowledge meant these workers contributed little to the development of process team recommendations, which were left to one or two team members to write up. The lack of involvement by other team members was linked back to the problems of poor morale and high workforce dissatisfaction which pervaded the organisation, rather than to a lack of willingness to participate in workplace decision-making (Buildcorp workforce, 27 April 1995).

Team members also experienced mounting work pressure because process team research was undertaken on top of their existing duties. The process of developing flow charts and undertaking research took up a substantial amount of time in team meetings resulting in several teams members retiring because of excessive work pressures. Team members also experienced growing resentment from individual branch managers and from other workers to their frequent and often lengthy absences. Process team members themselves were frustrated by the time involved in developing and implementing recommendations, with
an average of seven months required by each team to develop their recommendations. One Buildcorp team leader observed 'our recommendations will be implemented but it is taking time!' (DIRETFE, 1994j). The following section examines the reasons for these delays and the response of senior DIRETFE management.

Workplace Management Resistance and Senior Management Intervention
Advocates of TQM stress the central role that senior management must play to promote a corporate quality culture (Jones, 1991: 48; Purdie-Smith, 1991: 18). Hill argues that senior management 'determines quality priorities, establishes the systems of quality management and the procedures to be followed, provides resources, and leads by example' (1991a: 554). A survey of 51 Australian manufacturing firms found that senior managers were involved in generating workforce commitment, participated in 'steering committees' and promoted TQM training (Sohal et al, 1992: 297). Such intervention by senior management may be emphasised because of the failure of previous quality initiatives to maintain the support of senior levels of the managerial hierarchy (Bradley and Hill, 1983: 302; Hill, 1991a: 550). The role of senior management has also been emphasised to overcome the potential recalcitrance of middle management to TQM (Allan, 1991: 41). The resistance of middle managers was a major factor contributing to the failure of quality circles (Brennan, 1991: 23; Hill, 1991b: 404; McGraw and Dunford, 1987: 153). Therefore, TQM may be perceived as an attempt by senior management to reassert their authority over middle management and represents 'a vehicle within intra-management
struggles over the co-ordination of the management division of labour' (Nettle, 1995: 45).

Senior management may attempt to secure middle management commitment to TQM by devolving responsibility to them for the implementation of this quality management initiative (Hill, 1991a:560; Wilkinson et al, 1991: 30). But, such increased involvement may be insufficient to overcome the potential for middle managers to resist total quality initiatives. They may resent the challenge that TQM teams pose to their prerogatives and resist the increased workforce participation in decision-making that TQM proposes. For example, Wilkinson et al (1991: 28) found that TQM teams jarred with the traditionally 'authoritarian style' of branch managers in their case study of the Co-operative Bank. Middle management resistance may also be fuelled by the delayering of their ranks that frequently accompanies workplace change. At Black and Decker, Wilkinson et al (1991: 29) found that TQM resulted in a decline in the number of quality inspectors, whose responsibilities were transferred to shopfloor workers. The case study evidence suggests, therefore, that TQM may not represent a panacea for overcoming potential middle management resistance while senior management involvement to overcome such resistance may result in increased tensions within the management hierarchy.

Workplace management responded negatively to the 'Cheque Mates' teams' recommendation favouring electronic funds transfer. The finance branch manager argued that this idea had been recommended previously by staff within finance and that the 'Cheque Mates' team were seeking to take the credit for the finance branch's original idea. Workplace management also considered that 'Cheque Mates' had
provided insufficient detail on the financial controls required to minimise the potential for fraud and to comply with Treasury guidelines. Electronic funds transfer was also viewed as a waste of scarce resources given the lack of demand from building workers for this service, with only one request documented to date. Moreover, potential problems were highlighted with acquiring the necessary bank, state and branch number details from building workers who used the scheme. Management also raised concerns that workers in other branches may regard the recommendations of the 'Cheque Mates' team as a threat to their job security - particularly workers in the finance branch. Workplace management questioned the process team's research. For example, had the process team gained approval from Treasury and the Department's internal auditors for the electronic funds transfer recommendation? (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994).

Management also criticised the TQM process team for failing to solicit the views of the guidance team as they developed their proposals. This meant that workplace management were unable to control or predict the recommendations of the 'Cheque Mates' team. Guidance team members maintained that they had only limited knowledge of the research the process team was undertaking. While the guidance team received the minutes of the 'Cheque Mates' team meetings, they had few meetings with the team itself (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994). Management considered that process team recommendations did not necessarily represent appropriate courses of action for Buildcorp to take and that responsibility for accepting or rejecting process team recommendations should rest with workplace management, who were ultimately accountable for the decisions taken by Buildcorp (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994).
Workplace management were also critical of the process team concept which was perceived to provide minimal training in leadership skills or team dynamics. The Director maintained that the Department perceived process teams as a 'quick fix' which overlooked other human resource issues such as Buildcorp's own focus on process re-engineering (Buildcorp management, 15-26 September 1994).

In response to these criticisms the process team decided to undertake more extensive research. The team gained the approval of the manager of the internal audit unit within the Department and the Australian Taxation Office for the implementation of electronic funds transfer. The team also reviewed the research they had undertaken regarding financial controls to ensure that adequate safeguards were in place to avoid the possibility of fraud (Buildcorp workforce, 27 April 1995). Once the process team was satisfied that it had covered the concerns of the guidance team, they felt sufficiently assured of their recommendations to present them before the DIRETFE Board of Management in April 1994. 'Cheque Mates' team members claim that senior management responded enthusiastically to the electronic funds transfer recommendation and the team's efforts to improve upon the time taken to process claims for long service pay by building workers (Buildcorp workforce, 27 April 1995).

But, the implementation of the electronic funds transfer recommendation did not follow unproblematically from senior management's approval, and a one year delay occurred between recommendation and implementation. Workplace management blamed the delay in the introduction of the electronic funds transfer recommendation on Buildcorp's inadequate computer hardware and
software and DIRETFE's unwillingness to sanction expenditure on computer technology. Workplace management maintained that they had not received approval from DIRETFE to purchase the necessary personal computers and software to introduce electronic funds transfer (Buildcorp management, 1994). TQM process team members maintained that they were unable to tie management down to a specific deadline for the implementation of electronic funds transfer, being told that it could take anything between 12 to 18 months to implement. The process team were concerned that workplace management was stalling because they were unwilling to accept recommendations from the workforce (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

Concerted pressure from head office senior management sought to overcome the inertia in implementing the electronic funds transfer recommendation. Workforce frustration with the delays in implementing electronic funds transfer filtered back to head office management via the Department's customer service project officers. Senior DIRETFE management stated that electronic funds transfer was not optional and had to be placed in Buildcorp's business plans for the 1994/5 financial year. The Director of Buildcorp came under sustained pressure from the Assistant Director of DIRETFE, and other members of the Quality Council, to implement the process team's recommendations. The Director was required to provide status reports and develop a timetable for implementation. Every quarter, Buildcorp management had to report on the progress they had made in implementing the recommendations and senior head office management becoming increasingly concerned if little progress was made within a given quarter. In response to this pressure, management placed the electronic funds transfer recommendation in Buildcorp's Business Plan and noted that 'Buildcorp
has made a commitment to the main objective of offering an electronic funds transfer option to clients by end June 1995’ (Buildcorp, 1994g). Electronic funds transfer was introduced in April 1995, one year after the process team's initial recommendation.

But, senior management's intervention in the day to day activities of Buildcorp did not extend to attempting to change the culture of the organisation by promoting the virtues of 'True North'. DIRETFE senior management did not visit Buildcorp to communicate to staff the Department's new 'vision', mission and core values, nor were staff shown the Director-General's Christmas video message detailing 'True North'. Senior management involvement focused on placing pressure on workplace management to implement process team recommendations rather than attempting to instill a new culture throughout Buildcorp.

Workplace management were more enthusiastic about the recommendations from the 'Just Asc' team. The Director noted that the final draft of an information brochure had been distributed to Industry Services and sent to the publicity officer for 'final layout' and a planned date of 31 August 1994 was pencilled in for the introduction of the new ASC information flyer. Coloured tags to identify additional medical service credit enquiries and to expedite the processing of these claims were to be introduced by the end of August 1994 (Buildcorp, 1994d). The 'Just Asc' team's recommendations were placed in Buildcorp's business plan, but implementation was delayed with management blaming a lack of up to date technology. Conversely, Buildcorp's workforce blamed the delays on management procrastination and insistence on making alterations to the team's recommendations. They
claimed the team’s initial recommendations were altered by workplace management to the point where the brochure no longer provided the information initially recommended by staff and merely stated that applicants should ring the corporation if they wished to claim (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994). The 'Just Asc' team’s recommendation for a brochure was finally introduced in January 1995.

The Responses of 'Internal Customers' to TQM Teams

TQM programs within the public sector have a tendency to promote a corporate culture which emphasises customer service. Advocates of cultural change strongly encourage management to identify the organisations’ customers and satisfy their expectations (Blakemore, 1989: 18; Juran, 1992: 72; O'Grady, 1992: 20). An explicit focus on customer demands may, however, place constraints on the ability of public service managers (and politicians) to determine what appropriate public services should be provided. For example, patient pressure in public hospitals may result in public service providers feeling compelled to respond to the latest health fad (Pollitt, 1993: 183-185). Moreover, in contrast to the private sector, a precise definition of a public sector organisation’s customers is often difficult - is it a government Minister, the parliament or the general public? The politically sensitive nature of public service work may also result in agencies having a number of potentially conflicting customers. For example, a public sector agency’s customers may consist of both mining interests and environmental groups (Swiss, 1992: 358).

A corporate customer service strategy also emphasises the need to build customer service into the production of goods or services within
the firm. Where the focus is on such 'internal customer service' it has the potential to redefine the nature of workers' interaction with one another. Workers, now relabelled 'internal customers', receive a partially completed service from workers in one functional area and pass it on to others in another functional area. Throughout this process they are expected to conform to the requirements of other 'internal customers' (Dawson and Palmer, 1993: 121; Hill, 1991a: 554). Where the requirements of other 'internal customers' are not met, however, this may result in increased conflict between employees. For Oliver and Davies (1990: 562) this outcome signals the potential for 'horizontal social control' by workers over one another to emerge in place of traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic methods of labour management. The emphasis on developing customer/supplier relations between functional areas may also internalise market relations within an organisation:

‘departments now behave as if they were actors in a market, workers treat each other as if they were customers, and customers are treated as if they were managers’ (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992: 619).

Therefore, a focus on 'internal customer service' may not increase cooperation between workers in different functional areas but may instead result in increased conflict between these workers.

The process team's recommendations created tensions between team members and workers in different functional areas of Buildcorp. The 'Cheque Mates' team's recommendation to introduce electronic funds transfer was perceived by workers within the finance branch as
increasing the control of industry services over the payment of claims, and the job security of workers within it. Conversely, workers in the finance branch perceived themselves more vulnerable to future 'downsizing' exercises as a result of the 'Cheque Mates' team recommendations. Staff within the finance branch were also aggrieved that the team's recommendations implied that their work was somehow inadequate. They maintained that they were merely operating within the constraints imposed upon them by management, who had previously rejected proposals forwarded by staff within finance, including the need to move towards electronic funds transfer (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994). Workers not directly involved in either the 'Cheque Mates' or 'Just Asc' teams also asserted that the time taken up by team meetings created considerable additional work pressures for them with team meetings lasting up to two hours and involving the participation of two or three workers in any one functional area (Buildcorp workforce, 14-5 September 1994).

The workforce responded more positively to the recommendations of the 'Just Asc' process team. These recommendations were distributed for comment amongst staff working in industry services, who handled medical additional service credit enquiries and processed claims from building workers. This informal process gathered a range of suggestions from workers who would be directly affected by the teams' recommendations and the comments were incorporated into the final brochure recommendation to management. Such involvement neutralised potential negative responses from staff within Industry Services and contrasted starkly with the negative reaction of workers in the finance branch to the recommendations of the 'Cheque Mates' team.
Trade Union Avoidance and TQM Teams

Trade unions may interpret TQM as a union avoidance strategy where management seeks to use TQM programs to communicate directly with employees. Management attempts to use TQM to communicate directly to workers has antecedents in earlier experiments with quality circles. In North America, Grenier (1988: 58-60) found that quality circles were used by management to disseminate anti-trade union values and attitudes amongst team members. McGraw and Dunford (1987: 157) found that trade unions were not involved in quality circles introduced into the pharmaceutical division of Reckitt and Coleman's Australian operations and that these quality circles enabled senior management to communicate directly with workers outside of traditional management-trade union channels. Conversely, trade unions in Britain maintained a watchful eye upon the introduction of quality circles and little evidence was found that quality circles reduced workers support for their trade union or the level of their animosity towards management (Bradley and Hill, 1983: 302-7). However, Wilkinson et al found no trade union involvement in British TQM programs they examined and propose that:

‘TQM could marginalise the union as a communication channel, at the same time increase employees’ commitment to what are management objectives’ (1991: 30-1).
Therefore, management may seek to use cultural change and TQM team activities to communicate directly to employees and avoid trade union involvement.

The NSW PSA delegate committee within DIRETFE were concerned that 'True North' and the TQM process team initiative represented an attempt by DIRETFE management to undermine workforce loyalty to the union. For example, trade union members were not officially represented on TQM process teams (PSA Industrial Officer, 2 November 1994). PSA delegates insisted that the original management proponent of introducing TQM teams into the department had sought to deliberately exclude trade unions from their implementation (PSA, 1995a). The union was also concerned that the TQM literature was explicitly anti-trade union and that the 'methodology is apparently based on American literature that is extremely anti-union in focus and prescribes methods for circumventing union involvement such as so-called "staff consultation" at the lowest possible level' (PSA, 1995b, 2).

TQM process teams were introduced into Buildcorp without trade union involvement. The PSA did not have a say in the issues that the teams researched or in the recommendations that they came up with. The PSA industrial officer and workplace delegates highlighted the lack of information that they were provided with regarding the objectives and operation of process teams within DIRETFE. This occurred despite an agreement on sharing information with the union on all matters that may affect workers and their employment conditions (PSA DIRETFE Departmental Committee Delegates, 22 March 1995).
Because of this memorandum and concern that it had been deliberately excluded from 'True North' and TQM teams, the PSA demanded access to all relevant documentation about existing and past process teams. In a letter to the Assistant Director-General of the Department, the secretary of the PSA DIRETFE Departmental Committee stated that:

'... we require information on all of the process teams currently operating. This time, please understand we are not prepared to be fobbed of with totally inadequate summaries. We are seriously asking to examine ALL Departmental files relating to the customer service teams in keeping with the Department's obligations under the MOU to provide "adequate and timely information"' (PSA, 1995a).

Cultural Change, TQM teams and Management Fads
The promotion by management of cultural change via TQM teams may ultimately represent a 'cycle of control' of employee participation (Ramsay, 1977). Gill and Whittle (1993: 282) argue that packages promoted by management consultants appear to pass through a life cycle and that 'cyclic features' evident with earlier fads, such as organisational development and management by objectives, reappear in current attempts to popularise TQM. They highlight management's desire for quick fix solutions with TQM representing the latest 'consultant-led, packaged, managerial panaceas and quackery' (Gill and Whittle, 1993: 286). Moreover, they suggest that TQM is coming to the end of its 'honeymoon period' and may be fast approaching 'maturity and decline' (Gill and Whittle, 1993: 286). For example, TQM may become unfashionable with management where it fails to deliver
promised gains in productivity. Fisher (1990: 107) found that the implementation of a TQM program within one Australian organisation had produced minimal productivity improvements and had little impact on profitability. As such, cultural change and TQM teams may represent a temporary management fad or 'cycle of control' that may be abandoned where it fails to deliver measurable productivity improvements.

Not long after the PSA began pressing management for more details regarding TQM teams and 'True North', senior management closed the customer service unit on 30 June 1995, effectively ending the department's TQM teams strategy. The reasons for its demise included growing senior and middle management disenchantment with TQM process teams and the political realities that emerged in the aftermath of the 25 March poll in NSW and the election of a Labor government. By June of 1995 the enthusiasm of senior management for process teams had declined considerably. A recurring criticism from senior management was that the teams produced no quantifiable data to demonstrate the improvements in work processes that were resulting from process team activities.

But, the demise of the customer service unit predates the 25 March NSW poll and also involves the growing hostility of middle level managers throughout the Department. Since the January 1995 conference to discuss DIRETFE's 'vision', mission and values, which involved middle level management, there had been growing criticism of the customer service initiative and process teams by regional directors within the department. They argued that process teams were cumbersome, lacked flexibility and took too long to develop
recommendations. These views ultimately prevailed and resulted in a downgrading of the emphasis on process teams throughout the Department (Customer Service Project Officers, 16 June 1995).

Customer service had also been overtaken by the election of the Labor government. In the aftermath of the March poll, DIRETFE was restructured into two new departments; the Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC) and the Department of Industrial Relations. Senior management had sought to ensure that much of the former DIRETFE was not carved up and transferred to other departments. Organisational restructuring following the election included the transfer of Public Employer Services, Industrial Relations Consultancy and Workforce Management Centre to the Public Employment Office of the Premier's Department and The New South Wales Superannuation Office to Treasury (PSA, 1995d; DTEC, 1995b). The Department of Training and Education Co-ordination was also amalgamated with the NSW system of technical and further education, and senior management sought to ensure it was not subsumed within this system. As a result, senior management became more focused on the survival of the organisation rather than the promotion of process teams. Senior management established a 'Transition team' to respond to these changes and the customer service unit found itself excluded from its deliberations. As a result of its growing disillusionment with the outcomes of TQM process team initiatives, senior management changed the emphasis of 'True North's cultural change away from TQM teams and towards an increased focus on 'process improvement' monitored by the Planning and Review Section of the Department (Customer Service Project Officers, 16 June 1995).
Conclusion

This paper assessed attempts to introduce a quality customer service culture, or 'True North', within DIRETFE. It also examined the operation of two TQM teams within one agency of the department - Buildcorp. 'True North's' 'vision' of a quality customer service culture failed to materialise within Buildcorp as it conflicted with workplace management practices. These practices emphasised 'downsizing' Buildcorp's workforce, 're-engineering' or rationalising work processes and minimal consultation with staff. They also resulted in considerable job insecurity, stress, and increased workloads for the corporation's declining workforce. These outcomes demonstrate that TQM's promotion of a quality customer service culture represents mere rhetoric for public sector workers whose jobs are under constant threat of privatisation and where management's focus is on rationalisation and cost minimisation.

Participation by workers in TQM team activities resulted in contradictory outcomes for the workforce at Buildcorp. On the one hand, workers clearly appreciated the opportunity that TQM teams provided to conduct research and develop recommendations to improve work processes. On the other hand, the lack of knowledge of Buildcorp's legislation by some team members created tensions within both teams. Attendance at team activities was also time consuming and resulted in additional work pressure for team members. This led to a number of workers retiring from both teams and resulted in the team's final report's being written by one to two team members. This points to the potential for
initial workforce enthusiasm for TQM teams to wane where team activities are expected to be undertaken on top of regular work tasks.

This study also highlights the potential for TQM team recommendations to be resisted by workplace managers. In particular, Buildcorp management queried the recommendation to introduce electronic funds transfer by the 'Cheques Mates' team. This resulted in senior management intervention in an attempt to force workplace management to expedite the implementation of the electronic funds transfer recommendation. Even process team proposals which workplace management strongly encouraged, such as those by the 'Just Asc' team, were substantially revised. This demonstrates the potential for workplace management to limit the extent of decision-making accorded to workers under TQM. It also highlights that workplace management's response to TQM team recommendations may increase the level of tension and conflict between different levels of the management hierarchy.

The introduction of TQM teams within Buildcorp also failed to improve 'internal customer service'. Workers within the finance branch of Buildcorp perceived the movement towards paying claims within a 'One Stop Shop' to advantage workers within industry services whilst simultaneously threatening their job security. Resentment towards TQM teams was also heightened by the duration of team meetings, which frequently lasted for several hours, and resulted in an intensification of the effort levels required from the rest of the workforce. Therefore, rather than generating a culture of 'internal customer service', or improved cooperation between functional areas of an
organisation, TQM teams may lead to increased conflict between team members and other workers.

The study also suggests that cultural change and TQM teams in the public service may be introduced with little trade union consultation. DIRETFE management did not involve the PSA in the development or dissemination of 'True North'. The PSA was not consulted prior to or during the deliberations of either the 'Cheque Mates' or 'Just Asc' TQM teams within Buildcorp and the union had no input into the issues that either team investigated. This suggests that TQM may be compatible with a managerial strategy of trade union avoidance.

Finally, support for 'True North' and TQM teams from senior management within DIRETFE declined significantly when TQM teams were unable to demonstrate measurable improvements in productivity. This highlights the potential for cultural change via quality customer service and staff involvement through TQM teams to represent an ephemeral management fad.

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