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Choices, Constraints and Strategies of Independence: Retail Store Managers and the Management of Human Resources

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Thesis

Abstract

This research involved an investigation into the role of store level managers in the employee resourcing decision-making process in multiple retailing in the UK. The context of the retail industry is considered, including the employment characteristics of the workforce. The nature of HRM and employee resourcing in multiple store retailing and its link with corporate strategy is discussed. Particular consideration is made to the devolution of employee resourcing responsibilities to store level managers. The nature of retail management at local level is investigated followed by an examination of their choices and constraints takes place.

An embedded case study research methodology was adopted, which comprised of three multiple store retail organisations and six branches. Qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted with management throughout the organisational hierarchy. The majority of interviewees were managers at store level. An inductive approach was adopted for analysing the data.

A number of key findings were made and conclusions drawn through the inductive analysis of the data. Store level managers held significant responsibilities for employee resourcing, particularly in the recruitment and deployment of labour. They operated within a context of increasing centralisation and constraints. This resulted in their practice of strategies of independence to circumvent these increasing limitations. These strategies of independence had significant implications for the implementation of corporate policy and the management of human resources at store level. It was in the execution of employee resourcing where strategies of independence were most frequently deployed as HRM was the functional area where store level managers had greater autonomy. This resulted in a focus on 'hard' HRM practices at store level, regardless of head office 'rhetoric'.

In conclusion, a modification of Stewart's (1982) 'Choices For Managers' model is made, to more accurately reflect the reality of management processes. The consequences of store level managers' choices and constraints is conceptualised in the 'The Organisational Vicious Circle' model. This outlines how strategies of independence will perpetuate the limitations of local management.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	(iii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Contents	(vi)
List Of Appendices	(xi)
List Of Tables	(xii)
List Of Figures	(xiii)
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 HRM, Local Management And The Retail Industry	1
1.2 The Research Study	3
1.3 The Structure Of This Thesis	4
CHAPTER 2: THE UK RETAIL INDUSTRY IN CONTEXT	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 The Development Of Modern Retailing In The UK	7
2.2.1 A Brief History Of The Retail Industry	9
2.3 The Structure Of The UK Retail Industry	12
2.4 Multiple Store Retailers And The Superstore Format	16
2.5 Competitive Strategies In The UK Retail Industry	21
CHAPTER 3: EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF UK MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Employment Characteristics And Trends Of UK Multiple Store Retailing	28
3.2.1 Non-Standard Labour In The Retail Workforce	29
3.2.2 Women In The Retail Workforce	33
3.2.3 Students Workers In The Retail Workforce	37
3.3 Employment Characteristics Of The Superstore Sector	38
3.4 The Nature Of Store Management	42
CHAPTER 4: HRM AND UK MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING	52
4.1 The Characteristics Of HRM	52
4.2 The Nature Of HRM In Multiple Store Retailing	55

4.3	HRM And Corporate Strategy	58
4.4	HRM And Employee Resourcing At Store Level	64
4.4.1	HRM And The Line Manager	65
4.4.2	HRM,Employee Resourcing And The Store Level Manager	67
CHAPTER 5: MANAGEMENT CHOICES, CONSTRAINTS, AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING IN UK MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING		72
5.1	Introduction	72
5.2	The Choices And Constraints of Line Managers In Their Management of Human Resources	73
5.3	The Constraints Of Store Level Management	75
5.4	Methods Of Control	77
5.4.1	Organisational Structure	80
5.4.2	Management Hierarchy	86
5.4.3	The Use Of Budgets	91
5.4.4	The Use Of Technology	96
5.5	The Choices of Store Level Managers: Strategies of Independence	99
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY		109
6.1	Conceptual Foundation Of The Research	109
6.1.1	The Positivist Approach	109
6.1.2	The Phenomenological Approach	110
6.2	Research Methods	113
6.2.1	Triangulation	114
6.3	The Research Design:	115
6.3.1	Research Methodology: The Case Study Approach	116
6.3.2	Case Study Design	118
6.4	The Case Study Design: Fieldwork	120
6.4.1	Data Collection Methods	122
6.5	Data Analysis	128
6.6	Summary	131
CHAPTER 7: THE FIELDWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS		133
7.1	Introduction	133
7.2	Negotiating Access To The Case Studies	134
7.3	Data Collection	138
7.3.1	Interviews	138

7.3.2	Fieldnotes	144
7.3.3	Documentation	144
7.4	Problems And Barriers Encountered During The Fieldwork	
	Research	144
7.4.1	Superco	145
7.4.2	Groceryco	146
7.4.3	Electrico	147
7.4.4	Homeco	148
7.5	Data Analysis	149
7.6	Contribution To Knowledge	154
7.7	Assessment Of The Research Design and Fieldwork	156
 CHAPTER 8: THE SUPERCO CASE STUDY		160
8.1	Background History	160
8.2	Background Information: The Case Study Stores	161
8.2.1	The Surrey Quays Store	161
8.2.2	The Lewisham Store	162
8.3	Corporate Strategy: A Brief Outline	164
8.4	The Nature And Characteristics of Store Level Management	168
8.5	HRM And Employee Resourcing At Superco	172
8.6	The Constraints Of Store Level Management	180
8.6.1	Organisational Structure and Management Hierarchy	181
8.6.2	Budgetary Control	185
8.6.3	The Use of Technology	187
8.7	Store Level Managers' Autonomy	190
8.8	Strategies Of Independence	192
8.9	Discussion	203
 CHAPTER 9: THE GROCERYCO CASE STUDY		210
9.1	Background History	210
9.2	Background Information: The Case Study Stores	211
9.2.1	The Blackfen Store	211
9.2.2	The Camden Store	212
9.3	Corporate Strategy: A Brief Outline	213
9.4	The Nature And Characteristics of Store Level Management	218
9.5	HRM And Employee Resourcing At Groceryco	222
9.6	The Constraints Of Store Level Management	226
9.6.1	Organisational Structure and Management Hierarchy	227

9.6.2	Budgetary Control	229
9.6.3	The Use of Technology	234
9.7	Store Level Managers' Autonomy	237
9.8	Strategies Of Independence	240
9.9	Discussion	252
CHAPTER 10: THE HOMECO CASE STUDY		256
10.1	Background History	256
10.2	Background Information: The Case Study Stores	257
10.2.1	The West Thurrock Store	257
10.2.2	The Oxford Store	258
10.3	Corporate Strategy: A Brief Outline	260
10.4	The Nature And Characteristics of Store Level Management	263
10.5	HRM And Employee Resourcing At Superco	265
10.6	The Constraints Of Store Level Management	272
10.7	Store Level Managers' Autonomy	274
10.8	Strategies Of Independence	280
10.9	Discussion	294
CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION		298
11.1	Context Of The Retail Industry	298
11.2	The Context Of Retail Management	305
11.3	The Choices And Constraints Of Store Level Managers	310
11.3.1	The Constraints Of Store Level Management	311
11.3.2	Store Level Managers' Autonomy	315
11.4	Strategies Of Independence	318
CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS		328
12.1	Key Findings And Their Implications	328
12.1.1	Management Choices And Constraints	328
12.1.2	Strategies of Independence	334
12.1.3	Summary	341
12.3	The Contribution Of This Work	343
12.4	Implications for Future Research	349
REFERENCES		351

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix 1: Letter requesting research access to organisations	380
Appendix 2: Second letter requesting research access to organisations	381
Appendix 3: Table to illustrate initial contact meetings with original five multiple superstore retailers	386
Appendix 4: Negotiation Process for each of the case study organisations	387
Appendix 5: Schedule of interviews conducted	392
Appendix 6: Interview structure for Head Office management	395
Appendix 7: Interview structure for Store Managers/ Gatekeepers to the case study stores	398
Appendix 8: Interview structure for store level management	402
Appendix 9: Store Organisational Structure	408

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1	Key Features of Positivist and Phenomenological Paradigms	112
Table 2	Pseudonyms Given To The Case Study Organisations	135
Table 3	Rationale For The Choice Of Embedded Units (Stores)	136
Table 4	Designated Gatekeepers For Each Embedded Unit	138
Table 5	Number of Interviews Conducted	139
Table 6	Workforce Composition of the Surrey Quays Store	162
Table 7	Workforce Composition of the Lewisham Store	163
Table 8	Workforce Composition of the Blackfen Store	212
Table 9	Workforce Composition of the Camden Store	213
Table 10	Workforce Composition of the West Thurrock Store	258
Table 11	Workforce Composition of the Oxford Store	259

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 1	Characteristics Of Large Format Food Retail Outlets	20
Figure 2	Choices For Managers (Stewart 1982)	74
Figure 3	The Research Process	132
Figure 4	Choices For Managers (Stewart 1982)	333
Figure 5	The Limitation And Choices Of Managers	333
Figure 6	The Limitation And Choices Of Retail Store Level Managers	334
Figure 7	The Organisational Vicious Circle	343

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the key areas of literature pertaining to this research and consider how they have shaped and focused the investigation. The main issues and areas of work are briefly reviewed and the study placed within its wider context. The aims of the research are established, and the structure of the thesis presented.

1.1 HRM, LOCAL MANAGEMENT AND THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

The retail industry is a major employer in the UK (Labour Research 1994) accounting for approximately 10 per cent of national employment (National Retail Training Council [NRTC] 1995). Retailing is thus an important sector for any research concerning the management of human resources. The thesis focuses on multiple store retailing, which in recent years has been subject to increasing competition, rapidly changing market conditions, and increases in the average size of outlet over recent years (Freathy and Sparks 1994; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This has been particularly evident in the grocery sector which has been described as “intensely competitive” (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999:80), and often at the forefront of the industry in terms of competitive strategies.

Increased customer demands for longer opening hours, lower prices, and improved standards of product and service have also been noted (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; IDS 1993a, 1993b). Competitive strategies based on cost reduction have resulted, together with a corresponding improvement in the quality of customer service (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Gardener and Sheppard 1989; Sparks 1992c). Advancements in information technology have been cited as a key component of competitive advantage in the retail

industry. The adoption of Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) has been hailed as having revolutionary implications for retail managers (Johnson 1992; Retail Business 1994; Smith 1988).

These distinct characteristics of multiple store retailing raises questions about the management of human resources, particularly considering the large number of UK workers employed within the industry. Yet the retail industry remained academically neglected for many years (Lowe and Crewe 1991). Recent research has tended to focus on specific issues such as employment flexibility, or gender, when examining HR issues (Marchington 1995a). Little research has been conducted on lower level local management in retail, and commentators in general has tended to overlook these managers in the management of human resources (Lowe 1992). While previous research has identified some of the issues relating to lower and middle management (for example, Child and Partridge 1982; Patten 1968; Roethlisberger 1945; Watson and Harris 1999), few of these have been linked to HRM or conducted in the retail industry.

An examination of the choices and constraints of local management in multiple store retailing identifies retail managers' decision-making powers (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Stewart 1982, 1999). These stem from a number of factors including corporate strategy, organisational structure, budgetary controls and technology (see Berry et al 1995; Blyton and Morris 1992; Child 1984; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1979; 1980; 1983, 1989; Mullins 1999; Piper 1980; Retail Business 1990; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). A key trend in multiple store retailing has been the increasing centralisation of store level functions and responsibilities (Freathy 1993; Freathy and Sparks 1994; Ogbonna 1992; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Smith 1988; Sparks 2000b). This is combined with an increasing use of budgets and performance targets to achieve a competitive advantage (Freathy and Sparks 1996; Lusch and Serpkenci 1990; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). However, the geographical dispersion

of stores in multiple store retailing means some decentralisation of decision-making to local management is necessary (Berry et al 1995; Child 1984; Mintzberg 1983; Stewart 1999). The literature outlines that retail store managers maintain a prime responsibility for the management of their workforce (Freathy and Sparks 2000; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tamkin et al 1997; Tomlinson et al 1997). The devolution of responsibility for human resource management (HRM) to local junior managers is evident, with a concurrent centralisation of other functional areas.

With labour making up to 50 per cent of gross margins (Alexander 1988), and evidence of the delegation of HR to line managers (Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tomlinson et al 1997), the retail industry is an important sector for the study of HRM. This thesis will examine the previously neglected role of junior managers in the execution of human resource management in the previously overlooked industry of retail in order to address gaps in current knowledge.

1.2 THE RESEARCH STUDY

The research is based around two broad objectives: first, to establish the role of local managers in the management of human resources in multiple store retailing; and second, to establish how the choices and constraints of these managers impact on the employee resourcing decisions in multiple store retailing organisations. A review of the literature relating to HRM in retailing shows that particular consideration needs to be given to this previously neglected area of research. Gaps in the literature have been identified, and the research will consequently focus on these to provide a more holistic perspective on the management of human resources at operational level in multiple store retailing organisations.

The research was grounded in a phenomenological approach using the case study method. The empirical study focused on three multiple store retailers, encompassing a total of six stores. Each of these retailers was concentrated in the superstore sector of

retailing and operating large scale store operations. Central to the research design was a series of interviews conducted at different levels of management at both head office and store level. A longer-term approach was adopted with the research conducted over a minimum of nine months in each store. The results of the fieldwork were analysed before modifications of existing models and theories were made.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

This section serves as a 'route map' (Saunders 1997:375) to the thesis by introducing each chapter and detailing its contribution to the work. The thesis adopts a logical approach to examining the literature, which is covered in Chapters two to five.

Chapter two provides some background information to the retail industry, including retail competitive strategy, with a focus on multiple store retailing and the superstore format. Chapter three seeks to examine the employment characteristics of multiple store retailing. This encompasses an outline of the main characteristics of the retail labour market with a particular focus on the nature of local management. Chapter four introduces the management of human resources in the retail industry with a focus on employee resourcing and the role of store level management. This is followed in Chapter five by a consideration of the choices and constraints of local managers in their management of human resources and execution of employee resourcing. Where possible a focus on retail management is adopted, but where gaps in the literature prevail, more generic management literature is considered.

The research design is explored and justified in chapter six. The research objectives are reviewed in light of previous research and the study's philosophical and methodological approach presented and examined. Chapter seven outlines the fieldwork procedures, before detailing the process of data analysis. Chapters eight to ten present the findings of the research for each case study organisation. Chapter eleven then discusses these findings by considering the similarities and differences between the case study companies, drawing tentative conclusions. In chapter twelve

the thesis is concluded by considering the implications of this academic study for the management of human resources in the retail industry. The original contribution of this work is highlighted and some suggestions for future research are made.

This chapter has introduced the thesis by identifying the key areas of literature pertaining to this research, thus placing the study in its wider context. The broad aims and research methodologies of the research are introduced, followed by a presentation of the structure of the thesis. The following chapter will begin the in-depth review of the literature pertaining to the retail industry and the nature of its workforce: the context of this research.

Chapter 2

THE UK RETAIL INDUSTRY IN CONTEXT

To appreciate the role of store level managers in the management of HRM, it is important to consider the nature of the industry in which such managers operate. The aim of this chapter is to frame the research study in the context of the multiple store sector of the UK retail industry. A brief historical perspective of the development of the industry is given, together with an outline of the industry structure and current prevailing corporate strategies. Particular attention is paid to the superstore format, on which the empirical research of this study was focused.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Retailing is one of the largest sectors in the UK economy with a history of change, conflict and competition (Davis 1966; Jeffrey 1954; Shackleton 1998). “It is undeniable that retailing is an important sector” (Sparks 2000a:13), and that major multiple store retailers are critical in economic terms. Dawson (2000) argued that the nature of the retail company is becoming increasingly difficult to define with recent diversification into banking, health and travel services. For the purpose of this research study, retailing is defined as “any type of business whose marketing efforts are directed towards selling merchandise and services to the final consumer” (Howe 1992:190). The retailing sector covers both the retailing of goods and services. The activities covered in this research study exclude the retailing of services such as financial services and public utilities, concentrating instead on the sale of goods.

Retailing is distinctive from other industries in many ways. These differences include the geographical dispersion and nature of operations that brings about a widespread network of operational units. The industry tends to be more responsive to local culture, whilst having a large number of items which constitute the produce and service range. This is combined with low profit margins per employee (Dawson 2000). There is also a growing sense of internationalisation in the industry, with an increasing involvement in international activities, particularly among food multiple retailers (Dawson 2000; McGoldrick and Davies 1995; Sparks 1995). Retailing has been described as undergoing increased competition producing concentration, increases in scale, technological innovation, and rationalisation of labour use (MacEwan Scott 1994). The combination of these characteristics makes an appreciation of retail's development and context vital for any research study undertaken in this industry.

2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN RETAILING IN THE UK

The growth of the retail industry in recent decades has led to the identification of retailing as a significant contributor to tertiarisation of the economy and leading to Bell's (1973) 'post-industrial society', with a predominant service sector (Rajan 1987). However, the extent to which retailing can be described as a major contributor to a 'post industrial society' is questionable. Retailing has been present during all three stages of economic development and revolution. During the pre-industrial stage goods and services were sold directly to the buyer at local markets. During industrialisation the retail industry evolved with the introduction of independent fixed stores, which then developed into multiple outlets. This placed an emphasis on the rationalisation and concentration of retail branches. The significance of economies of scale continues

to the present day with small, independent retailers losing market share to the multiple retailers (Ruston 1999). The average size of retail outlets has continually increased since the Second World War. Superstore retail outlets, particularly in the grocery sector, are employment units in their own right and employing more people than many factories, often operating for longer hours (Howe 1992).

Academic research on employment in the retail industry has emerged from “two separate strands” (Marchington 1995a:1). Retail specialists have recorded the generic employment dimensions of the industry, with a particular focus on new retail formats. The most significant contributions of these are from the Institute for Retail Studies at Stirling University. Their emphasis is on measurement and prescription, rather than on understanding aspects of work, employment or industrial relations. Some of the later work began to focus on labour market segmentation and flexibility. As such, Marchington was critical that a lack of grounding in the mainstream human resource literature meant this work was limited in its ability to advance a more general theory of HRM in retailing. In contrast to the retail specialists, the HRM perspective came rather later to research in the retail industry. The focus of research was a concern with more specific employment patterns and issues, such as contractual terms and conditions, considerations of flexibility such as the rise in part time working (for example, Gregory 1991, 1993; O’Reilly 1992, 1994; Robinson 1990, 1993), the role of gender (for example, Bradley 1989; Broadbridge 1991, 1995, 1996, 1998; MacEwan Scott 1994; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995), and the link between strategy, culture, and HRM (for example, Ogbonna 1992; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This research was criticised by Marchington (1995a) for focusing too heavily on individual issues,

restricting the ability to produce holistic theories about HRM in retailing. He advocated a combination of the 'two separate strands' to enable the advancement of knowledge in the field of retail HRM practices.

2.2.1 A Brief History of The Retail Industry

The emergence of the retail trade can be traced from Elizabethan times when a distinction was made between the function of retail distribution and that of production. Prior to this suppliers of goods and services sold their products directly to buyers in the local markets or at larger fairs. By the beginning of the 17th century a separate retailing function began to develop in the larger centres of population, which had spread across the country by the end of the 18th century. During this period shop keeping was considered a trade that involved a variety of skills such as production, purchasing, stock-keeping and accounting (Howe 1992).

The advent of the industrial revolution was not immediately accompanied by further developments in retailing. It was not until after the middle of the 19th century that the retail trade, as it is recognised today, started to evolve. The latter half of the 19th century saw fundamental changes in the shopping habits of the UK population on the basis of a much enlarged, urbanised and increasingly well-off population. This in turn changed the structure of retail distribution from a pre-industrial form to one which still exists today. Initially there was a replacement of street sellers by independent fixed stores, both general and specialist. The importance of these were soon overtaken by multiple store organisations in the final quarter of the 19th century, initially in the field of groceries, but later in non-food areas. These multiple outlet developments were

accompanied by the growth of co-operative stores and department stores. The multiple store continued to appeal predominately to working-class customers on the basis of price. Competition in retailing increased with the emergence of the variety chain stores which developed considerably in the inter-war period. The distinguishing features of these were an emphasis upon high-volume trading in a wide range of low-priced goods, with shoppers operating a system of self-selection. It was not until this period that the multiple chains began to increase their range of goods in an effort to reach more customers (Howe 1992).

By the early decades of the 20th century multiple chains were able to enjoy economies of scale through their ability to buy in bulk as well, as standardisation and specialisation of retail functions such as buying, merchandising and administration. The inter-war period saw supply conditions continuing to favour large-scale retailing. An increase in the manufacture of standard goods, the introduction of pre-packaged goods, and extended use of branding, encouraged the formation of a national market for products (Howe 1992; Johnson 1992).

As with many other industries, retail underwent a fundamental transformation in the post-war period. It has been described by some as a 'retail revolution' and is claimed to be as dramatic and influential as the industrial revolution (Segal-Horn 1987).

Others dispute the term 'retail revolution' arguing that "retailing is an evolving industry" (Dawson 2000:142) as there is little evidence of major paradigm shifts.

Segal-Horn (1987) described the retail revolution as a "combination of market changes together with new ways of organising and conducting retail business" (p.31). Lower-



cost multiple retailers were able to fully exploit their economies of scale by competing in terms of price. This increased the rate of penetration of those multiple shop organisations able to exploit this advantage (Ruston 1999).

The decrease in the number of retail outlets in the UK reflects the maturity of the industry and increased competitive pressures (Musannif 1988). The first phase of concentration occurred in the post-war period up to 1971 that saw the fastest decline in absolute numbers of shops. Since then there has been a slower rate of decline.

Different sectors of the retail industry experienced different timings of concentration. Rationalisation began to occur in the grocery industry in the 1960s when supermarkets competed heavily on price. Not only do different types of retailing format compete against each other, but increasingly competition is among multiples themselves - a sign of market maturity. With companies getting larger in size and smaller in number, the catchment area of potential customers is expanding (Business Monitor 1988; Ruston 1999).

Changes in lifestyle have resulted in consumers increasingly demanding more convenient and longer opening hours, and improved service provision from retail outlets. The retail industry responded by extending opening hours. This is also linked with legislative changes, which gave retailers the opportunity to open for longer hours, for example, Sunday trading. Some food retailers even began operating 24 hour opening, predominately those in the food and home improvement retailing sectors (Ruston 1999).

A number of changes and external influences have had a significant impact on employment in the retail industry. Increasing competition, rapidly changing market conditions, more selective customer demands, longer opening hours, and increases in the average size of outlet have been key trends in the retail industry (Freathy and Sparks 1994; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). However, as Doogan (1992) and Shackleton (1998) point out, these changes are difficult to discern in large scale statistics because the data offers a scant impression of the realities of restructuring that have taken place.

2.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE UK RETAIL INDUSTRY

One of the trends in retailing over the last ten to fifteen years has been the increasing overlap of the major store format groupings so that the rationale for differentiation into the traditional categories is becoming difficult to sustain (Ruston 1999). Although specialisation is gathering pace, the boundaries between products and services are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, many grocery stores now stock a selection of household goods, and retailers are beginning to compete with banks and insurance companies in the financial services market. This fragmentation of markets has led to a multiplicity of retail formats. For the purpose of this research the following classifications of retail formats are used:

Multiple Store Groups

The multiples are traditionally defined as ‘enterprises with over ten shops’ (Musannif 1988; Ruston 1999). There has been an increase in the size of average multiple store organisation in terms of outlets, and also the increased size of these outlets in terms of

employment (Business Monitor 1988). This form of retailing organisation has come to dominate the UK retail industry in terms of sales and market share. Multiples have been largely reliant on market share gains to fund their growth, rather than volume growth (Segal-Horn 1987).

There are two types of multiple stores - the variety chain stores, and the specialist multiple shops. The definition of variety stores is not clear because they sell a wide range of merchandise on a self-selection basis, for example Marks and Spencer and Woolworth. The specialist multiple store has its origins in one product market, for example, Superdrug, WHSmith and The Burton Group. These initially majored in food and footwear, but are now dominant in most other sectors. The relative position of multiples differs across major specialist sectors of the retail trade. Its market penetration is greatest in the grocery sector, followed by clothing and footwear, and household goods. However, in the Confectioners, Tobacconists and Newsagents (CTNs) and other non-food sectors, multiples do not appear to hold such a dominant position (Segal-Horn 1987).

The Independent Retailer

The independent retailer has suffered a vital loss in their share of the retail trade over the past four decades (Business Monitor 1988; Ruston 1999). They have been reeling under the onslaught of the multiples, but can always survive because of their long-term role in society, and by virtue of the unique service that they offer. Meanwhile, the independent retail establishment does remain the dominant physical feature of retailing in terms of outlet numbers.

Department Stores

The department store is a mature retailing format which has been in decline since its peak in 1950 (Howe 1992). The traditional definition of a department store is 'selling space in excess of 25 000 sq. ft. on more than one level, selling at least five types of merchandise including women's wear on a departmental basis' (Musannif 1988). Since 1971 department stores have been omitted from separate analysis in the Census of Distribution report, but the sector is estimated to account for approximately 4.5 per cent of total retail sales (Howe 1992). It would seem unlikely that department stores can regain any significant share of the retail market, especially with the emergence of 'up-market' chains such as Next and Principles (Ruston 1999).

The Co-Operative Retail Societies

The Co-operative movement comprises the individual societies and the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), which is in turn owned by the individual societies. CWS acts as a central marketing organisation, major wholesaler, and supplier (Musannif 1988). Since 1950 the Co-operatives' share of the total retail trade has more than halved, suffering from the growth of the multiple store groups (Retail Business 1994).

Mail Order

Mail order prospered in the 1950's and 1960's (Howe 1992). Today this retailing format can be divided into two sections, the traditional agency mail order system, and direct mail sales. The traditional form of mail order retailing accounts for 90 per cent of home shopping sales and being dominated by five large organisations, has one of the highest concentration in retailing. However, advancements in technology may lead to

a revival of non-shop retailing through tele-shopping. The expansion of access to the Internet means that customers can shop from the 'information highway' as well as through satellite television channels. The grocery sector is the first of the large UK multiple retailer sector to operate tele-shopping with 'virtual supermarkets' and home delivery (Ruston 1999).

Franchising

Another increasingly popular form of retailing is the business-format franchise. This occurs where a franchiser develops a particular form of product or service and a number of independent businesses (franchisees) pay the franchiser for the right to conduct the franchise operation in a particular locality. Business format franchises accounted for 3.7 per cent of retail sales in the UK in 1995. This equated to 474 business formal franchises, employing 222,700 staff, with sales worth £5.9 billion (Ruston 1999).

This research study concentrates on multiple store retailing. Given its dominance of the industry, both in terms of employment and trading, it is an very important employer in the UK. Consequently, its execution of HRM and employee resourcing practices has widespread implications for a large proportion of the UK's workforce. A particular focus of the empirical research was on multiple store retailing and the superstore format. Consequently, a more detailed discussion of this sector of the retail industry will take place in section 2.4.

2.4 MULTIPLE STORE RETAILERS AND THE SUPERSTORE FORMAT

As outlined in Section 2.2.1 market concentration has occurred in the UK retail industry over recent years, whereby a few multiple organisations dominate various retail sectors. For the purpose of this thesis the term multiple store retailers will be used to describe those organisations with over ten outlets and operating on a national basis. The market power of these large firms in the UK retail industry has expanded considerably over recent decades (Baret et al 2000). The largest firms in retailing are amongst the largest companies in the UK (Labour Research 1994; Sparks 1989), underlining their significant role in the UK's economy.

The list of top UK employers is dominated by multiple branch retailers (Labour Research 1994), thus highlighting the concentration of employment in a few large businesses. This is such that multiple retailers represent less than one per cent of businesses, yet account for 46 per cent of retail employment, and over half of retail turnover (NRTC 1995). Retailing is a labour intensive industry (Shackleton 1998), making it a key area for any HRM study.

A key feature of the industry is the domination of the market by a few, large multiple retail companies. These multiple retailers have dominated the retail industry since rationalisation began in the 1960s. Independent retailers, particularly those in the grocery sector, attribute their decline to unfair and discriminatory trade practices by multiples and suppliers. The industry displays significant pockets of oligopolistic behaviour in what is otherwise a highly competitive industry. Acquisitions have meant increasing rationalisation in the retail sector with the major multiple store retailers

claiming growing shares of the total market. This has been aided by aggressive marketing and promotional activity. The 1980s was a decade of mergers and acquisitions that saw the development of ‘super-multiples’ such as Kingfisher, Dixons, Burton, Tesco, Sainsbury, and Argyll (Ruston 1999). However, the 21st Century is witnessing some reverse in this trend with the on-going de-merger of the Kingfisher group.

The growth of multiple store retailers in the UK has led to their requirement for large amounts of finance. Many of the companies are quoted on the stock exchange and have generated financial capital on these markets. The ownership of multiple retailers is becoming more and more concentrated into a small number of financial institutions. The large size of many of these organisations has brought about changes in the nature of their relationships with the institutional investors:

“The imperative to meet short-term tactical targets becomes stronger as institutional investor involvement increases and becomes more active.”
(Dawson 2000:128)

This is particularly so for food retailers who have become increasingly answerable to the City and shareholder pressure (Freathy and Sparks 1994). Multiple store retailers are generally owned and controlled by those not in charge of their day-to-day operations. The imperative has subsequently become the maintenance of a high share price to sustain profits (Sparks 1989). As a result many multiple store retailers are required to perform against specified quantitative targets through the development of more sophisticated retail strategies.

The dominance of the large retail organisation in recent decades has led to an increasing complexity of their operations. This has demanded a more professional

approach to operations, which has been witnessed in their search for products and sites, the merchandise and design of stores, logistics, and employment (Sparks 2000b). This has been a key component in organisational change and the rise of the multiple store retailer. Until recently the focus of growth was on the development of larger shops, in new locations, with the impetus on efficiency and effectiveness of operations (Sparks 2000a).

The efficient administration of such complex organisations requires a centralised structure and functional specialisation at head office (to avoid duplication of common back-up services), as well as a high degree of monitoring and co-ordination of all its activities (Sparks 1989, 1992a). At the same time this flexibility is supported by very tight cost management and financial controls. Such systems tend to require centralisation of policy, planning and investment, with multiple retailers thus needing high control and high flexibility to compete effectively in the market (Segal-Horn 1987).

As multiple store retailers have grown larger they have centralised many of their functions and facilities. This process has included the centralisation of functions such as buying, advertising, pricing and merchandising. Consequently, while the stores are “substantial operations in their own right”, they are “attached through an umbilical cord and data cord to the central part of the business” (Sparks 2000a:18). A further, and more detailed, discussion of this centralisation of store level managers’ responsibilities takes place in Chapter five.

Large multiple retailers are also associated with the geographical decentralisation from high streets to out-of-town locations. The grocery multiples tend to be at the forefront of change in the retail industry. It is a highly concentrated and competitive sector dominated by five non co-operative operators who between them have a 64 per cent share of grocery retail sales in the UK (Marchington and Harrison 1991). They spear-headed the move towards self-service shopping and larger retail outlets in the 1950s culminating in superstores and hypermarkets operating in out-of-town locations. The trend of expansion in size and geographical decentralisation was followed by the DIY, furniture and electrical multiples setting up 'retail warehouses' in retail parks, and then other multiple retailers moving to out-of-town shopping centres.

The increase in size of multiple store retailers has been accompanied by format development, and in particular the rise of the superstore format. The standard definition for 'superstores' is of stores "with a sales area greater than 25,000 sq. ft. on one floor and with adjacent parking facilities" (Ruston 1999:100). Superstore development in the UK began in the 1960s. The format was relatively slowly introduced until it became increasingly accepted by consumers, retailers and planners. Improved economies of scale and lower unit costs became paramount in the 1980s. Capacity became increasingly rationalised which led to the emergence of superstores in out-of-town locations. While in 1980 only 5 per cent of sales took place through out-of-town retailing, by 1991 this had grown to 17 per cent (Ruston 1999).

The penetration of superstores into the UK accelerated dramatically during the 1980s and early 1990s until planning regulations curtailed their expansion (Bromley and

Thomas 1993; Davies 1995; Davies and Sparks 1989; Freathy 1993; Guy 1994; McGoldrick 1990; Wrigley and Lowe 1996). Subsequently, multiple store retailers shifted their focus from new store build to a concern with the operational efficiency of existing stores (Freathy and Sparks 1996). Sparks (2000b) has warned that the superstore format is now under threat because of planning restrictions, but believes it “will remain the dominant format for some time” (p.88), particularly in the food retailing sector.

The retail format through which some multiple store retailers have become more successful is the superstore (Sparks 2000a). Food retailing is now dominated by a few multiple store retailers, predominately operating the superstore format. Figure one outlines the characteristics of superstore food retail outlets, according to Dawson (1984).

Figure 1: Characteristics of large format food retail outlets (Dawson 1984)

1. Retail establishment run by horizontally integrated chain
 2. Sales areas of > 2500m²
 3. Merchandise mix of >35% sales area in non-food
 4. Gross floor space >120% sales area
 5. Product range wide, but shallow
 6. Mass scrambled merchandising
 7. Prices are relatively low
 8. Customer self-service
 9. Extended opening hours
 10. Associated operations e.g. petrol
 11. High technology use
 12. Supply channels
 13. Car parking space provided
 14. Development by retailer
 15. Off-centre locations
 16. Design stresses functionalism
 17. Store management decentralised
-

Due to their operational efficiency, the development of the superstore format quickly became the sole focus of multiple store retailers in the grocery sector (Shaw et al 1989). Retailers in other sectors also followed, particularly those in the home improvement and electrical areas. These out-of-town superstores are cost effective, with greater economies of scale. The emphasis on larger outlets to realise economies of scale became apparent with out-of-town superstores tending to be more cost-intensive than labour intensive (Dawson et al 1987; Segal-Horn 1987). This has resulted in a polarisation of the market between large out-of-town superstores and smaller in-town outlets. A further discussion relating to the employment characteristics of superstore retailing takes place in Section 3.3.

2.5 COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES IN THE UK RETAIL INDUSTRY

Crucial to a firm's growth and prosperity in large-scale multiple store retailing in the UK is the ability to gain and retain a competitive advantage (Howe 1992; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This involves a success factor in the market substantial enough to make a difference, and sustainable in the face of changing conditions and competitive actions (Johnson 1992). A competitive advantage is gained by focusing on variables that clearly differentiate a company from its competitors enabling an organisation to increase volume, reduce costs, retain customers, and hence increase profitability (Walker 1992).

Many retailers were quick to realise that economies of scale could be best achieved through repetition. Adding identical departments and branches led to quantity buying and other favourable terms, which could provide a considerable competitive

advantage. In the early 1990's the strategies for achieving this were through dominating local markets, increasing store size, sales and gross profit productivity, improving store operating costs and central cost productivity, and reducing merchandising costs. However, to the extent that one company gained the initiative, competitors were obliged to respond and thereby play a reactive rather than a proactive role. This, combined with the openness on issues of strategy and performance demanded of multiple retailers from their investors, has created problems in competitive terms "with the copying of tactics and strategies widespread in retailing" (Dawson 2000:129). In the 1980s and early 1990s retailers could be described as 'defenders' (Miles and Snow 1984).

Retailing is very often viewed as a mature industry despite also being described as 'dynamic' (Musannif 1988; Sparks 1992a, 1992b). A portfolio classification could thus be used which draws on the concepts of product life cycle and experience curve - a tool recommended by Baird and Meshoulam (1988). Multiple branch retailing could be generally defined as a 'cash cow' using the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) portfolio model. This places the emphasis on costs in order to maintain growth. However, large retailers have begun to recognise the need for innovation in order to remain competitive, particularly in the more developed food retailing sector. This has encouraged them to enter new markets, such as banking and Internet shopping. Using the BCG matrix these new ventures could be defined as 'question marks', which create a demand for new skills and effective management. In essence retail companies have had to do more to sustain their profit growth targets in the face of changing markets (Whitefield 1987).

During the 1990's and into the 21st century some major retailers appeared to be practising two generic strategies simultaneously by placing an emphasis on both quality enhancement and cost reduction (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This was particularly in terms of offering customers a high quality of customer service and shopping experience, together with low prices. Compounded by competitive pressures, particularly in the food retailing sector, retail strategies have tended to focus on the maintenance of a high share price, through cost saving initiatives (Christopherson 1996; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1998; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). The economic recession of the early 1990s intensified the situation by placing price at the forefront of retailers' competitive strategies (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This search for operating efficiencies and improved methods of meeting customer needs transformed the operations of leading retailers.

Parallel to pursuing this strategy of cost reduction, many retailers placed the quality of customer service at the heart of their competitive strategies in the mid to late 1990s. As Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) noted, even the recession of the early 1990s, and the subsequent re-focus on cost savings was not at the total expense of quality and service. "The critical role of customer service" (Doogan 1992:23) and "quality of staff" issues (Sparks 1992b:11) became key determinants in contemporary strategies of retail competition. There is a clear association in the literature between the rise of customer service as an important facet of the retail business and the competitive edge which can be gained (Gardner and Sheppard 1989). The customer care programmes are important strategies for today's multiple store retailer gaining prevalence during the 1990's. However, Sparks (1992c) noted, "in looking at the realities of British retailing,

customers might be forgiven for believing that retailers understand only lip service rather than customer service” (p.165). As Lowe and Crewe (1996) found, increased efficiency for the retailer has often meant declining standards of service to the customer. Yet, pursuing a strategy of quality customer service requires a culture which always puts the customer first. Many retailers have attempted to encourage a strong sense of company culture and corporate identity in the workplace (Doogan 1992), which would suggest a ‘soft’ HRM approach is necessary to secure the success of such corporate strategies.

In all retail activities there appears to be a strategic drive towards serving the customer better, but within an acceptable cost base (Freathy and Sparks 2000). Many retailers are now moving towards customer-centric marketing models, recognising that the customer has high expectations of service (Ruston 1999). This has in part been caused by speculation that growth could only be achieved by attracting customers from competitors (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This seems to have served as the impetus for change, and a majority of retailers now embrace the philosophy of customer service. Some retailers have undergone enormous strategic change to address the combination of strong competition in the industry, together with a more discerning customer. One example of this was Safeway whose strategy was re-focused, which involved a massive overhaul of the whole company (Ruston 1999).

The concurrent strategies of cost reduction and improved quality of customer service appear diametrically opposed goals. It also does not accord with the typology put forward by Porter (1985) that only one strategy type can be pursued within the same

organisation at the same time. This suggests that an alternative approach to generic strategy is needed. Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) found that staff were confused about the conflicting messages arising from changes to competitive strategy in the food retailing sector. These competitive strategies have obviously had various repercussions on the practice of HRM and employee resourcing within retail organisations, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.

This chapter has sought to outline the industry context within which local managers operate and HRM is executed. A brief historical perspective was provided, before the discussion focused on multiple store retailing, with an emphasis on the superstore format.

Increasing rationalisation in the retail industry has led to multiple store retailers claiming an increasing share of the total market. Many multiple retailers are now answerable to shareholder pressure, which has placed an emphasis on cost reduction and profit maximisation through the development of appropriate corporate strategies. The growth of multiple store retailers has been accompanied by a rise in the superstore format, particularly in the food retailing sector. These superstores have tended to be located out-of-town, achieving greater economies of scale than equivalent high-street stores.

Current retail strategies appear to be focused on two aspects - customer service and cost minimisation. This equates to Porter's (1985) quality enhancement and cost reduction strategies being pursued simultaneously - two apparently diametrically

opposed strategies. The literature places doubt on retailers' true strategic intentions of quality enhancement, and the consequences of these strategies for employment issues will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF UK

MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING

This chapter seeks to examine the employment characteristics of the retail industry. It adopts a particular focus on multiple store retailing and the superstore format in order to reflect the empirical work of this research study. This encompasses an outline of the main characteristics of the retail labour market before proceeding to consider the nature of local management.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To discern the role of store level managers in the process of employee resourcing it is important to consider the nature of the retail workforce. A review of current trends and key characteristics will enable a full understanding of the context within which HRM and employee resourcing is practised in multiple store retailing. Statistics and key trends are taken from the period of the mid 1990s to enable a picture of the nature of retail employment, at the time of the empirical research, to be established. Key features of the retail workforce are examined with a focus on the high use of non-standard employment; the above-average employment of women; and the increasing employment of student workers.

Sparks (1992a) described British retailing as characterised by:

“low pay, poor levels of staff remuneration, sometimes inadequate working conditions, and minimal staff levels, motivation and concern.” (p.182)

The workforce is often described as “youthful” and “feminised”, employing a large number of young workers, together with having a predominately female workforce (Sparks 1992a, 1992b; Shackleton 1998; Sly 1996).

Another of the features common to retail employment is the high level of labour turnover. USDAW (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers) estimated average staff turnover for 1989 to be 62 per cent. Exacerbated by these high levels of turnover is a low level of unionisation. Overall it is estimated that less than 30 per cent of retail employees belong to a trade union (Sparks 1992a); Toye et al (1992) put the figure even lower at 17 per cent. Of these, most will belong to USDAW (Sparks 1992a). However, some companies have maintained substantive agreements with trade unions, which culminated in the first partnership agreement in the retail industry, between Tesco and USDAW in 1998 (IDS 1998).

3.2 EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS IN UK

MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING

Retailing is a labour intensive industry (Shackleton 1998) with three key characteristics. Retailers are high employers of part timers who constitute a substantial part of the industry’s workforce (IRS 1993b; Naylour 1994; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1992b). In recent years the introduction of zero hour and minimum hours contracts have been witnessed (IDS 1993a, 1993b; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995). Retailers also employ high numbers of women and young workers, particularly students. Each of these will be examined in more detail in this section.

3.2.1 Non-Standard Labour In The Retail Workforce

Retailers employ large numbers of part timers, and a significant proportion of the retail workforce could be categorised as ‘flexible’, i.e. working less than full time under non-permanent contracts (Hakim 1987). In Spring 1995, part time employment accounted for 43 per cent of the British retail workforce (Sly 1996). Between 1984 and 1994, part time employment in retailing increased by 63 per cent in the UK (Naylour 1994), while the incidence of temporary working remains low, accounting for 4 per cent of the total workforce (Alpin and Walsh 1997). The industry also accounted for the largest share of part time workers, with the biggest increase in part time jobs occurring in the food retailing sector (Naylour 1994). This increase in part time employment led to a concurrent decrease in the employment of full timers, particularly in the food retailing sector (Freathy and Sparks 1996; Naylour 1994; Sparks 1992b). However, the retail industry’s dependence on part time employment has been a long standing feature of their labour market structure, and not simply “a phenomenon of the recession and uncertainty of the 1980’s” (Walsh 1991:107).

McGregor and Sproull (1991, 1992) found that the main reasons for employers recruiting flexible workers (in particular part time and temporary workers) were traditional ones. These were defined as providing short term cover, catering for tasks requiring only limited inputs, or attracting certain segments of the labour force. Recruiting part timers avoids the under-use of labour and the higher level of wage and non-wage payments which need to be meted out if full timers were employed to fill these jobs. This is classified as the supplementary rationale for the recruitment of part timers (Tam 1997). The use of part timers enables retailers to match labour demands

with changing patterns in operational and customer requirements. This has been particularly evident in the superstore sector and is said to indicate a shift from the employment of full time workers to part time workers (Sparks 1992b). It could therefore be argued that the deployment of part time workers in the retail industry is a combination of both supplementary and substitution factors, with the use of substitution a relatively new phenomenon.

Much of the literature concludes that retailers have increased their employment of part timers in order to develop flexible groups of employees for the achievement of economic gain. This is particularly through their ability to increase hours without incurring premium rate overtime payments (Gregory 1991; Robinson 1990; Walsh 1990). Gregory (1991) found that retailers consider part timers to be the main vehicle for flexibility, particularly through overtime. Neathey and Hurstfield (1995) has found that retailers commonly employ non-standard employees to contain or reduce costs, whilst having the flexibility to cover regular fluctuations in business. Meanwhile, Gregory (1991), Robinson (1990), and Walsh (1990), found that retail employers were using part timers to control costs and increase productivity within a competitive environment.

Almost all sectors of the retail industry experience fluctuations in demand over the year, usually attributable to seasonal factors (Sparks 1992a, 1992b; Walsh 1990, 1991). These fluctuations enhance the attractiveness of temporary workers. The use of temporary staff on fixed short-term contracts has been advocated as an important component of the retail labour force (Walsh 1991). It is most frequently used to cope

with fluctuations in demand as a result of seasonal factors, which generally occur during the Christmas period when some retail employers earn up to 40 per cent of annual revenue in a six week period (Sparks 1992a). Walsh (1990), and Hunter and MacInnes (1991, 1992), found that the seasonal variation in retail sales was commonly met by temporary employees, usually for sales and summer seasons. However, the incidence of temporary employment in retailing is low (approximately 4 per cent) and appears to affect mainly the youngest workers, particularly students (Alpin & Walsh 1997).

McGregor and Sproull (1991, 1992) found that although supply-side explanations were quite salient for employers of part timers, they were cited less frequently in the case of temporary workers. Flexible working practices open up opportunities of employing different groups of people - those with family or caring responsibilities, those with other time pressures, such as education, and those who simply do not want to commit themselves to 'standard' employment. There is a majority of part time workers who prefer to work in their current pattern (Wareing 1992) and these workers are termed as 'voluntary' part timers. These are typically women with dependent children, full time students, or semi-retired persons. Women, especially those with children, value flexibility of work hours and seek job opportunities which offer this advantage, particularly in the UK where employer-provided child care provision is scarce (Feldman and Doerpinghaus 1992).

Research indicates that part time workers are often treated less favourably than full time workers in respect to some conditions of employment. They are commonly

excluded from receiving overtime premia. Few employers pay any premium to part timers for working overtime beyond their contractual hours until the full time standard weekly hours are exceeded (Dickens 1992, 1995; Walsh 1990, 1991). Promotion beyond a certain level is also limited for part time employees (Tilly 1992). Robinson (1990) found a few part time supervisors in existence in the retail industry, but they typically worked over 30 hours a week and were only used where full time supervisory staff could not provide adequate cover, such as at week-ends and late evenings. Consequently, part timers are confined to certain occupational groups within the lowest grades of a store (Robinson 1990; Walsh 1991).

Research has also confirmed that part time employees are particularly disadvantaged in skill levels (Gallie 1991; Gallie and White 1994), tending to be found in the lower skilled jobs directly responsive to customer demand (Cockburn 1991; Gregory 1991). Elias and Gregory (1994) concluded that part time work remains heavily skewed toward the low-skill end of the spectrum of occupations, with the occupational structure of part time jobs changing little since 1980. Gallie and White (1994) found that part timers were not only the lowest skilled workers on all criteria, but were least likely to have experienced an increase in either skills or responsibility over the previous five years. They concluded that in terms of skill, part timers conform most closely to the secondary, or peripheral, labour market.

The ultimate form of part time working is the zero, or minimum hours contract, where there is no specification as to the exact hours which an employee is expected to work. A number of retailers have adopted this form of working for a small proportion of their

workforce to achieve maximum flexibility of working time (IDS 1993a; IRS 1993b). This has resulted in a further fragmentation of working hours for some retail employees and they have been identified in the literature as the true 'peripheral' workforce in the retail industry (Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Purcell and Purcell 1999).

3.2.2 Women In The Retail Workforce

In the course of the 20th Century, the retail industry changed from a predominately male full time workforce, to a female one with large numbers of part time workers (Bradley 1989; Hoffman 1947; Winstanley 1983). As Howe (1992) described:

“retailing is dominated by women and managed by men.” (p.192)

Sixty one per cent of the retail workforce is female, while in 1994 sixty five per cent of women working in retail were employed on a part time basis, compared to only twenty five per cent of men (Census of Employment 1994). The expansion of female employment has been particularly prevalent in the superstore sector (Booz et al 1990; Dawson et al 1986). The vast majority of part time positions within superstores, particularly supermarkets, were filled by women (Dawson et al 1986). However, the rise in the number of part time jobs and the substitution of part time jobs for full time jobs has taken place largely within the female workforce. Therefore, the majority of male jobs remain full time (MacEwan Scott 1994).

The retail workforce, particularly in the superstore sector, reveals a distinct gender bias, with women being used primarily as sales assistants and men tending to occupy managerial roles (Freathy 1993). While women are more likely to be managers in the

retail industry than other occupational sectors, they tend to be concentrated at the lower levels of management (Davidson and Cooper 1992). Wacjman (1996) implicates masculine organisational cultures in the retail industry for the existence of vertical occupational segregation, claiming that macho management is in the ascendancy. Barriers for females in reaching senior retail management positions of 'not being male', long hours, lack of part time management positions, and locational mobility, have been cited (Broadbridge 1998; MacEwen Scott 1994). This has led to conclusions that masculinity and male values still constitute an essential qualification for many retail management posts.

The retail industry employs a large proportion of part time female labour and various attempts have been made to explain this. One approach argues that it is the nature of the retail industry and demand factors that contribute to the high incidence of flexible working practices (Dale 1987). This argument asserts that the retail industry demonstrates all the factors that have been identified as likely to lead to the construction of part time jobs within an occupation or industry. These are that it draws upon the local labour market, is labour intensive, has staffing requirements that fluctuate, requires employees to work unsociable hours, and the work has traditionally been carried out by women (Dale 1987). Conversely, it has been argued that feminisation of the retail workforce has enabled employers to deploy a flexible workforce more easily. Retailers have been provided with a readily available pool of labour that accepts inferior terms and conditions of employment, as working mothers strive to accommodate their child care and domestic obligations (Brockbank and Airey 1994a, 1994b).

Occupational segregation is prevalent in the retail industry (Broadbridge 1995; Craig and Wilkinson 1985; Dawson et al 1987; Freathy 1993; Sparks 1991) and research has shown there is a long history of job gendering in retailing (Broadbridge 1991; Craig and Wilkinson 1982; Game and Pringle 1984; Winstanley 1983). This pattern of segregation began to develop as women were drawn into the retail industry and can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Men have always filled the occupations that were considered skilled and requiring training, where the value of the products sold was high, the work was considered heavy and rough, or where there was a predominately male clientele. Women traditionally conducted jobs which required minimal training, the work was considered light, the clientele was predominately female, and where the wage bill was highly important to the shopkeeper (Holcombe 1973). As a result, female workers were found in confectionery, millinery, corsetry, china goods, women's clothing, and where refreshments were sold. Men dominated in the grocery, jewellery, butchery, ironmongery, fishmongery, and pharmacy sector. The most striking feature is how firmly the pattern of segregation persisted once it was established. 'Masculine' jobs have today retained their associations with craft and training, as well as being the more senior positions in retail.

Horizontal segregation is also prevalent within the retail industry, where even within the same retail store occupational segregation often exists. Sales (other than buyers, brokers and sales representatives) is one occupation in which the greatest proportion of women work part time (Sly 1996). MacEwen Scott's research (1994) highlighted the tendency for retail managers to allocate men and women to different sections within a store according to the types of activity and merchandise. The main reasons

was the close association between the goods sold and the salesperson and the customer. This was justified in terms of economic efficiency as retail managers attributed it to producing better sales. However, job gendering also occurred behind the scenes where no customers were involved.

Research in the food retailing sector indicates that men working on the shop floor were mainly confined to specialist areas such as butchery, bakery, or warehouse (Freathy 1993). MacEwan Scott (1994) found that men tend to hold most of the senior positions in stores and dominated departments with expensive or bulky consumables. Tolich and Briar (1999) found major gender divisions between apparently equal workers that were clearly detrimental to female employees' promotion prospects. Gender differences must therefore be recognised as not always arising out of natural, or biological differences between men and women, but out of social processes and the specific implementation of employment policies by managers (Rubery and Wilkinson 1994).

Women are also disproportionately found in business support functions, and least likely to hold operational roles within retailing (WH Smith 1994). This is despite 13 retail companies being members of the Opportunity 2000 initiative (Times Books 1995). Broadbridge (1998) concluded that this must equate to a considerable divergence between espoused company policy and organisational reality.

3.2.3 Student Workers In The Retail Workforce

The retail industry has a workforce with 50 per cent of all workers aged 34 or less; higher than the national average for all employment (NRTC 1995). Many of these younger workers are students working part time to fund their studies (Dex and McCulloch 1995; Lucas 1997; Taylor and Smith 1998). The numbers of part time workers in the 16-19 age group exceeds those of full time workers (Employment Department 1994). Taylor and Smith (1998) found that 47.9 per cent of their sample of full time students, worked in the retail sector. According to Labour Force Survey data, the majority of retail employees aged 16-19 worked part time, and 15 per cent of Britain's retail workforce were enrolled on full time education courses in Spring 1995 (Alpin and Walsh 1997). The significance of the retail sector as an important location of the student worker is clearly apparent. Dex and McCulloch (1995) suggest that Britain "may be in the process of moving to the USA model of part time employment where the rates of part time employment are highest amongst the young workers who are in full time education" (p.136-7).

Existing literature focuses on the supply of student workers to the labour market and the experiences of those student workers, rather than employer demand for student labour (for example, Hakim 1996; Lucas 1997; Lucas and Ralston 1997; Taylor and Smith 1998). This is in contrast to other research conducted on flexible employment where demand-side factors are often examined at the expense of the employee perspective. The research shows that student workers tend to be treated as peripheral by their employers. Whilst located in low skilled jobs they "tend to get the worse jobs, the lowest pay and often find themselves pressurised to work extra hours and shifts"

(Taylor and Smith 1998: 3). Lucas (1997) claimed to have strong evidence demonstrating employers' attempts by employers to maximise labour control through low cost and high flexibility strategies by using student labour.

With much of the literature defining student workers as part of the peripheral workforce this raises the issue of working mothers' part time employment. Dex and McCulloch (1995) concluded that women's part time employment linked to family formation has appeared to have peaked. They believed that employers are now increasingly turning to student workers to maximise flexibility. This forces women into direct competition with students, for the availability of part time jobs, as noted by Rubery and Tarling (1988):

“women are being increasingly forces into competition with other disadvantaged groups in their traditional employment areas.....thus women could lose their dubious advantage of being an important source of disadvantaged labour supply.” (p.126)

This is particularly applicable to the retail industry as a large employer of both female, and student, part timers.

3.3 EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPERSTORE SECTOR

The employment implications of superstore retailing have attracted academic interest over recent years (Sparks 1982, 1983, 1991; Dawson et al 1986; 1988). Of the 2.2 million persons employed within retailing over 380,000 are directly employed by superstores (Freathy 1993). The growth of superstores has therefore had a significant **impact upon UK retail employment.**

As store sizes increase so economies of scale are encountered, including economies of labour input. Large multiple store retailers have been associated with the most modern changes in the labour process, particularly through their use of technology, with retailers becoming one of the most innovative users of information technology (Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This introduction of information technology has also led to some reduction in the need for labour. The use of Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) technology has enabled a better matching of staff supply to customer demand, with a resultant increase in employment flexibility (Sparks 2000a). The rise in the superstore format has consequently led to a reduction in labour input in retailing, particularly in the food retailing sector where a large proportion of superstore formats are in operation.

Much of the work carried out by shop-floor sales assistants in multiple retail companies is tedious and low-skilled. This has led to the retail workforce being described by MacEwan Scott (1994) as the 'new proletariat of modern times'. The increased use of information technology means that retailing is becoming increasingly standardised relying on mass production methods for economies of scale and increased productivity. For example, cashiers in superstores are often monitored for their throughput by store managers and head office (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). This negates Bell's (1973) notion of work in a post industrial society as being of a pleasant, skilled and challenging nature. Conversely, in superstores there has been an increased demand for "craftsmen" on the shop-floor as multiple store retailers increasingly compete on a quality basis. As a result stores have seen the re-introduction of

traditional craft skills on the shopfloor in the form of butchers and fishmongers in the food retailing sector, and carpenters in the DIY sector (Ruston 1999).

Another feature of superstore employment is the marked increase in female employment within this format (see also section 3.2.2). It has been estimated that over 70 per cent of total superstore employment is female (Dawson et al 1987; Booz et al 1990). Accompanying this increase in female employment is a growth in the use of part time labour in superstores. An emphasis upon cost reduction together with the increased opening hours in superstore trading has driven this rise in part time employment in the superstore sector (Freathy 1993). In contrast to food retailing, non-food superstores have a more even split between male and female workers (Dawson et al 1987; Sparks 1991). Within the superstore labour market there is also evidence of occupational segregation with female workers occupying the majority of unskilled and semi-skilled occupations, whilst male employees are disproportionately represented in the managerial function (Broadbridge 1991, 1998).

Superstores are also considerable employers of the under-18s and over-60s (Dawson et al 1986). Young workers have been a traditional source of labour supply for the retail industry, and this has been particularly prevalent in the superstore sector.

However, the decline in the number of school leavers has also led to retailers focusing on the semi-retired. Research has found that superstore retailers who have recruited older workers have been more successful in their demand for labour (Freathy 1993).

The de-skilling thesis, first put forward by Braverman (1974), could be applied to the superstore sector of the retail industry. The effects of de-skilling in the retail industry can be traced back to the 1850s in the grocery sector. At the beginning of the 19th century shop-keeping was considered a trade requiring a variety of skills, but new food production methods began to erode the production skills of shop-keeping from the 1850s. The structure of the retailing industry began to change from the middle of the 20th century; as did the occupations within it. With the advent of large multiples came the role of the shop assistant. The shop assistant carried out very different tasks from those of the skilled apprentice with a more limited range of responsibility (Bradley 1989). The skills required for retailing were no longer craft oriented under an apprenticeship scheme, but were social skills and industry-specific experience.

Technology has since taken over many of the tasks previously executed by humans, such as stock-ordering and cashier skills. The use of EPOS and laser scanning has diminished the cashier's skills, with the latest technology allowing customers to enter their own bar codes. It can be concluded that the use of technology, particularly in the superstore sector, has de-skilled the roles of cashiers and store level managers (Smith 1988). Such standardisation of the labour process is in line with Braverman's (1974) de-skilling thesis, and the 'Fordist' approach to management. As the largest industry in the UK economy for female and part time employees, combined with the high density of young workers and low levels of unionisation, it could be argued that the retail industry is utilising weaker segments of the labour market in its search for profit.

Conversely, attempts have been made to professionalise the function of retail management (see also Section 3.4), which suggests a conflict of interests for retailers. This could result in a polarisation of the retail workforce with senior managers enjoying enhanced terms and conditions of employment, while staff at the lower levels appear to be experiencing the opposite.

Dawson et al (1986) found significant differences between employment levels and types of labour in superstores operated by different companies. These differences were greater than the variation in employee types within superstores operated by any one retailer. The main differences were in the balance between part time and full time, and male and female, employment within superstores. They concluded that the major determinant of employee characteristics of superstores was the store operator. This led to calls for research that explains why such differences exist, and why different retailers pursue apparently convergent corporate employment policies for “often seemingly similar superstores” (p.360). This research study aims to address this gap in the literature by examining the processes and management rationale of employee resourcing decision making at store level.

3.4 THE NATURE OF STORE MANAGEMENT

To fulfil this study’s research objectives it is necessary to consider the nature of local management in UK multiple store retailing. This will enable any characteristics unique to retail management to be considered when examining the execution of HRM and employee resourcing at operational level.

Retail store managers occupy an indispensable role between the corporate organisation, the store operations, and the marketplace. Over the past decade research interest has grown in the employment aspects of retailing (Broadbridge 1991, 1996, 1998; Freathy 1993, 1997; Freathy and Sparks 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000; Sparks 1987, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 2000a, 2000b). However, much of this work has been concerned with the position of shop-floor workers, rather than store or head office management (Broadbridge 1998; Freathy and Sparks 1995). Consequently, the factors that may help or hinder the job outcomes of these managers, and how those factors may affect the organisational outcomes have been rarely studied (Lusch and Serpkenci 1990).

The characteristics of retail managers appear consistent throughout the industry. The jobs are nearly always full time, and the more senior the position within a store the greater the likelihood the job will be full time (Freathy and Sparks 2000). The managerial structure also resembles a distinct gender bias (Freathy 1993; Sparks 1992a). Much research has indicated that women, despite their numerical dominance in the retail industry, are disproportionately represented within the lowest occupational grades (Broadbridge 1995, 1996, 1998; Craig and Wilkinson 1985; Dawson et al 1987; Freathy 1993; Sparks 1991). In particular women are under-represented at senior retail management levels (Broadbridge 1997; Collins 1990; EOC 1991; Hansard Society Commission 1990). Research conducted by the Institute for Retail Studies found that of 481 randomly selected stores from four multiple food retailers, 97.5 per cent of store managers were male, with only 2.5 per cent female. This trend continues through the management hierarchy to middle and junior managers (Freathy and Sparks 2000). Only in superstores large enough to warrant a personnel department do women

seem to be more fully represented, with the majority of personnel managers being female (Freathy 1993).

Research has revealed a highly segmented labour market between management and shop-floor employees, which broadly reflects the primary/secondary divide identified by Doeringer and Piore (1971). Managerial and supervisory staff have been found to have terms and conditions of employment which most closely correspond to primary sector employment, while shop-floor staff more closely resemble Doeringer and Piore's secondary employees. In practice, the managerial tier in retailing has been further sub-divided in the literature. The terms 'senior', 'middle' and 'junior' management are the conventional terms used by the retail industry to describe the typical management hierarchy (Brockbank and Airey 1994a, 1994b). Senior managers include store managers, and grades similar and above at head office. Middle management includes assistant store managers, personnel managers, and department heads, while junior management comprises supervisory positions.

The bureaucratic store management hierarchy has recently been dismantled by many retail companies in an effort to reduce costs, and increase the flexibility and job content of remaining managers, in a search for higher productivity (Sparks 2000a). This de-layering has been particularly extensive in the superstore sector. For example, Tesco placed a major emphasis on the de-layering of management at the store level in the 1990s in an effort to reduce the cost burden of a bureaucratic hierarchical organisational structure (Sparks 2000b). This has led to a breakdown of the traditional management hierarchy, particularly in superstores. In this retail format, stores are

more likely to have a senior store management team, while the level of supervisor/junior management has been eradicated and merged into middle management. This has led, in some stores, to a reduction in management to two hierarchical levels: senior and lower level managers (Sparks 2000b).

As already discussed, senior retail managers tend to occupy full time, relatively secure positions, with conditions of primary labour (Freathy 1993; Freathy and Sparks 2000).

As a result turnover is much lower than the industry average at just over 5 per cent (Freathy 1993). Such senior managers are also considered to be on a structured career path. Doogan (1992) found that movement between stores is also a significant feature of managerial career progression. Other features of store management is the expectation to work considerably longer than the 'standard' week, including evenings and weekends (Brockbank and Airey 1994a, 1994b). Even middle managers have been cited as having relatively secure conditions of employment (Freathy and Sparks 1996). Department heads are typically empowered with responsibility for a specific area of a store, although their function usually differs from senior management. Their duties are more highly defined with their roles governed by a formal set of work procedures. They have little or no control over space allocation, product placement, merchandising or promotion. This has led Sparks (2000b) to conclude that:

“the requirement at the store level is a simple one - keep the shelves stocked and the customers served.” (p.17)

Meanwhile, junior managers are primarily in charge of the shop-floor with work which is usually repetitious, acting as first line of complaint from the customer (Freathy and Sparks 2000). The overwhelming majority of junior managers have previously worked on the shop floor, and progression from sales assistant to a supervisory position is

considered a traditional promotional path for the sales force (Freathy 1993).

Supervisory skills are generally not considered company specific and experience is regarded as an important promotional criteria. Freathy (1993) believed these features would “limit supervisors’ ability to progress on to lower managerial positions” (p.74). Freathy and Sparks (1996) consequently classified these jobs as comprising lower primary tier employment.

Organisational and technological changes have altered the nature of retail management jobs (Broadbridge 1998). The success of retail businesses has required rapid responses from its managers (Freathy and Sparks 1995). However, the recruitment for a store manager is often for a generalist rather than a specialist, as many of the control and management issues are now handled away from the store at head office (Sparks 1992b). These developments led Tomlinson et al (1997) to suggest that the store manager’s role now demands increased awareness of the expectations of more demanding and diverse consumers, significant HRM skills, and information technology competence.

Retailing management has traditionally been associated with a style characterised by task orientation, competition separation, self-assertion and control. In the past, retail companies have required people in key management positions who can deliver measurable ‘hard’ objectives (Broadbridge 1998; Brockbank and Airey 1994a, 1994b). Broadbridge (1998) claimed that today’s retailer now places a greater emphasis on ‘softer’ management skills, such as delivering high morale, customer care and employee care, as a means of achieving competitive advantage. This has yet to be fully

supported with empirical evidence, and much of the literature actually describes retail store level management as becoming de-skilled through a centralisation of managers' tasks and responsibilities (Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Smith 1988).

As retail companies have expanded, so many of their functions have become centralised at head offices. At store level, many managers have experienced a change in the nature of their role and a reduction in their decision-making responsibilities (Broadbridge 1998). Doogan (1992) noted that store management functions reflect a low position in the multiple chain of command of large, multiple retailers. This equates to an inability to make any valuable contribution to policy formation and strategy. Essentially, local management responsibilities seem geared towards the delivery of a service that has been designed and packaged centrally, and exhibit comparatively little autonomy in decision-making. This was supported by Smith (1988) who found that store managers "had little or no say in number of lines carried, selection of lines carried, store layout, promotions, price, window display, staff budgets, marketing, store design and decorations, or delivery dates" (p. 149). Freathy and Sparks (1996) had similar findings concluding that the autonomy and control of store level managers has been reduced over time, resulting in a de-skilling of their positions. They attributed this to retailers' efforts to remain competitive and secure operational efficiency. Kelly et al (1981) commented that being geographically separated from head office, while undergoing a centralisation of their tasks, could lead to a lack of role clarity for store level managers.

Greater central control of store managers by head office has been facilitated by advancements in technology, enabling more managerial decisions to be made at head office, and reducing the content of local managerial positions (Sparks 1987). This highly centralised pattern of retail management is particularly British, and other European countries are more decentralised in their approaches (Burt 1989). In the UK, even responsibility for the transfer of trading information to head office has been eradicated as a result of EPOS, which allows data to be transmitted to head office without any intervention by store personnel. Consequently store managers have become “executors of orders emanating from head office, and the emphasis of their role has altered from trading to administration” (Houlton and Thomas 1990:15).

An explanation for the decline in autonomy for store level managers, through the centralisation of many elements of the local decision-making process was offered by Smith (1988). He found, in the majority of retail chains in his research, that senior managers at head office were keen to eliminate local management discretion. They “saw the branch manager as a problem” (p.152), who could not be trusted to make effective decisions, particularly regarding stock and sales decisions. In many cases they were not even given access to the EPOS data to allow them to develop such skills. At one chain he found:

“what the Board wants to do is remove that discretion from shops, to make the computer system so clever that the system would get [re-ordering] basically right every time.” (p. 153)

As Freathy and Sparks (1996) noted, while there remains a need for the presence of management at store level to “organise and manage what cannot be controlled centrally” (p. 193), their responsibilities are relatively minimal. This has left store level

managers with responsibility for staff punctuality and presentation, and some control over day-to-day staff deployment (Smith 1988). Even training is commonly devolved to a training supervisor, and the content of training often set centrally to ensure consistency throughout a national chain (Smith 1988). In the case of employment policy, Doogan (1992) found evidence of clearly stipulated labour cost to sale ratios with the ability to specify part time to full time ratios, all determined by head office.

This process of centralisation has reduced the demands on store managers, yet Sparks (2000a) argues that their tasks remain considerable, if only because of the sheer size of many stores, particularly the superstore format. Accusations of de-skilling and decline in autonomy are in contrast to the increased remuneration packages offered to retail managers, and the tying in of senior store management to structured career paths (Freathy and Sparks 1996; Sparks 1992a, 1992b). Retailers are having to balance their requirement for better educated and better trained staff to cope with increased store size with the removal of areas of decision-making responsibility from the store. The requirement of retail management is of more practical generic management skills. The industry has made efforts to increase the number of graduates and many retailers have graduate management training schemes, in an attempt to professionalise their managerial workforce. Many store management positions in the larger companies now require a degree as a prerequisite reflecting these efforts (Freathy and Sparks 2000). Retail companies are also using advancements in IT to monitor and reward store level managers' performance. Data from management information systems is commonly used by major retailers to compare managers across stores enabling promotions and raises to be tied directly to country-wide competition (Lusch and Jaworski 1991).

Head office can remind store managers where they rate relative to other stores by disseminating company-wide reports (Lusch and Dunne 1990). This enables the career-conscious manager to present evidence of effective performance to superiors (Brockbank and Airey 1994a).

There appears to be a centralisation of store level managers' tasks occurring in UK multiple store retail organisations aimed at achieving improved efficiency and consistency across branches. This is combined with an apparent low trust culture of local managers' ability to make effective decisions, together with facilitating enhancements in technology and management information systems. Meanwhile, retailers are concurrently making attempts to professionalise store level management, which could result in some role conflict for these local managers.

This chapter has sought to examine the employment and management characteristics of the multiple store retail workforce. The retail industry's workforce has three dominant features: female workers; young workers; and a large part time workforce. Research has shown that the superstore sector is a large and growing employer of these three types of workers, particularly food retailing stores. This has been attributed to a number of reasons, although the store operator appears to be a major determinant in the employment characteristics of the superstore workforce, with retailers seeming to pursue different employment policies to achieve similar strategic goals.

The nature of store management was also considered in this chapter in order to frame the context of the multiple store workforce. Evidence of a de-skilling of store

managers' responsibilities, with an accompanying increase in professionalism has been witnessed in recent years. This has been facilitated by improved technology and the use of management information systems.

There appear to be changes occurring in the retail labour market, some of which have been driven by the growth of the superstore format. The nature of retail store management is also changing in multiple retail organisations. The following chapter will more closely examine the nature of HRM in the industry, with a particular emphasis on the execution of employee resourcing policies and procedures at store level.

Chapter 4

HRM AND UK MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING

This chapter provides a focus on the nature of HRM and employee resourcing in the retail industry. It considers the role of HRM and employee resourcing in multiple store retailing, concentrating on the operational level. This includes an outline of the general characteristics of HRM, followed by a summary of the nature of HRM and employee resourcing in multiple store retailing, and the consequences of retail corporate strategy for the management of human resources. This is followed by a study of employee resourcing decisions at the operational level in retail, considering the role HR managers and store level managers play in the decision-making process.

4.1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HRM

HRM is not dissimilar to organisational behaviour in that both are concerned with the individual members of an organisation's workforce. However, organisational behaviour is concerned with a set of behaviours, whereas HRM recognises that people must be effectively managed if an organisation is to achieve its objectives (Maund 2001). HRM is often seen as a product of the 1980s (Blunt 1990; Bratton and Gold 1999) representing a move away from traditional personnel management towards a wider perspective (Wood 1994). Whilst one approach has been to contrast HRM with traditional personnel management (for example, Storey 1992), this division is not necessarily straight forward and Legge (1995) discusses the problematic nature of these attempts. Storey (1992) 'maps' the various meanings of HRM on a matrix of 'strong' to 'weak' and 'hard' to 'soft'. The two most widely adopted models of

human resource management are the 'hard' and 'soft' versions (Truss et al 1997). Guest (1987) and Storey (1992) viewed the key distinction between soft-hard models of HRM as being whether the emphasis is placed on the human or the resource. Hard HRM stresses the "quantitative, calculative and business-strategic" (Storey 1992:29) aspects of managing human resources. It focuses on the importance of a strategic fit between HR and corporate strategy, both internally (where HR policies and practices are closely linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation), and externally (where HR policies and practices are coherent among themselves), to achieve a competitive advantage (Baird and Meshoulam 1988; Devanna et al 1984; Hendry and Pettigrew 1986; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988; Miles and Snow 1984; Storey and Sisson 1993b; Tichy et al 1982; Tyson and Fell 1986). Meanwhile, soft HRM is associated with the concept of high employee commitment based on high levels of trust, and associated with the goals of flexibility and adaptability (Storey and Sisson 1993b; Walton 1985; Wood 1996). To summarise, the hard model is "based on notions of tight strategic control", while the soft model is "based on control through commitment" (Truss et al 1997:53). These two perspectives on HRM make assumptions that are diametrically divergent with conflicts and tensions evident in the models developed by both Guest (1987) and Storey (1992).

A review of the literature in the field of HRM also indicates divergence about what HRM actually is and what it represents. Initial criticism alleged that HRM was simply a restatement of traditional personnel management (Armstrong 1987; Fowler 1987; Keenoy 1990a, 1990b; Keenoy and Anthony 1992). Keenoy (1990a, 1990b) claimed HRM is more rhetoric than reality, full of contradictions in both theoretical and

practical terms. Others have indicated that the financial orientations of most companies, are their stronger objectives, which are generally incompatible with HRM, particularly 'soft' HRM (Armstrong 1989). Truss et al (1997) concluded that even if the rhetoric of HRM embraces the tenets of soft HRM, "the reality is almost always 'hard', with the interests of the organisation prevailing over those of the individual" (p.70). As Dawes (1995) outlined, while the view of senior managers might be that people are the key resources, "there is little evidence to show that managers behave as though this is true" (p.8).

These ongoing debates demonstrate the attention being paid to HRM and its use within organisations. However, the concept of HRM has been criticised as being often seen as "vague and elusive" (Maund 2001:25). Truss et al (1997) maintained that this distinction between rhetoric and reality must be considered in any conceptualisations of HRM. The remainder of this chapter will focus on one feature of the model of HRM - the role of the line manager in the execution of HRM with particular attention to employee resourcing. This will satisfy the objectives of this research study to focus on the role of local managers in the execution of HRM and employee resourcing at the operational level of multiple store retail organisations.

For clarification purposes, a definition of employee resourcing is provided. Employee resourcing has been described as difficult to define meaningfully (Taylor 1998), but attempts include:

"the range of methods and approaches used by employers in resourcing their organisations in such a way as to enable them to meet their key goals" (Taylor 1998:2)

“that part of personnel and development which focuses on the recruitment and release of individuals from organisations, as well as the management of their performance and potential whilst employed by the organisation.” (CIPD PQS Scheme, cited in Corbridge and Pilbeam 1998:1)

In summary, employee resourcing includes three fundamental groups of personnel and development objectives: staffing, performance, and administration. Staffing includes “securing the services of the right people, in the right place, at the right time” (Taylor 1998:2). The performance activity aims to ensure the workforce is well motivated and willing to perform to the best of its ability. This carries with it a need to monitor and improve employees’ performance levels. Administration objectives are to ensure that employee resourcing is carried out “in accordance with the law, professional ethics and natural justice” (Taylor 1998:2). Combined, these three functions broadly form employee resourcing. This research study is fundamentally concerned with the deployment of staff at store level, including the choice of contract type (i.e. full time, part time, permanent or temporary), the recruitment and selection of new staff, the management of working hours, and the delegation of tasks, i.e. the ‘staffing’ element of employee resourcing.

4.2 THE NATURE OF HRM IN MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING

Labour is critical to retail operations because of the need to serve customers and to manage stores:

“Retailing by its very nature is a people-centred activity.” (Sparks 1992a:201)

Labour is the biggest expense a retailer has after the purchase of stock (Freathy and Sparks 1996), which makes the efficient use of labour imperative to retailers. This is combined with growth in the superstore sector, which has initiated a restructuring of

both the labour composition and the labour process within the retail sector (Freathy 1993). The scale of activity in the superstore format has also required retailers to reconsider the “within-store organisational structures and the way in which this workforce is managed” (Sparks 2000a:17).

Retail distribution has low levels of union membership relative to some other sectors of the economy (as discussed in Section 3.2). The low trade union density is compounded by the high labour turnover prevalent in the retail industry, whereby USDAW would require 100,000 newcomers to join the union each year to avoid a net decrease in membership (Sparks 1992b). The extent of multi-employer bargaining in retailing was weakened in the 1980s as negotiations were decentralised (Jackson et al 1991), although some companies have maintained substantive agreements with partnership agreements. Therefore, the influence of trade unions is far less than in manufacturing or public sector organisations, where trade union density tends to be much higher (Bird and Corcoran 1994).

The lack of trade union input in retail employment relations is combined with a lack of credibility bestowed to the personnel profession by the retail industry. Howe (1992) attributed this to the evolution of personnel management in a mainly non-retailing context, which has led to its services not being universally recognised as useful, “let alone vital to the needs of retail business” (p.189). Consequently, strategic business decisions are often taken in functional areas with little or no consideration given to the impact on personnel-related issues. Personnel departments in retail organisations are commonly “only given lip-service by other managers” (Sparks 1992b:193), and tend to

be allocated to problems affecting staff welfare, wages records, counselling and staff recruitment, and only for shop-floor hourly paid sales assistants.

Therefore, it can be surmised that existing literature is generally pessimistic about the role of personnel in the management of human resources in the retail industry. While a later article by Sparks (1992b) was more optimistic about retailers' recognition of HR-related issues, this seemed to be restricted to recruitment and retention issues to reduce the costs of high labour turnover. Tomlinson et al (1997) concluded that the high labour turnover in the retail industry has created:

“an unstable, untrained, demotivated workforce which is expensive to maintain. Resources for training and development are diverted to recruitment and line supervision, tending towards an autocratic work environment, itself a factor in labour turnover.” (p. 220).

Robinson (1990) found that while retailers recognised the need for training and ran formal training programmes, there was a comparative disregard for the training and development of part time employees - a significantly large proportion of the retail workforce. It can thus be concluded that where retailers have developed training packages these have been directed predominately at primary labour market employees. The development of self-service has enabled retailers to remove the traditional skills of the sales assistants. This has allowed employers to reduce labour costs and give minimum training to employees with few formal qualifications (Gregory 1991). Training for secondary employees - namely hourly-paid sales assistants appears limited to induction programmes (Freathy and Sparks 2000).



Historically, retailers have placed their emphasis on the quantitative reconciliation of supply and demand, because costs and cost reduction have been crucial. Hence, many retailers have a target cost for employment at store and/or company level (Sparks 1992b). With labour making up to 50 per cent of costs, its use is of vital importance to overall operating efficiency (Alexander 1988; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Robinson 1990; Walsh 1990). This equates to “a clear need to monitor such expenditure and to seek means of measuring and promoting labour productivity” (Sparks 1992a:189). The focus has become the need to reduce the costs of employment, while attempting to maintain service levels. This strategy is discussed in more detail in section 4.3. The focus on costs by multiple store retailers has led to the conclusion that retailers have tended to pursue ‘hard’ versions of HRM (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999).

The growth of the superstore format has also had implications for HRM in retail organisations. The companies which operate this format are growing in strength and one important component of this is their efficiency in labour management. This has provided both operational efficiency through cost control and profitability, and corporate recognition through service and attitude generation (Freathy and Sparks 2000). It would therefore appear that retail organisations are more likely to pursue a ‘hard’ HRM approach to employment issues, with some ‘soft’ HRM tools such as training and development, focused at their core workforce of managers.

4.3 HRM AND CORPORATE STRATEGY

Labour in the retail industry constitutes a large proportion of a firm’s costs (Alexander 1988; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Townsend et al 1996). It is argued

that this places human resources at the forefront of retailers' competitive strategies (Doogan 1992). Fundamental changes in the business environment are thought to be making human resource concerns more important (Schuler and Walker 1990). In particular, conditions of increased market competition are said to have focused attention on the role of human resource strategy within the wider business strategy (Kinnie 1989). This section will consider retailers' corporate strategies and the implications of these for the management of human resources.

The link between strategy and HRM is regarded as essential, in both theory and practice, for the model of HRM to be fulfilled in practice. One reason for the popularity of HRM is its perceived relationship with organisational strategy (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). However, not all the literature is enthusiastic about the link between HRM and strategy. Ogbonna and Whipp (1999:77) concluded that "HRM not only lacks a coherent theoretical base", but also proves difficult to link to strategy and for organisations to actually achieve. Nevertheless, there is evidence in the literature, in often prescriptive linkages between HRM and the theory of strategic management (for example, Beer et al 1984; Dyer 1984; Fombrum et al 1984; Guest 1987; Hendry and Pettigrew 1986, 1992; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988; Miles and Snow 1984; Miller 1987; Purcell 1989, 1991, 1995; Purcell and Ahlstrand 1994; Schuler and Jackson 1987; Watson 1986, 1999).

The literature also provides differing perspectives on the formation of strategy and hence human resource strategy. This is alongside the debate as to how corporate strategy links with human resource strategy. Just as corporate strategy may be

deliberate, emergent or a mix, so too can human resource strategy. Attempts to link human resource strategy to corporate strategy have taken three approaches. These include the matching of human resource strategy with corporate strategy (for example, Baird and Meshoulam 1988; Beer et al 1984; Devanna et al 1984; Fombrum et al 1984; Guest 1989; Hendry and Pettigrew 1992; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988; Miles and Snow 1984; Porter 1980, 1985; Schuler and Jackson 1987), which maintains that organisational effectiveness depends on a fit between HR strategies and corporate strategy. Yet empirical research has found that many organisations actually operate what Golden and Ramanujan (1985) term the ‘one-way’ linkage, where business strategy informs human resource strategy, but not vice versa (Truss et al 1997). Some of the literature has adopted a contingency approach to proposals for a strategic HRM model (for example, Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988). Another approach is to view strategy as a layered concept in that it is found at different levels in an organisation (Boxall 1992; Gunnigle and Moore 1994; Miller 1989; Purcell 1989; Purcell and Ahlstrand 1994). An alternative perspective adopted by the literature is to see strategy as a pattern viewing it as outcomes of both planned and unplanned activities (for example Grundy 1998; Mintzberg 1987; Quinn 1980, 1991; Watson 1999).

With regard to retail strategy and the link to employment strategy, research has attempted to examine this area further (for example, Ogbonna and Whipp 1999).

Retailers’ need for staff has grown for a number of reasons, as summarised below by Sparks (2000b):

“As businesses have grown, store formats have increased in size, opening hours have been extended and customers have expanded their horizons from price to service, so the need for staff has grown. **Retailers** have therefore had to make

a managerial and financial examination of their cost base in this area and new policies towards employment have been implemented.” (p.14)

From an employment perspective the changes in retailing have focused on the search for efficiencies at store and head office level. The need to serve customers and manage stores, together with the high cost of labour, has been said to have increased the critical role of human resources in retail strategy (Freathy and Sparks 1996). In order to maximise returns, retailers have had to consider how best to manage their employees (Sparks 2000b). Consequently, efficiencies in the area of labour have become of great importance to today's multiple branch retailer.

A problem of labour efficiency in retail is the utilisation of capacity in the face of irregular customer arrivals and different levels of demand over days, weeks and seasons. Walsh (1990) argued that this has led to a move from “extensive use of labour through trading hours, to intensive use at peak hours” (p.253). As a result the industry employs a large number of part time employees, and has introduced the concept of zero and minimum hours contracts (IDS 1993a, 1993b; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995) (as discussed in section 3.2.2).

Intensive competition, particularly in food retailing, creates a strong requirement to match workforce levels over the day and during the week to fluctuations in consumer demand (Townsend et al 1996). Many retailers appear to have adopted flexible employment as a human resource strategy focusing recruitment, retention and development on a core talent of staff with critical skills that the firm requires. Variable needs are then staffed through more contingent employment arrangements, such as temporary and part time employment. This strategy can also provide significant savings

on labour costs through the deployment of large numbers of part time employees enabling retailers to cut labour costs (O'Reilly 1994). It also accords with the matching models of human resource strategy assuming a rational approach to strategy and a need to 'fit' employment practices around the corporate strategy. However, there are also problems associated with applying the theories of human resource strategy to the retail industry, particularly when examining the high use of part time labour. Empirical research has found employer strategies on flexibility being of both an incremental and ad hoc nature (Collinson et al 1990; O'Connell Davidson 1993; O'Reilly 1992), thus rejecting the 'matching' theories of strategic HRM. This argument is strengthened by empirical research evidence which suggests HR professionals are rarely involved in strategy formulation in multiple store retail organisations:

“But for the day-to-day operation of the business certain personnel specialists occupy a low profile role. Strategic business decisions are often being taken in function areas with little or no consideration given to the consequences affecting personnel related issues.” (Howe 1992: 193)

As discussed in Section 2.5, an increasing emphasis in retail strategy has been placed on the provision of high quality customer service. Christopherson (1996) suggested that the ultimate goal of retail strategy is the improvement of customer service without any increase in costs, particularly labour costs. Freathy and Sparks (1996) noted that the movement up-market of many leading retail chains in the 1990s was coupled with a vigorous attack on labour costs throughout companies' operations. Sparks (1992c) predicted that customers would increasingly reject inadequate service provision, and hence retailers must continue to apply customer service as a strategic tool. Freathy and Sparks (1996) noted the ambivalent relationship produced by the dichotomy

between costs and services. They came to the conclusion that labour is usually seen by retailers as a cost to be minimised, and thus HRM can be used to mediate the relationship between costs and profit levels.

The employment of large numbers of part timers appears a continuing trend among many large-scale multiple retailers. However, there remain contradictions between this and the strategic goal of improving the quality of customer service (Lowe and Crewe 1996; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1992c). As Doogan (1992) summarised this can exert “contradictory pressures on corporate personnel policy, expressing, on the one hand a need to raise the calibre and competence of the workforce, but on the other a downward pressure on labour costs” (p. 24). It could be concluded that until retailers link customer care with adequate staff development their strategies are “at best flawed and at worst suspicious” (Gardner and Sheppard 1989:207). As Ogbonna (1992) outlined, retailers are faced with a dilemma between staff who are likely to be committed to the organisation, and career-minded, but wanting full time employment, and staff who can work part time, improving flexibility and offering substantial cost savings. He concluded that “it is clear that most companies...will go for the latter” (p.92).

Armstrong (1989) suggests that the pervasive influence of accountants poses a problem for those who believe the personnel function has a part to play in corporate strategy. Subsequently, the view of HRM as strategic is naive because it ignores the fact that decision making on human resources often takes place at a level considerably subordinate to budgetary planning and control (Hill and Pickering 1986). This is

compounded by evidence that HR professionals do not appear to be highly regarded in the retail industry (Howe 1992), as illustrated by the following quote from a leading UK food retailer's Managing Director:

“personnel management is a burden on our profitability, but is occasionally useful.” (cited in Howe 1992:193)

While it can be accepted that some retailers are re-structuring retail employment relations to reduce costs, and if possible improve service, there are limits to this.

These are determined by the service level that the market agrees among itself or which is deemed acceptable by consumers (Freathy and Sparks 1996). Therefore the cost reduction strategies of some retailers, may not be suitable as the quality of service could suffer beyond that considered acceptable by the customer. Retailers appear to be playing a balancing act with their corporate strategies, focusing on productivity savings as a means to offer cheaper goods, parallel with improved services to customers.

Research findings to date necessitate an examination of the influence of human resource strategy in any empirical study of the deployment of labour in the retail industry. However, a subsequent re-evaluation of the current notions and typologies of human resource strategy may be needed in order to facilitate a deeper theoretical understanding in this area.

4.4 HRM AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING AT STORE LEVEL

The objectives of this research study are to consider the role of store level managers in the execution of employee resourcing decisions. Therefore it is important to consider the relevant literature on the devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers, and

where possible, a particular focus on the management of employee resourcing at store level.

4.4.1 HRM And The Line Manager

One of the key theoretical features of HRM is its devolution to the line. The devolution rationale is that people management is critical to effective business performance. It therefore needs to be enacted by empowered line managers who are responsible for co-ordinating and directing all resources, including human resources, towards organisational success (Corbridge and Pilbeam 1998). Empirical research supports this and has found that responsibility for managing aspects of the human resource elements of business are increasingly falling, in varying degrees, to line managers (Armstrong 1989; Bevan and Hayday 1994; Guest 1982; Hill and Pickering 1986; Hutchinson 1995; Kinnie 1989; Maund 2001; Sisson and Scullion 1985; Tamkin et al 1997). Hill and Pickering (1986) found that this devolution occurred mainly in the multi-divisional organisation. In case study research conducted for the Institute for Employment Studies, the tendency in the retail company under study, was to devolve responsibility for HRM as far down the line as possible (Tamkin et al 1997).

However, as Maund (2001) highlights, while HR responsibilities may have been devolved to line managers, they often have minimum control over the objectives that are set for them. They are unlikely to have the power to determine budgets, although there may be some leverage on how they spend their budget. As Armstrong (1989) warned, the line manager's performance is often evaluated in budgetary terms, with

short-term bonuses or long-term career progression sometimes linked to these measures of performance. He believed that:

“the delivery of HRM practice into the hands of managers controlled in such a fashion, whatever the rhetoric behind it, promises to turn the treatment of human resources into an instrument for the achievement of short-run accounting targets.” (p. 164)

Kirkpatrick et al (1992) concluded that the decentralisation of HR decisions has meant that personnel now has to “justify itself using the same criteria of short term effectiveness as everyone else” (p. 142).

Maund (2001) maintained that line managers instead have a sizeable control over the people who work in their teams. This has meant that line managers have become more concerned with the operational aspects of personnel activities within their own departments. This would encompass the organisation of work and allocation of duties, minor disciplinary matters, grievances from staff, standards of work performance, health and safety, on-the-job training, and the communication of information (Mullins 1999). Hutchinson (1995) found that line managers tend to be more heavily involved in recruitment choices, discipline procedures, and decisions about who receives training.

Research has revealed a suspicion amongst personnel professionals over the ability of line managers to competently take on responsibility for the management of human resources due to a lack of time, or inadequate training (Hutchinson 1995; Tamkin et al 1997). As Gilmore and Ferris (1989) found, training in HRM practices is vital if successful and appropriate decisions are to be made. Bevan and Hayday (1994) observed that line managers sometimes view the devolution of HRM as merely

'dumping'. Further problems have been identified in the difficulties monitoring standards of HRM and ensuring accountability for HR decisions. Tamkin et al (1997) found that formal monitoring and measures of effectiveness in the devolution of HRM often occurred some time after the devolution of responsibility. Hutchinson (1995) concluded there was little evidence that organisations successfully evaluated line managers' HR activities. This was despite acknowledgement that failure to do so could lead to the inconsistent treatment of HR decision-making, an increase in breaches of the organisation's policies and procedures, which may send out a message to line managers that HRM was a less important facet of their role (Hutchinson 1995; Tamkin et al 1997).

4.4.2 HRM, Employee Resourcing, And The Store Level Manager

Retail employers have been found to be increasingly devolving personnel responsibility to branch level giving line managers freedom to control labour and operational costs (Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tomlinson et al 1997). This means many decisions on the management of human resources and deployment of labour are no longer taken by HR specialists, but instead by line managers. Opportunities for local managers to influence the managerial style of a store have increased as responsibility for human resources is devolved to them. More recent work has found that the focus for store managers is now on managing the store labour force, particularly as a centralisation of control has directly removed many of the areas of decision-making responsibility in other functions (Sparks 2000b). This suggests that the store level manager's role now demands significant HRM skills (Tomlinson et al 1997).

This devolution of HRM practice to line managers (Bevan and Hayday 1994), along with the line manager becoming a 'budget holder', means that the management of human resources could simply turn into an instrument for the achievement of short-run accounting targets (Armstrong 1989). Armstrong (1989) also believed that the transfer of personnel functions to the line would subordinate the management of human resources further to the management accountancy framework. Within the retail industry it is clear that while HR activities have been devolved to line managers, head office continues to control stock levels and set budgets and targets. Thus control is vested at HO while responsibility for meeting targets remains with individual store managers (Freathy and Sparks 1994). When contrasting the "rhetoric and reality of HRM" Sisson (1994:15) found the rhetoric of "customer first" actually meant the reality of "market forces supreme". This suggests a 'hard' approach to HRM is likely to be more prevalent in such a competitive industry as multiple store retailing.

The context within which retail managers operate is an important factor in the management and deployment of labour (see also chapter two). In many retail firms the context is one where the emphasis is on delivering the bottom line within decentralised units, and operating under tight financial controls (Tomlinson et al 1997). Changes are taking place in the systems used by managers to exercise control over their organisations through an increased use of financial management control systems. This is typically established by head office setting budgets, or through measuring performance in terms of profit (Freathy and Sparks 1996). Consequently, the context in which local managers in the retail industry operate could lead to the deployment of the 'cheapest' labour in order to fulfil head office budgets and targets. This logically

equates to the deployment of 'flexible labour' using cheaper forms of labour supply, such as women, students and older workers to keep costs down. This may actually disregard the rhetoric of any human resource strategy espousing 'soft' HRM practices because the predominate guiding principle becomes meeting financial budgets. This has significant implications for the management of human resources and suggests that 'hard' HRM techniques may be preferred at store level.

The employment composition of superstores is related to several variables and based on the employee resourcing decisions undertaken. Generally, decisions on labour policy in retail organisations are made by corporate planners and individual store managers, who are influenced by local labour market conditions and the type, quantity and mix of labour available. The demand for labour in superstores is related to sales turnover, the size of store, the store operator, the store opening hours, and the type of goods retailed by the store. Dawson et al (1986) concluded that the size of the superstore has become less deterministic in decisions on labour levels, and instead the store operator is the major determinant (see also section 3.3).

Robinson (1990) and Doogan (1992) found that the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) level in retail organisations tended to be set centrally. Store level managers then determine the mixture of employment within the constraints of wage budgets related to annual sales targets. However evidence has also been found of part time shift hours being determined centrally using technology that identified trading fluctuations (Robinson 1990; Smith 1988).

Case study research undertaken by Freathy and Sparks (2000) provides an interesting insight into the nature of HRM and employee resourcing at store level. Three superstores were selected for research of which the staffing and working time arrangements of each were examined. Where a HR manager existed at store level they were found to occupy a relatively autonomous position in a store's structure. Their chief areas of responsibility included recruitment, selection, training and disciplinary. In one organisation they were also responsible, in conjunction with the store manager, for the financial allocation of working hours to each department. However, it was then junior managers' responsibility to devise the shift pattern for staff under their control. Where there was no HR manager at store level, responsibility for all HRM and employee resourcing-related decisions fell to the store manager. This included decisions as to whether vacancies were filled by part time, full time, temporary or permanent workers, recruitment, selection, and disciplinary issues. Support was provided from the head office on any human resource issue a store manager may face. In many cases decisions on store promotions were made by head office and communicated to the store manager.

The literature reveals a divergence in approach to employee resourcing activities, in terms of both hierarchical levels and management decision-making responsibilities. This research study aims to provide a richer insight into this process.

This chapter has focused on the nature of HRM and employee resourcing in multiple store retailing organisations. To achieve the research study's objectives the chapter focused was made on employee resourcing decisions and the link between HRM and

retail corporate strategy. This examination of the literature has revealed that retailers tend to adopt a 'hard' version of HRM. Where 'soft' HRM tools are deployed, these are more likely to be directed at core employees. Responsibility for HRM and employee resourcing at store level appears to vary from retailer to retailer. In some organisations a HR manager will be present at store level, whilst in others the store manager will take responsibility for HR issues. Nevertheless, evidence of centralised decision-making, particularly in terms of employment budget, was apparent. Decisions regarding the composition of a store's workforce is predominately the responsibility of store level management, while the determination of shift patterns seems to vary from centralised control via a computerised system, through to responsibility at junior local management level. In conclusion, a wide variation in employee resourcing practices and responsibilities between different retailers is apparent, dependent on store operator and management discretion.

Chapter 5

MANAGEMENT CHOICES, CONSTRAINTS AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING IN UK MULTIPLE STORE RETAILING

This chapter considers the choices and constraints of line managers in their management of human resources and execution of employee resourcing. Where possible a focus on retail management is adopted, but where gaps in the literature exist, more generic management is considered. This will facilitate an examination of the choices and constraints of line management, with an evaluation of the consequences of these for HRM at the empirical research stage.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In service operations such as retail, work activities are people-oriented and the characteristics and management of the workforce are particularly important in determining organisational effectiveness (Fitzsimmons and Sullivan 1984). Together with increasing competition, the role of company human resource (HR) policies within the wider business strategy has been paid increasing attention (Kinnie 1989). The retail industry is no exception - whatever the format and competitive situation, labour is crucial to retail operations and business development. It is critical because of the need for people to serve customers, and to manage stores and direct businesses, but is also critical because “labour is the single biggest expense a retailer has after the purchase of goods” (Freathy and Sparks 1996:181). Therefore:

“the effective management of human resources in retailing is critically important for achieving a competitive market position and a high rate of return.” (Lusch and Serpkenci 1990:85)

Doogan (1992) argued that changes in the retail industry, particularly in terms of the concentration of retailing power, has significant implications for the management of human resources.

5.2 THE CHOICES AND CONSTRAINTS OF LINE MANAGERS IN THEIR MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) maintained that “making choices within parameters is central to the managerial role” (p.86). It is this centrality that makes the study of management choices and constraints imperative to the study of HRM. However, as Kinnie (1989) pointed out, despite the increasing attention focused on HR policies and practices, relatively little attention has been paid to changes in control systems and the management of human resources. He concluded that this neglect of HR issues in the study of management control systems makes the influence of managers’ choices and constraints on HRM policy and practice an important consideration for researchers.

To appreciate the choices and constraints available to retail store level managers in the management of human resources, the choices and constraints of general management need to be considered. To do this Stewart’s (1982) model of ‘Choices For Managers’ will be used. Stewart considered this model to be illustrative of the choices and constraints of generic management. She divided management tasks into three categories of demands, constraints, and choices, as outlined in Figure two. The demands of a manager’s job are influenced by the demands of the organisation in which the incumbent works. This is determined by corporate strategy, which is in turn



influenced by the external environment, particularly in terms of competition. Retail managers have recently witnessed an increasing centralisation of store level activities with responsibility and decision-making powers reverting to head office. This is combined with an escalating competitive environment, particularly in the food retailing sector. Applying Stewart's model of 'Choices for Managers' (Figure two) to retail store management, this would suggest that the demands and constraints of their roles are increasing. However, with research evidence showing a devolution of HR responsibilities to local managers in the retail industry, this would suggest that their autonomy in this functional area is increasing. The remainder of this chapter will consider these propositions, with particular reference to the execution of employee resourcing, using both general management literature, and where feasible, specific retail management literature.

Figure 2: 'Choices for managers' (Stewart 1982)

DEMANDS	CONSTRAINTS	CHOICES
<p>What anyone in the job has to do.</p> <p>For example, meeting minimum criteria of performance, complying with bureaucratic procedures which cannot be avoided.</p>	<p>Internal or external factors which limit what a manager can do.</p> <p>For example, legal, trade unions, technology, physical location, organisational constraints, attitudes of other people.</p>	<p>Activities which the manager is free to do, but does not have to do. They are opportunities for one job-holder to undertake work from another, or to do work in a different way.</p> <p>For example, what work is done in a defined area, to change the area of work, the sharing of work, and participation in organisational or public activities.</p>

5.3 THE CONSTRAINTS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

With much of the literature pointing to the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers the assumption could be drawn that line managers' discretionary powers have increased as a result. However, it is important to consider how other trends in management and organisational behaviour in the retail industry, such as increased centralisation, are impacting on this devolution of HRM down the line.

Management consists of a number of choices and constraints within which the incumbent must operate. Previous research has been conducted to establish the role and nature of management (for example, Mintzberg 1980, 1989; Stewart 1991, 1999). As Stewart (1999) outlined, various limitations on management behaviour exist, which can restrict the decision making process. These stem from the political and social background, competition and economic scarcity, and people's attitudes. The examination of management choices and constraints emanates from the topic of control and power. Child advocated (1984) that organisations, "are fundamentally structures of control and power" (p.137). However, as Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) suggested, the notion of power is a controversial topic, difficult to define and measure with precision, and being abstract makes it difficult to conceptualise. Hales (1993) went further in proclaiming that a lack of agreement exists in the literature "on how to distinguish among power, influence and authority" (p.18). Child (1984) believed the notion of control was surrounded by ambiguity, which was "partly a reflection of its different facets, and of its close relationship to those equally fuzzy phenomena power and influence" (p.136).

Berry et al (1995) maintained that the basis of management control arises from corporate strategy and organisational goals. Senior managers are concerned to influence the behaviour of organisational participants so that overall organisational goals are achieved. This was supported by Anthony et al (1992) when they stated that:

“management control is primarily a process for motivating and inspiring people to perform organisational activities that will further the organisation’s goals.”
(p.11)

Mintzberg (1980) argued that all managerial jobs are constraining, and it is the personality of each individual manager that determines their control over the role. Therefore, only strong-willed managers can actually control their jobs, regardless of their position within an organisation. However, it has been acknowledged that bureaucratic control can be so rigid as to prevent any autonomy in their jobs (Mintzberg 1980; Stewart 1991). Mintzberg (1980) cited branch managers in large banking firms as appearing to fit this pattern - a role very similar to store level management in retailing. Stewart (1999) argued that decision making in organisations is often made simpler if management sets the boundaries within which business is to operate. However, she did acknowledge that “knowing the parameters within which one can act can give a sense of freedom, unless these parameters are seen to be unreasonably restrictive” (1999:37).

It is apparent that the choices and constraints of line managers derive from the need for organisations to control employees’ behaviour in order to achieve their strategic goals.

Hales (1993) identified ‘control’ as one of the major elements of managing work:

“to manage work in general means...controlling what is to be done to ensure that it conforms with what was intended.” (p.18)

The methods to achieve this are varied, and discussed in more detail in the following section (section 5.4).

5.4 METHODS OF CONTROL

Retail control is said to be a topic of increasing concern for senior retail managers in order to facilitate the achievement of high performance results (Lusch 1990; Lusch and Jaworski 1991). Attention has been paid in the literature to the methods of control which can be placed on lower managers and employees. Mintzberg (1989:101) termed these “co-ordinating mechanisms”. Such controls can be enacted through organisational structure and culture, staff training, setting resources and performance targets, and the use of technology.

Two different forms of control systems can exist within organisations as a means of controlling behaviour. Mintzberg (1983) proposed that employee behaviour can be controlled through either personal control systems, or bureaucratic control systems. Managers can use personal control systems to control the behaviour of their subordinates through giving direct orders, establishing guidelines or specific constraints on decision-making, reviewing decisions, or allocating resources (usually budgets). This determines whether a subordinate will have a wide or narrow latitude of decision-making powers. Merchant (1985:4) termed this “personnel control”, involving social and self control.

Bureaucratic control systems represent impersonal standards that guide the behaviour of employees. These can constrain the incumbent’s autonomy through the

standardisation of work content, outputs, or individual skills and knowledge (Mintzberg 1983). The skills and knowledge an individual brings to their work may also be standardised through the establishment of procedures for training and selection, although these can also be developed externally to the organisation. Output control is achieved through systems of planning and control, where the work content itself cannot be specified so the results, not the process are standardised. Ouchi (1977) found output control to be more effective in larger organisations with many hierarchical levels. Performance control systems express results in specific objectives, or quantitative measures, through which the formal goals of the organisation are directly operationalised. Merchant (1985:4) termed this “results control”, referring to an approach which holds individuals accountable for achieving particular results, and then rewards them for their achievement. In doing so it allows the possibility of managers having autonomy for detailed action, provided they can produce the desired outcome, and therefore the outcomes must be quantifiable. As Lusch and Jaworski (1991) commented, retail management tends to have an overriding concern with bottom-line performance measures, which makes the use of output control widespread in retail settings.

However, as Emmanuel et al (1990) outlined, organisations often have many objectives which cannot be easily measured. Not all aspects of performance, especially HRM, can be measured in quantitative terms, which makes the standardisation of outputs difficult. Merchant (1985:4) proposed, that where quantifiable criterion is not available “action control” might be used, similar to Mintzberg’s (1983) standardisation of work content. Here the actions required can be specified so that the control system

is geared towards seeing that the correct actions are carried out. This can be achieved through the formalisation of work content via rules, procedures, and job descriptions. Merchant (1985) concluded that in functions where it is difficult to define and measure outputs, and where it is not entirely clear what procedures are required, social controls are more important. However, both Mintzberg and Merchant concluded that where many organisations place the emphasis on rewarding results and not behaviour, managerial behaviour becomes geared towards the achievement of reported results. This supports Mintzberg's (1979) earlier concerns that when managers are forced to prioritise economic benefits, they tend to ignore the social consequences of their actions, and explains Truss et al's (1997) conclusions that the reality of HRM is "almost always hard" (p.70).

In the retail industry control appears to be enacted through both personal control systems and bureaucratic control systems. The centralisation of control in the retail industry has had the effect of turning stores into cost centres (Freathy and Sparks 1994). Many of the decisions that would previously have been made by managers at the store level are now taken elsewhere in the organisation - usually by head office (Freathy and Sparks 1994; Smith 1988). Nevertheless, managers at store level remain responsible for meeting targets set by head office. This led Freathy (1993) to conclude that, while senior managerial store level staff are not subjected to elaborate work rules, they experience a high degree of centralised control over both strategic and operational functions, particularly as a result of bureaucratic control systems.

5.4.1 Organisational Structure

The size and structure of an organisation can considerably influence the format of the control systems within it. The nature and effectiveness of control systems can also be manipulated by the presence and strength of the informal organisation. Decisions about job descriptions, organisation charts, and types of authority relate to the formal organisation. This refers to the collection of work groups that have been consciously designed by senior management to maximise efficiency and achieve organisational goals. However, as Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) noted:

“to understand and explain the behaviour of people in an organisation it is necessary to become familiar with the informal organisation.” (p.460)
Within the formal structure, an informal organisation will always be present. This informal organisation is described as:

“the network of relationships that spontaneously establish themselves.”
(Huczynski and Buchanan 2001:462).

As Mullins (1999) points out, organisational charts do not show “the extent of personal delegation from superior to subordinates, or the precise relationships between line and staff positions” (p. 546). This raises issues about the role of the informal organisation in management processes and practices.

As discussed in chapter two, a key trend within the retail industry has been the increasing power and size of multiple store retailers, and the increasing size of stores with the growth of the superstore format. Mintzberg (1989) concluded that as organisations in an industry become big so others “must become big in response” (p.340). They must grow bigger and try to dominate other organisations, and avoid being dominated themselves, as is evident in the retail industry. Child (1984) suggested that the size of an organisation affects its control systems, so that “as

organisations grow they become more formalised” (p.153). This formalisation establishes a framework of rules and systems within which decision-making can be delegated with reasonably predictable results. Mintzberg (1989) agreed that the larger an organisation, the more formalised its systems.

Sparks (2000b:16) believed that all large organisations “have at their heart a centralised model of control”. This has been witnessed in the retail industry, where the centralised control model has gathered together at head office many of the functions that might otherwise have previously been undertaken at the store level. This centralisation of retailers’ functions and facilities has been driven by a requirement for organisational control and to achieve cost savings:

“This has effectively relocated the locus of control of company (and store) operations away from store managers and into head offices. Decisions about most aspects of store operations are now made away from the store and the activities of managers are severely circumscribed. This control.....has reduced the freedom of store managers to operate independently, and has placed the emphasis on more specific head office tasks.” (Sparks 2000a:9)

Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) also found that senior retail managers at head office admitted that the increased size in the company had led to the centralisation of control:

“the company had grown to such a point where the prevailing autonomy at store level could not be justified. ” (p.81)

Meanwhile, Smith (1988), in his research, found that Taylorism and its accompanying centralisation of control was the dominant organisational form among larger retail companies.

Freathy and Sparks (1996) outlined how store level managers are expected to adhere to strategies and systems developed by managers at the organisation’s head office. They argued that to realise shareholder and customer expectations, multiple branch

retailers require a centralised structure. Within this structure head office maintain responsibility for functional specialisation, together with a close monitoring and co-ordination of store activities - a formalisation of organisational control systems. This is evident with the centralisation of buying, marketing, branding, and logistics - all examples of how the scale of the business has been linked to the centralisation of many store management processes.

Mintzberg (1989) proposed typologies of organisations whereby large, mature organisations, such as multiple retailers, could be classified as either machine bureaucracies, or diversified organisations. Within a machine bureaucracy the prime co-ordinating mechanism becomes the standardisation of work processes. This is evident in the retail industry where the centralised model of control is said to demand “at least a knowledge of what is occurring at branch level, if not, in some instances, outright total control” (Sparks 2000b:17). In support of this, Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) found that senior retail managers at head office considered it necessary to institute bureaucratic control with effective surveillance systems. However, as Child (1984) indicated, communication links become more tenuous in larger organisations, and a “lack of co-ordination is one of the charges most frequently levelled against large organisations” (p.112). This places retail head office’s actual ability to control and have a knowledge of store operations in some doubt.

According to Mintzberg (1989), the prime means of regulation and control in a machine bureaucracy is through an organisation’s ‘technostructure’. He defined the ‘technostructure’ as the technical support staff, whose role it is to standardise the work

throughout the entire organisation, by designing systems and procedures, redesigning work processes, providing information, and building financial systems. Mintzberg (1989) believed that machine bureaucracies represented the force for efficiency, with the 'technostructure' controlling managers through the development of "work rules and standards to make sure everything comes out as planned" (p.256). He argued that the solution to a machine bureaucracy's problems becomes rationalising, such as redundancies, cutting budgets and restructuring, and being in control means "having it down on paper" (p.342). From case study research conducted in the retail industry, Smith (1988) concluded that the majority of retailers could be categorised as machine bureaucracies, which he termed the "Taylorian ideal type" (p.149). He found an intense division of labour, a pronounced centralisation of control, a lack of discretion for store managers, and a reliance on the 'technostructure'.

Conversely, a diversified organisation, has the standardisation of outputs as its prime co-ordinating mechanism, with middle line managers forming the key part of the organisation. However, these middle managers also exert a pull to "balkanise the structure", thus representing a countervailing force for concentration, or as Mintzberg (1989) described:

"middle managers arguing they should be left alone...and ..be free to manage...as we see fit, subject only to the performance controls." (p.257)

He cautioned that geographically dispersed operations can mean an organisation's

head office ends up maintaining:

"central control of all critical functions, to ensure operating standards for all the divisions, which leads to a less than complete form of divisionalisation."
(p.160)

Truss et al (1997) found at Lloyds Bank that a major programme of re-structuring had led to the centralisation of many activities, thus realising Mintzberg's warning.

Mintzberg (1989:255) discussed the use of typologies, via “lumping”, or playing “organisational LEGO”. The ‘lumping’ approach would require a retail organisation to be defined as either a machine, or diversified organisation. Playing “organisational LEGO” enables the characteristics of different typologies to be combined to describe an organisation. Applying Mintzberg’s typologies to multiple store retailers, a combination of machine bureaucracy and diversified organisational models seem to be in operation. Research evidence (for example, Freathy and Sparks 1996; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Smith 1988; Sparks 2000a, 2000b) shows that multiple store retailers are increasingly centralising store operations and controlling managers’ actions, thus realising Mintzberg’s machine bureaucracy typology. However, the geographical structure of a branch network and sheer size of the organisations themselves means an element of diversified organisational typology must be in operation together with a reliance on a standardisation of outputs as the prime control system.

The tension between centralisation and decentralisation is another feature of organisations that can determine a manager’s choices and constraints in his/her decision-making powers. Hutchinson (1995) found that many organisations claimed their main problem was achieving the right balance between the need to provide line managers with autonomy and the need to retain central control. Stewart (1991) believed that the difficulty in finding the right balance between order and flexibility was the major dilemma underlying the nature of control. She argued that this led to a second related dilemma of finding the appropriate balance between centralisation as a means of exercising control, and decentralisation as a means to improving organisational flexibility.

Child (1984:146) defined centralisation as “a condition where the upper levels of an organisation’s hierarchy retain the authority to take most decisions” while decentralisation represented “a condition when authority to make specified decisions is passed down to units and people at lower levels in the organisation’s hierarchy”.

Centralisation also implies that control of information is passed to the top of an organisation, while delegation implies that some passes to lower levels. In the retail industry the organisational relationship between the centre and individual stores is a significant determinant of the efficiency with which a retail chain is operated. It can influence the speed and accuracy in which information is passed up and strategy is passed down, and will also affect human relations in the organisation (Howe 1992).

The trend towards the adoption of an organisation-wide national image for multiple retailers, and the availability of operational and administrative economies of scale from centralising particular functions, have all tended to keep retail organisations relatively centralised in their management structures (Howe 1992).

In his case study research Ogbonna (1992) found that the retail company was embarking on policies to enhance management control, and the main indication of this was the centralisation of operations. Doogan (1992) argued that the drive towards centralisation occurred in the late 1980s when very large retail employers began to emerge out of a series of take-over, mergers and acquisitions. In his research he found centralised structures and ‘top down’ management styles. He concluded that this equated to centrally located strategic decision making with the delivery of policy organised locally under close monitoring, or within nationally determined guidelines. To support this, of the fourteen retail companies examined as part of Smith’s (1988)

research, eight conformed to the centralising tendency, particularly the national chains in Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and food. Howe (1992) suggested that many retail companies have a mechanistic culture, particularly in the food retailing sector. Indeed, Channon (1978) concluded that the lack of success of certain non-food store groups in the 1960s and 1970s was due to the failure to adequately centralise and control the critical function of merchandising.

Today, information technology provides head office with relevant, immediate, and detailed data from which to make better decisions and to assess the risk arising from management actions, thus signifying a low trust culture in UK retail organisations. As Houlton and Thomas (1990) commented “the computer has made a vital contribution to the transformation in balance of power and authority within retail organisations” (p.15), with the resultant transfer of power from stores to the centre (see also section 5.4.4). In employment terms these changes have led to a removal of some areas of responsibility away from the store and their replacement by decision making at head office. This trend undoubtedly has implications for the role and responsibilities of retail managers, which in turn may affect the employee resourcing decision-making processes.

5.4.2 Management Hierarchy

This thesis is particularly interested in the role of lower level managers in the management of human resources in the retail industry. The term junior manager will be used in accordance with the terms ‘senior’, ‘middle’ and ‘junior’ management,

which follow the conventional pattern adopted by the retail industry (Brockbank and Airey 1994b) (see Section 3.4).

Mintzberg (1980) concluded that the level of a manager's job in the organisational hierarchy appears to be a key determinant in the constraints which are placed upon him or her. He maintained that the higher in the hierarchy, the greater the degree of autonomy, and the higher the level of commitment to the organisation. He found that further down an organisational hierarchy "controls become more and more onerous" (p.127), with bureaucratic controls in particular becoming more intense and stringent. However, middle managers still look up to a clearly defined hierarchy of authority, often dominated by a "full-time superior with some potent means of formal control" (Mintzberg 1983:126), and so do not escape bureaucratic control systems.

Mintzberg (1989) depicted the different levels of management in an organisation as 'thin' and 'thick'. He argued that to manage at the senior level of today's large, complex, and diversified organisations, means having only the most superficial knowledge of the things that must be decided about. He described this level of management as 'thin', in that it was very detached from the operational level and based on analytical methods of control. According to Mintzberg these 'thin' managers rely heavily on information received via management information systems. This data is then used to evoke general action by subordinates through the development of systems, the design of structures, and the implementation of directives. Conversely at the lower organisational level, managers were described by Mintzberg as 'thick' managers, in that they were heavily involved in day-to-day operations, dealing directly

with customers and shop-floor employees. Mintzberg (1980:128) used the term “disturbance handler” to describe the role of junior managers. Child (1984) described their role as consisting of “handling a stream of different disturbances” (p.48). To summarise, strategic decisions are often vested in top management, whereas operating decisions are the prerogative of divisional managers (Ezzamel 1992; Williamson 1970). This highlights the differences in roles and responsibilities of managers at different levels of an organisation.

Mintzberg (1989) argued that as organisations become larger it becomes very difficult for higher levels of management to practice ‘thick management’, due to the distance between themselves and the operational level. As Truss et al (1997) found, a lack of trust often exists between staff at head office and the operational level, with head office viewed as being very remote. Watson and Harris (1999) also found from their research that store level retail managers inadvertently, but very accurately, described the ‘thick’ management approach of senior management at head office:

“ Head Office are not as close to the customers and do not see the customers on a daily basis as we do. I don’t think they really fully understand.” (p.182)

Tamkin et al (1997) supported these conclusions with their research, which found a sense that head office did not fully understand the problems and issues of operational level, and therefore developed unsuitable corporate policies because they were not best placed for supplying tailored solutions. They found that this tension was most marked where the devolution of HRM was advanced, or where there was a greater distance between Head Office and the operational units, with many layers in between. This supports Mintzberg’s (1989) notion of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ management, particularly

applicable to the multiple retail industry where stores are geographically dispersed from head office.

Using a similar typology, Duncan (1975) identified three distinct levels of management: 'philosophical', 'scientific', and 'art'. At the 'philosophical' level managers develop the organisation's strategy and goals, while the 'scientific' level of management devises plans, methods, and techniques to achieve these goals, as well as monitoring and evaluating progress. The 'art' level of management then implements these decisions, making tactical and administrative decisions to deploy the organisation's resources, and attain the optimum degree of operational efficiency. This can be related to Mintzberg's 'thin' and 'thick' management levels, with the thinnest level of management being Duncan's philosophical manager, through to the thickest managers at the art level. Mintzberg's (1989) 'technostructure' could be described as Duncan's scientific level.

As Beardwell and Holden (1997) outlined, the very nature of organisations "generates a number of tensions between people with different stakes in the organisation and different perspectives and interests in it" (p.37). Management is said to be the process which keeps an organisation from dividing because of these tensions (Watson 1995). Yet conversely, tensions between middle and junior managers, and those managers at more senior levels have been well documented in the literature (Hales 1993; Mintzberg 1983; Rawson 1997; Roethlisberger 1945; Sayles 1999; Watson and Harris 1999). Roethlisberger described middle managers as the 'man in the middle', while Sayles (1999) noted that they often become the players who facilitate the necessary trade-offs

to make the systems, imposed by senior managers and the 'technostructure', workable. Sayles (1999) argued that "it takes a middle manager to get senior management's attention and make the case for change" (p.600).

Watson and Harris (1999) found that middle managers in particular, have to make "other people's policies work" (p.178), with pressures from senior managers to maximise output, and pressures from below about work intensification. Other descriptions used include Drucker's (1954) "orchestra conductors" whereby middle managers interpret the strategy to relay to lower level managers and staff. As Mintzberg (1989) described, middle managers can get distracted from their operational responsibilities by "the gaze from above...and having to glance up from time to time" (p.355). Rawson (1997) believed the greatest tensions lie between senior and middle managers:

"the divide deepens as each accuses the other of pursuing their own personal rather than organisational ends. Middle managers accuse senior of being concerned with their own career advancement; senior managers accuse middle of directing their efforts to protecting their positions." (p.3)

Therefore, middle and junior management would appear to bring with them conflicting demands that need to be addressed.

The role of junior management has been a neglected aspect of the literature, particularly in the management of human resources (Kinnie 1989; Lowe 1992). This is despite Stewart's (1999:28) observation that management decision making at different organisational levels, is "a very neglected, but potentially useful area of research" (p. 28). Research has found that a social and education gap often exists between qualified middle managers and unqualified supervisors (Child and Partridge 1982; Ogbonna

1993). This level of management has been described as representing “two organisational families” (Mann and Dent 1954 in Blyton and Turnbull 1992:152). While their role represents management’s interests, their occupational background and work experience is more reflective of the shop floor. A persistent theme in the literature is the divorce between the responsibilities assigned to first-line managers and the lack of authority associated with the position (Child and Partridge 1982; Patten 1968). Mintzberg (1983) concluded that “by the time we reach first-line supervisors, the individuals cannot really be called managers” (p.127). However, Kinnie (1989) disagreed with this by suggesting there was a widening of the responsibilities of junior managers, with a concurrent increase in accountability. Yet Tamkin et al (1997) found the relationship between the devolution of HRM and accountability in retail to be one of high devolution and low accountability. These conflicts in the literature highlight the need for further research to examine the reality of the execution of HRM and employee resourcing at local management level, particularly at the most junior level, where previous research efforts have been sparse.

5.4.3 The Use of Budgets

Bureaucratic organisations commonly make use of accounting control systems (for example, Mintzberg 1983, 1989; Mullins 1999; Piper 1980). These are often geared to highlight easily identifiable performance levels such as sales, costs, and profits.

Organisational goals and strategies are usually expressed in financial terms, with success measured in terms of profitability, and results reported in monetary terms.

Such financial limits are easy to apply as a measure of control, and easy to relate to (Mullins 1999). This form of control conforms to Goold and Campbell’s (1987)

financial mode of management, whereby an organisation's head office limits its role to approving budgets and monitoring performance.

Stewart (1999) noted that the minimum of centralisation customary in a large organisation is financial control. Such budgetary control publicly determines the boundaries within which managers can operate, by defining their latitude of decision-making (Mintzberg 1983, 1989; Stewart 1991). Senior managers subsequently rely on accurate information systems as a basis of control with information frequently expressed in financial terms (Mullins 1999). However, as Berry et al (1995) noted, a top-down approach to budgetary control, can cause organisational members to consider the budgets as a severe constraint. Prior (1984) found that budgetary control is often regarded by managers as another head office restriction.

The competitive strategies of multiple store retailers have very much focused on the use of cost minimisation as a means of achieving organisational goals, improving market share, and raising shareholder value. Piper (1980) advocated that when an organisation is under competitive or financial pressures, such as in the retail industry, accounting controls are liable to become more elaborate and specific. This could be applied to multiple store retailers, where an emphasis on cost cutting and accountancy control is evident (Freathy and Sparks 1996; Lusch and Serpkenci 1990). As Walters and Hanrahan (2001) pointed out, store managers are often measured against profit generated, despite having little control over major expenses such as stock and advertising. This increases their constraints, while reducing the remit of their autonomy. Legge (1995) and Sisson (1994) discussed the pressures from shareholders that often make the maintenance of dividends and short term financial results take

precedence, with a resulting “tendency to think mainly in terms of short-term profitability, and ignore the long-term and social consequences of actions” (Burnes 2000:506).

Mintzberg (1989) was also very critical of organisations’ search for efficiency who believed that machine bureaucracy organisations represented the force for efficiency. He warned of the dangers of cutting tangible costs at the expense of intangible benefits, particularly the quality of working life for employees. As Bhallacharya (1985) pointed out:

“a company can increase its short-term profit very easily.....the question is, for how long?..There is also a point to made about non-financial factors, some of which indicate a great deal about the future performance of a company”.
(p.37)

Storey and Sisson (1993a) argued that this short-term nature of UK business meant a tendency “for managers to have recourse to opportunistic quick-fix agreements, fire fighting solutions” (p.76). A large body of research has found British management to be reactive and pragmatic in its approach to business decision-making in general, and the management of human resources in particular (Hunter and MacInnes 1991; Storey 1992; Sisson and Marginson 1995). Scott (1994) found how quickly British management reverted to traditional authoritarian methods when faced with pressures, problems, and non-compliance. These characteristics have been attributed to the low quality of British management in terms of technical expertise, and to the prevalence of short-termism in British businesses (Lane 1995; Nolan 1989; Sisson and Marginson 1995). This is particularly pertinent for the retail industry where retailers are keen to satisfy the short-term needs of shareholders, and the management skills required have

traditionally been considered to be at a lower level than in other industries, resulting in lower quality managers.

An emphasis on budgetary control and short-term financial results also has implications for the management of human resources, as discussed by Armstrong (1989) and Kinnie (1989). As Emmanuel et al (1990) outlined, not all aspects of performance, especially HRM, can be measured in quantitative terms (see section 5.4). From an employment perspective, the changes in multiple store retail organisations have focused on the search for efficiencies at store and head office levels (Sparks 1992b). These changes are interlinked with changes in retail operations. The search for operating efficiencies and improved methods of meeting customer demands have transformed the operations of leading retailers (Freathy and Sparks 1996).

The pressures from head office in retail organisations to reduce costs is said to be typical in the UK, with very little evidence of centrally devised HR strategies, particularly in the area of employment flexibility (Blyton and Morris 1992; Hunter et al 1993; Marginson et al 1993). Blyton and Morris (1992) concluded that interest in employment flexibility is primarily focused on the short-term, rather than strategic, long-term HR strategies. Brewster et al (1993) found that a focus on cost reduction led to a belief by managers that 'standard' employment contracts were more expensive. In the retail industry research has found that managers commonly employ non-standard workers to reduce costs (Gregory 1991; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; O'Reilly 1994). A strategy of increased customer service and cost reductions has often meant an attack on labour costs (Freathy and Sparks 1996). This supports the conclusions drawn by

Blyton and Morris (1992), Child (1984), and Cully et al (1999), that the UK approach to labour flexibility is characterised more by cost minimisation based on cheap labour, than by productivity enhancement. As Freathy and Sparks (1996) noted, “in addition to providing a degree of flexibility, secondary sector employment can provide significant savings on labour costs” (p.183). This produces an element of tension within the concept of HRM, where ‘hard’ HRM, in emphasising managing the size of the workforce and utilising labour more efficiently, is inconsistent with the emphasis of ‘soft’ HRM, on obtaining worker commitment through improved skills and motivation (Beardwell and Holden 1997).

Legge (1995:170) found that “decisions about manpower contracts and usage appear to rest on a weighing of the costs and benefits...in the light of immediate organisational requirements”, which tends to be in conflict with ‘soft’ HRM approaches. This poses the problems which arise “where appraisal systems assert the primacy of cost control, while senior management rhetoric espouses quality and customer service” (Legge 1995:96). As Mintzberg (1989) stressed, lower level managers will favour tangible benefits, because “he or she can measure them and attribute them to his or her efforts” (p.333). This has implications for the management of human resources, whereby if HRM is being devolved to the lowest levels in the retail industry, with few measures of accountability, an emphasis on ‘hard’ HRM could be found.

5.4.4 The Use of Technology

One of the major enabling devices for increased control over operational matters has been the advancement of technology. In particular, information technology now forms an important part of management information (Lynch 1997), and the use of management information systems a vital part of any manager's job (Maund 2001).

Retailing has been cited as one of the most innovative users of information technology, with many retailers deploying technology to standardise the retail process and make efficiency savings (Tordjman 1994; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This concern was central to Braverman's (1979) argument that advances in technology give management greater opportunity to tighten management surveillance and control over workers.

This has been supported by research which has concluded that information technology can be used to control individual workers (for example, Child 1984; The Economist 1999; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Ogbonna 1992; Retail Business 1990; Smith 1988; Tordjman 1994; Walters and Hanrahan 2001; Whitmore 1990). Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) noted that this improved control can lead to lower costs, and in turn to higher profits. As they concluded:

“some of the implications of technology may .. be viewed .. as the result of management strategies to improve control through appropriate forms of work organisation.” (p.78)

Lloyd and Rawlinson (1992) inferred that information technology “allows a greater degree of control of managers by senior managers” (p.185). Freathy and Sparks (1996) argued that information technology has been one of the most influential mechanisms changing retail managers' methods of working. The impact of new technology over the past few decades has been the transfer of power from stores to the centre of multiple store retailing organisations (Houlton and Thomas 1990). As

Ogbonna (1992) commented, more control can now be exerted from head office with the up-to-the minute data which is provided via technology. Smith (1988) found that most of the features of retail store management were centrally determined, through such use of technology - sales data was used to plan distribution, with EPOS technology automatically replenishing stocks. Child (1984) cited the retail industry and its deployment of EPOS as an example of how information technology extends the possibility for management control. He maintained this was achieved through faster and more precise knowledge of operating conditions and results, a reduction in the scope for inter-determinacy in the behaviour of employees, and the unification of previously segmented control systems.

Some of the literature outlines how the use of EPOS has enabled retailers to introduce staff scheduling software so that changes in sales revenue more accurately reflect labour costs, particularly those which are more readily controllable by line managers. Automated staff scheduling has been facilitated by the introduction of new technology in the field of stock control and point-of-sale monitoring (Doogan 1992). Graves (1990) outlined how analysis of checkout activity makes possible a scheduling system which improves customer services, and allows for the monitoring of wage costs and efficient labour utilisation. However, not all researchers have been convinced of the staff scheduling and labour deployment consequences of new technology in the retail industry. Both Smith (1988) and Dawson et al (1987) concluded that the effects of EPOS would not be immediately visible through a reduction in labour costs. Instead Smith (1988) concluded that not all retailers planned to use EPOS for staff scheduling purposes, while Dawson et al (1987) maintained that the technology was more likely

to be applied to marketing and merchandising decisions. Empirical evidence suggested EPOS tends not to be used to determine the deployment of labour. It appears more likely that the information provided by the new technology was being utilised for stock and marketing purposes. However, it is clear that the opportunity for the facilitation of a more economic use of staff exists, through the availability of trading patterns and staff scheduling systems on EPOS systems.

Tomlinson et al (1997) found that the use of technology in the retail industry has shifted the focus towards a more efficient use of human resources, which maximises service elements, whilst maintaining control of labour costs. Such savings on labour costs through the use of technology have also been noted elsewhere in the literature (Dawson et al 1987; Smith 1988; Whitmore 1990). Sparks (1987) attributed the development of information technology to aiding the process of increased part time employment and zero hour contracts in retailing. Ogbonna (1992) believed the use of technology freed store management “from the routine task of ordering stock, to concentrate on HRM” (p.86).

From this review of the literature, technology would appear to be limiting the decision-making powers of retail store level managers, transferring many of their responsibilities to head office. This could certainly have consequences for the management and deployment of human resources in the retail industry, which prompts the need for further empirical investigation.

5.5 THE CHOICES OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE

Most organisations necessarily involve a degree of decentralisation arising from such features as size, or geographical dispersion of different parts of the organisations (Mullins 1999; Stewart 1999). This decentralisation refers to authority and responsibility for decision making being dispersed more widely downwards and given to lower level managers. This is particularly applicable to multiple store retailers operating large businesses, with stores in numerous locations, where a branch is located some distance away from head office. Here store managers would be assumed to need an “adequate level of delegation in order to maintain day-to-day operational efficiency” (Mullins 1999:185). Child (1984) noted that in such a structure, junior managers tend to be in a better position to make decisions relating to their stores, because they know local conditions well, and are therefore more able to assess the circumstances of any issue that arises. Mintzberg (1983) described middle managers in charge of organisational units, such as retail stores, as being like a “mini CEO” within that unit, “with many of the same types of power over it that the CEO has over the whole organisation” (p.126).

Berry et al (1995:86) found there is often a tension in multiple retail companies between centralised control and the delegation of decisions to stores. This places the emphasis on output control (as discussed in Section 5.4), when “once agreed, subordinates can work with a semi-autonomous relationship to management, free from detailed control over how tasks are carried out” (Mullins 1999: 777).

As discussed in Section 5.4.1, in order to gain a full understanding of management behaviour it is important to examine the informal organisation as “one way to recognise why people behave as they do at work” (Hellriegel et al 1998: 6). The informal, or covert, features of organisations can include attitudes, communication patterns, informal team processes, personality, conflict and political behaviour (Mullins 1999). Mars (1982) advocated that “we cannot understand how our society operates unless we consider the informal side of our social institutions” (p.7). Therefore, the study of management cannot be fully understood as simply the result of control systems imposed on people in organisations. This is because these control systems are concurrently adapted, interpreted, and challenged by those they are supposed to control (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). As Hales (1993) pointed out control does “not simply flow as predictable, inevitable consequences” (p.28), because power and influence is relational. This means that the success of organisational control systems depends upon the responses of those over whom control is being exerted. It is the unstructured decisions that are actually more common in organisation, and more susceptible to politicking (Hales 1993; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001). “Given the ambiguity surrounding the means to attain targeted ends in retail” (Lusch and Jaworski 1991:401), particularly in the management of human resources, it can be expected that the informal organisation has the potential to play an important role in influencing the choices and decision-making processes of store level managers.

Another issue to consider is the potential distortion of corporate strategy, as outlined by Mintzberg (1989), whereby the expressed intentions of corporate strategy may not necessarily be shared by others in the organisation. As Child (1984) said:

“if other members do not share top management’s objectives, (and indeed they cannot readily do so because in strategic terms they are resources, the costs of which are to be minimised), then the potential is present for resistance to management control” (p.138).

Mintzberg (1989:112) described middle managers as exerting “a pull to balkanise the structure”, and do not necessarily conform to senior management’s expectations of behaviour. Therefore, implementation and control of strategy is increasingly recognised as one of the most important dimensions of strategic management (Berry et al 1995; Child 1984; Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1989). In the retail industry there are elements of the “unique perception of individual managers, power with the organisation, and interactive decision making” (Howe 1992:100), which influence the strategy adopted at operational level.

It would appear that the formation of corporate strategy does not necessarily indicate successful implementation without resistance from employees, particularly in the area of HRM where there is the added “difficulty of monitoring standards of performance management” (Tamkin et al 1997:39). This is particularly true when ‘espoused policy’ is frequently the approach of organisations to HR strategy, consisting of “a summation of proposals, objectives and standards that top-level management hold and/or state they hold for establishing the organisation’s approach to its employees” (Brewster et al 1993:63). This provides an opportunity for HR strategies to be modified or resisted by line managers, in order to prevent them being converted into practice (Marchington and Parker 1990). These include opposition within management itself, on either the basis of function or hierarchy, caused by the competing pressures of different sets of objectives. This can be applied to the retail industry with corporate strategies appearing to strive for two diametrically opposed aims of cost reductions and

improved customer service standards. Managers and supervisors may not agree with the policies, or may fail to implement them, precisely so as to allow themselves discretion and leeway in their dealings with subordinates. With evidence of the increased centralisation of store level managers' tasks in the retail industry, HRM may be the only remaining functional area where they can impose their authority and exert their discretionary powers. This is particularly relevant given the low level of monitoring HR policies that research has found (for example, Tamkin et al 1997). Alternatively, practices may develop through acts of omission without managerial intent. Marchington and Parker (1990) concluded that there needs to be a differentiation between the formulation of strategy and its implementation, as well as between resistance to management actions, and consent to the goals of the organisation:

“To describe strategies without assessing whether or not these operate on the shop floor is to provide a partial picture of the concept” (p.74).

Therefore, research needs to be concentrated on both the senior and lower levels of management to reveal the reality of the execution of HRM and employee resourcing at the operational level, and enable an evaluation of the effectiveness of corporate strategies and HRM.

Centralisation and formalisation, such as that evident in multiple retail companies, is susceptible to employee resistance because it can be viewed as an attempt to remove discretionary powers at the operational level (Child 1984). This is particularly applicable where control systems are considered to be overtight or misdirected. For example, companies that use enhanced methods of surveillance still have employee resentment and resistance towards monitoring and enforcement of scripted behaviour

(Taylor 1998). This is despite some of the literature assuming that there is no alternative for people at work, but to offer behavioural compliance with managerial dictates, even though such conformity might be resigned (Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1988). As Berry et al (1995) noted, inventive minds will always manipulate the systems designed to control them. Where a top-down approach is adopted, subversion of the control system can result, such as undermining the budget and budgeting process. The formal power flowing downwards can get displaced by politics and senior managers risk receiving a simplified, edited, or wholly untrue version of what is happening (Mintzberg 1983; Stewart 1999). Organisations with centralised decision-making and with the centre remote from the operational level are particularly vulnerable:

“centralised decision-making can be remote from the operationalised levels at which rules and decisions apply. It may be based on information which, on its journey up the hierarchy, becomes out of date, over-processed, over-generalised and sanitised. Furthermore, policy and rules follow the same path downward through the hierarchical thicket, incurring delays, distortions, misinterpretations or failures to implement.” (Hales 1993: 104)

Mintzberg (1983) described how formal power can get displaced in organisations and replaced with politics. This can take the form of distortions in objectives, group pressures, the intrinsic needs of employees, the insurgency game, and the manipulation of budgets. The use of politics overcomes the problem of resolving situations where different organisational members bring different values to their work (Kakabadse 1983). However, while politics and resistance is applicable to all organisational levels, it is not always constant, visible or obvious (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Edwards 1979; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Mullins 1999). As Ackroyd and Thompson

(1999) noted, there is often a gap between managerial expectations of 'ideal behaviour' and the reality of misbehaviour.

While employee resistance to control systems has been acknowledged in the literature, much of the research adopts a mass employee approach, with little empirical evidence from a management perspective. While some of the literature outlining resistance to control systems has made mention of management resistance, little empirical evidence has been collected, particularly in the retail industry. This research study aims to address this imbalance by examining the influence of junior managers' choices and constraints on the management of human resources, particularly the extent of their autonomy and its impact on the deployment and management of labour.

Mintzberg (1983) outlined how managers frequently play insurgency games against their own superiors, whereby control is achieved by "circumventing, sabotaging and manipulating" (p.188) the role structure of the organisation. Berry et al (1995) acknowledged that managers can take actions that may advance their own personal self-interest because they "are individuals with their own goals and needs" (p.80). This can detract from overall organisational goal achievement. Mintzberg (1989) referred to middle and junior managers 'balkanising' the structure of diversified organisations, to maintain their autonomy and discretionary powers. The main disadvantage of a divisionalised structure, such as that of multiple store retailers, is that decisions may be adopted by line managers, which are optimal for that particular store, but may be suboptimal for the organisation as a whole (Berry et al 1995).

Punch (1996) reported that managerial misbehaviour is a significant problem in organisations because managers are the people responsible for defining and policing the formal or informal rules governing behaviour. Yet managerial politics has been described as “endemic” in organisations (Watson and Harris 1999:82). Sayles (1999:600) believed that middle managers often have to “massage and re-jiggle” company policies in order to make systems work. Operating between workers and more senior managers they are responsible for implementing policies and decisions that have been decided at a more senior level. While they have responsibility for making the organisation more efficient and profitable, they may have little to gain personally, particularly in the de-layered structures of today’s organisation. As Mintzberg (1989) and Child (1984) pointed out, the expressed intentions of strategies will not necessarily be shared by others in the organisation. Such characteristics of management mediate the notion of managerial autonomy, power and control.

The rationale for resistance to control systems by managers is said to stem from the pursuit of autonomy (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Hales 1993; Mintzberg 1989). Argyris (1985, 1990) felt that organisational defensive routines are patterns of behaviour deployed by people to protect themselves from embarrassment or anxiety. Threats to job security can generate defensive responses by employees at all hierarchical levels (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001). Watson and Harris (1999) concluded, that the way in which organisations are structured, especially the way they encourage managers themselves to become rivals for both resources and career advancement, makes managerial politics inevitable and endemic in bureaucratised enterprises. The consequence of this is an undiscussed game of pretence, in which all

participants indulge and are knowledgeable of its existence. Yet as Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) point out, misbehaviour cannot be allowed to become too visible up the line of command: “the fruits of fiddling must not be too visible” (p.37). This means that any oppositional misbehaviour is often covert and difficult to detect.

The literature points towards a need to examine the formal and informal elements of managers’ discretionary powers at different levels of organisations. This has important implications for the management of human resources, particularly as responsibility for HRM is being increasingly devolved down the line, with a possible emphasis on ‘hard’ HRM practices.

This chapter has sought to examine the constraints and autonomy of line management in the retail industry with a particular focus on store management. It has identified that retail managers’ decision-making powers stem from a number of factors, including corporate strategy, organisational structure, budgetary controls, technology, and the level of management concerned.

Through an examination of relevant literature, multiple store retailers have been identified as a combination of Mintzberg’s (1989) machine bureaucracy and diversified organisational typology. A key trend in multiple store retailing organisations is the increasing centralisation of store level functions and responsibilities. This is combined with an increasing onus on the use of budgets and performance targets to achieve a competitive advantage. Meanwhile, multiple store retailers also operate along

Mintzberg's diversified typology due to their size, the geographical dispersion of stores, and a reliance on the standardisation of outputs as a control system.

Through reviewing the literature it is apparent that retail store level managers maintain some elements of autonomy, with a prime responsibility for HRM (see also section 4.4). The remainder of their autonomy can be gained through their resistance to control systems, and is somewhat dependent on the strength of the informal organisation. However, this needs to be more critically tested through in-depth empirical research.

This aims of this research study are to establish the role of store level managers in the management of human resources, and assess how their choices and constraints impact on the employee resourcing decision-making process. This literature review has revealed a trend of devolving responsibility for HRM down to junior managers at store level, with a concurrent centralisation of other functional areas. However, many gaps have been identified in existing knowledge, including:

- the employment implications of organisational change in multiple store retailing has been under-researched (Dawson et al 1987; Doogan 1992; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1983, 1987, 1991);
- previous research on HRM in the retail industry has neglected to take the holistic approach necessary to develop a broad theory true to organisational reality (Marchington 1995a);

- a neglect of management as an important retail labour issue (Freathy and Sparks 1996), particularly junior management, and in terms of HRM (Kinnie 1989; Lowe 1992);
- the difficulties previous research has found in differentiating between the formulation of strategy, its implementation, and the impact of employee resistance, needs to be addressed (Child 1984; Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1983);
- a neglect of management when considering employee resistance to control systems (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999).

The following two chapters will outline the research process. Chapter Six describes the research design and methodology, while Chapter Seven reports on the fieldwork stage and process of data analysis. The remainder of the thesis will then present the findings and analysis of the study's empirical research.

Chapter 6

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The previous chapters sought to provide an examination of the areas of literature relevant to this research study. This chapter begins by seeking to review the conceptual foundations of the research. The definition and study population are clarified, the research design outlined, and the process of data analysis identified.

6.1 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE RESEARCH

Epistemology is the study of the foundations of knowledge (Nachmias and Nachmias 1992). Different epistemological perspectives have different views on what counts as knowledge. Bryman (1988) suggests that the choice of a particular epistemological base leads to a preference for a particular method of research on the grounds of its greater appropriateness. Two views about the research process dominate the literature: positivism and phenomenology (Saunders et al 2000), and these will be discussed in the following sections.

6.1.1 The Positivist Approach

The positivist approach is grounded in scientific principles with an emphasis on highly structured methodology to facilitate replication (Gill and Johnson 1997). It uses models and methods of natural science to study human affairs, with quantitative observations that lend themselves to statistical analysis (Burrell and Morgan 1979). Theories tend to arise from natural observations tested by deduction of hypotheses, which are then investigated by research. There is an assumption in the positivist

approach that the researcher is independent of what is being observed, and does not affect, nor is affected by, the subject of the research (Remenyi et al 1998). This approach lends itself to the deductive approach, where theory and hypothesis are developed, and a research strategy is designed to test the hypothesis (Saunders et al 2000).

A quantitative approach assumes that the researcher can develop objective, precise measures with numbers, that capture important features of the social world. Broadly, the positivist approach lends itself to quantitative methodologies (Bryman 1988).

Quantitative research brings other advantages such as some reassurance about the validity and reliability of findings (Ryan 1995). Statements about quantitative research are likely to be grounded in reconstructed logic, in that the logic of how to do research is highly organised and restated in an idealised, formal and systematic form (Neuman 1997).

6.1.2 The Phenomenological Approach

Researchers critical of the positivist philosophy argue that the complexities of the world are missed if their constructs are reduced to a series of law-like generalisations. This line of argument is particularly persuasive in the case of business and management research (Saunders et al 2000). Research methods rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology have been said to offer the opportunity of discovering “the reality behind the reality” (Saunders et al 2000:86). The research task in the phenomenological approach is not to simply gather facts and measurements to prove

or disprove theories, but to capture the different constructions and meanings people place on their experience.

While the phenomenological perspective has been criticised because of the problems of generalisation, Saunders et al (2000) believe that in today's fast-changing business world, "if we accept the circumstances of today may not apply in three months time, then some of the value of generalisation is lost" (p.86). The phenomenological philosophy is more likely to involve inductively going from the empirical to the theoretical level. Data is collected, and theory is developed as a result of data analysis, and hence theory would follow data, rather than vice versa, as in the deductive approach. This approach would be particularly concerned with the context in which events take place, and criticises the deductive approach for its inflexibility to pursue alternative explanations of what is going on.

A non-positivist perspective relies largely on interpretative and critical approaches to social science. As a result a qualitative researcher attempts to capture aspects of the social world for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers. The phenomenological approach tends to dictate a qualitative approach (Bryman 1988). Qualitative research tends to arise more "in practice" and is "relatively messy, with more ambiguity and has fewer set rules" (Neuman 1997:330).

The generation of theory from data, that is often associated with the phenomenological approach, means that the theory is 'grounded in data', hence the term 'grounded theory' originally conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967):

“Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon.”
 (Strauss and Corbin 1990:24)

In grounded theory the data collection starts without the formation of an initial theoretical framework. Instead theory is developed from the data, which is generated from a series of observations. Conceptualisation and operationalisation occur simultaneously with data collection and preliminary data analysis. This enables the researcher to be more flexible and allows data and theory to interact. Inductive researchers have to remain open to the unexpected and willing to change the direction and focus of their research project, even abandoning their research question in the middle of a project should the data dictate this (Neuman 1997). It enables the researcher to develop theory that is faithful to the data, and is often thought of as the best example of the inductive approach (Saunders 1997). Theory being grounded in a continual reference to the data, has led to grounded theory being viewed as a combination of the inductive and deductive approaches (Hussey and Hussey 1997).

Table one outlines comparisons between the two dominant paradigms of positivist and phenomenological.

Table 1: Key Features of Positivist and Phenomenological Paradigms

	Positivist Paradigm	Phenomenological Paradigm
Basic beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is external and objective • Observer is independent • Science is value-free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is socially constructed and subjective • Observer is part of what is being observed • Science is driven by human interests
Researcher should:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on facts • Look for causality and fundamental laws • Reduce phenomena to simplest elements • Formulate hypotheses and then test them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on meanings • Try to understand what is happening • Look at the totality of each situation • Develop ideas through induction from data
Preferred methods include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured • Taking large samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena • Small sample investigated in depth or over time

Source: Easterby-Smith et al (1991:27)

6.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative and quantitative styles of research differ in several ways, but in other ways they can be complementary. Both methodological approaches are seen to have different strengths and weaknesses, as are individual methods within these wider approach perspectives.

A research design can be defined as a plan that:

“guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting observations. It is a logical model of proof that allows the researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relationships among the variables under investigation.” (Nachmias & Nachmias 92:77-8).

This research design can follow two formats: a linear path which follows a fixed sequence of steps; or a non-linear, cyclical path. In general, qualitative researchers tend to follow a more cyclical path, rather than the linear path of quantitative researchers:

“Rather than moving in a straight line, a cyclical research path makes successive paths through steps.....with each cycle or repetition a researcher collects new data and gains new insights” (Neuman 1997:331).

As a result, qualitative research reports may not discuss method, and often have a personal autobiography tailored to a particular study. Few procedures or terms are standardised, and “there is debate among qualitative researchers about whether there ever should be” (Neuman 1997:330).

The design of a research problem centres on the purpose of the study - it could be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Exploratory research may be the first in a series of studies, with the goal of formulating more precise questions that future research can answer. This would require a non-positivist approach, with researchers asking creative questions and taking advantage of serendipity. Researchers conducting

exploratory research frequently use an inductive approach and qualitative data (Neuman 1997; Yin 1994). Descriptive studies aim to “portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations” (Robson 1993:4), tending to concentrate on ‘how’ and ‘who’ questions. Descriptive researchers use most data-gathering techniques. Explanatory research seeks to establish causal relationships between variables. The emphasis is on studying a situation, or a problem, in order to explain the relationship between variables (Saunders et al 2000), and the desire to know “why” (Neuman 1997:20). It is vital to consider the aim of the research study, the underlying philosophical approach of the researcher, and the most appropriate research methods which can be deployed to address the purpose of the project.

6.2.1 Triangulation

Denzin (1989) advocated the use of triangulation, which he described as:

“directing the observer to combine multiple data sources, research methods, theoretical perspectives, and observers in the collection, inspection, and analysis of behaviour specimens.” (p.92)

Examining the data using as many different strategies as possible helps to verify and strengthen the validity of the research results (Kane 1990). Yet triangulation is not without its problems for a number of reasons (Bryman 1992). The use of multiple-strategies may prove to be inappropriate because the underlying philosophies of quantitative and qualitative research, the positivist and phenomenological perspectives, are so very different. This could result in the data from each different approach being difficult to compare. Secondly, the results from different data sources frequently do not confirm one another, as is hoped for in triangulation, which makes it unclear which data set is to be preferred (Hall and Hall 1996; Hammersley 1992). Bryman (1992) suggests in such a situation the qualitative data may be more reliable, due to the

proximity of the researcher to their subject. It may also be difficult to know what such a conflict in results actually means. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the design of any research project to ensure the most appropriate philosophy and methods are adopted, and that their incumbent weaknesses are addressed as fully as possible.

6.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The discussion so far has outlined the conceptual foundations and broad research methodologies available to conduct a research project. The original aim of this research study was to identify the factors prompting the trend towards increasing numerical flexibility practices in the retail industry. The objectives of this were to:

- investigate changes in the working practices and nature of employment in the retail industry;
- investigate how, why, and at what levels retail managers make employee resourcing decisions, and the relationship of these decisions to corporate strategy;
- determine the degree to which the following influences have prompted the use of numerical flexibility working practices in the retail industry: nature of the industry; economic climate; feminisation of the workforce; technology; employment legislation; skill requirements; supply side preferences.

These research objectives were driven by the results of a literature review undertaken by the researcher. Therefore, the research question and accompanying objectives derived from existing theory and knowledge, adopting a deductive approach. The research objectives of this study are of an explanatory nature, seeking to establish the links between employee resourcing decisions and a number of multiple variables.

These variables have been deduced from current knowledge and theory, thus assuming the deductive approach to research and data analysis.

6.3.1 Research Methodology: The Case Study Approach

The research strategy decided upon was a series of case studies. The case study is but one of several ways of conducting social research. Other methods include experiments, surveys, histories, and the analysis of archival information. Each strategy has particular advantages and disadvantages, depending upon three conditions: (1) the type of research question; (2) the control a researcher has over actual behavioural events; (3) the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena (Yin 1994).

A case study can be defined as:

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin 1994:13)

or:

“the development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single ‘case’, or a small number of related ‘cases’.” (Robson 1993:40)

In general, case studies are the preferred methodological strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed. They are often used where the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomena within some real-life context. This research study demands a need to understand complex social events and consequences within an organisational context. This suggests a case study approach would be the most appropriate research methodology for conducting the research study. The research question is asking both ‘how’ and ‘why’, and the objectives outline the need to understand both organisational and managerial processes. Case studies can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory, but the case

study strategy “should not be confused with qualitative research” (Yin 1994:14) as the data collection methods employed with a case study approach may be various (Saunders et al 2000).

Case studies help researchers to connect at the micro level and immersion in the data gives the researcher a familiarity with organisational and managerial processes (Neuman 1997; Yin 1994). It is a research strategy that is used where there is a wish to gain a rich understanding of the context of research and the processes being enacted (Morris and Wood 1991). It is also an approach which is preferred when examining contemporary events, such as those in this research project. The case study method has been particularly recommended for the analysis of HRM, since it permits a holistic analysis of a set of interrelated phenomena within controlled settings (Boxall 1993; Dyer 1984; Truss et al 1997). The aims and objectives of this research project meant that fieldwork needed to be focused at the micro level of organisations to establish the rationale behind labour use decision-making at operational level.

However, the case study approach to research has been criticised for its lack of rigour because of its capacity to allow equivocal or biased views to influence the direction of findings and conclusions (Yin 1994). Another concern, also associated with other qualitative methods, is the issue of generalisation. While findings and conclusions are generisable to theoretical propositions, they cannot be applied to populations or universes. As a result, the researcher must be clear that the goal of their research study is “to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation), not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)” (Yin 1994:10).



6.3.2 Case Study Design

As outlined in Section 6.2 a research design provides a:

“blueprint of research dealing with a least four problems: what questions to study; what data are relevant; what data to collect; and how to analyse the results.” (Yin 1994:20)

As with any other research strategy, case studies are a method of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of prescribed procedures. This provides logical proof that allows a researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relationships among the variables under investigation.

When developing a research design the validity and reliability of the design are especially important. Validity is concerned with whether the findings are ‘true’ to data, and can be divided into construct, internal, and external. Construct validity in case study research can be increased by using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, or having the draft case study report reviewed by key informants. Internal validity is a concern only for explanatory case studies, as descriptive or exploratory studies are not concerned with making causal statements. To ensure internal validity a researcher could use pattern-matching, explanation building, or time-series analysis. However, a case study involves an inference every time an event cannot be directly observed, which brings into question the internal validity of the strategy. External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings are generalisable beyond the immediate case study, and can be increased by conducting further case study research to introduce replication logic. Another concern of any research design must be reliability. To ensure a later researcher following the same procedures would arrive at the same conclusions the steps must be as operational as possible (Neuman 1997; Saunders et al 2000; Yin 1994).

Other research design issues pertinent to case study research is the selection and design of the case studies themselves. A case study approach can be either single or multiple; and holistic or embedded (Yin 1994). Single case studies can be considered where it represents a critical case, an extreme or unique case, or a revelatory case (Yin 1994). The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriott and Firestone 1983). They can also be considered as multiple experiments following a logic of 'replication'. The case studies should be selected because they will produce literal replication (similar results); or they produce contrasting results, but for predictable reasons - theoretical replication. Yet, while multiple case study research can improve the validity of findings, and be likened to multiple experiments, their conduct requires extensive resources and time often beyond the means of a single researcher (Saunders et al 2000).

A research design must consider whether to adopt a holistic or an embedded case study approach. The same case study can involve more than one unit of analysis, and these embedded units can be meetings, roles or locations. A danger of this approach is a focus on only the sub-unit level, and a failure to return to the large unit of analysis to contextualise the findings. Alternatively a holistic design will examine only the global nature of an organisation, but is advantageous when no logical sub-units can be identified, or where the relevant theory underlying the case study is itself of a holistic nature (Yin 1994). However, problems can occur where the research is conducted at a very abstract level and avoids examining any specific phenomena in operational detail. Therefore, careful consideration needs to be made when drawing up a case study

research design, and deciding between a holistic or embedded approach. The research question, choice of sub-units and resources available to the researcher should all guide this decision.

6.4 THE CASE STUDY DESIGN: FIELDWORK

This research study adopted a qualitative approach, which suggests the use of qualitative research methods. While qualitative research, unlike quantitative, has no standard approach to the reporting of data and procedures (Neuman 1997), it is important to ensure that a “transparency” of method is present (Huberman and Miles 1994:439). This section describes the case study research design, the data collection methods and the research process, which together form the research design for this study.

For the purpose of this research study a multiple case study design was considered more appropriate. The case studies would be drawn from organisations operating in the UK multiple retail industry. The rationale for focusing on multiple store retailing as the retail sector under study has been justified elsewhere (see Chapters one and two). While this delimits the choice of organisations for case studies to multiple store retailers, within this sector the researcher had a vast choice of organisations.

Four organisations were selected as the basis for research thus adopting a multiple case study approach. In his discussion of sample design, Patton (1990) stressed the importance of selecting appropriate ‘units of analysis’. In this research the case studies were multiple store retailing organisations. The rationale for adopting a multiple case

study approach was to increase the validity of data collected. This would enable the research design to resemble a series of experiments to add credibility to the subsequent research findings and conclusions drawn by the researcher. Within each case study access to stores was required to fulfil the study's research objectives. This demanded an embedded approach to the case study design. For each case study it was decided that two embedded units (i.e. two stores) would be selected. Two embedded units for each case study were chosen for the following reasons:

- to enable comparability between stores within the same case study;
- to increase validity by reducing the risk of bias, or 'unique' stores distorting the research findings;
- to increase validity by using 'replication' logic through collecting data from a greater number of similar sources.

The selection of site and sample are crucial decisions that affect the viability of the whole study. Yet, selection must necessarily be undertaken within the constraints of access and practical issues (Marshall and Rossman 1989). For this research study, the researcher had no prior contacts for access to retail organisations. While it has been recommended that inexperienced field researchers should choose an unfamiliar setting in which they are strangers (Bodgan and Taylor 1975), this raises issues about access.

The ability to collect data depends heavily on gaining access to appropriate sources (Saunders et al 2000), and "awareness of the access problem seems to be low" (Gummesson 1991:47). Access is likely to be a problematic area, which suggests that the feasibility of a research design has to be a guiding principle, alongside the issue of a

sound research design. Buchanan et al (1988) acknowledged that feasibility will often determine the construction or refinement of a research question and “may sometimes lead to a clash with the hallmarks of good research” (p.54). Given these difficulties in gaining access it was decided that a random sampling method would be used to initiate access to retail organisations. Multiple retailers operational in the UK would be targeted by letter to seek access for this research study. This request for access would be directed to the Human Resources (HR) Directors of each company. Addresses, and where possible the names, of HR Directors would be gathered through desk research, to whom these letters would be sent requesting co-operation with the research study.

6.4.1 Data Collection Methods

The choice of methodological tools as part of the research design has often been portrayed as quantitative versus qualitative, while some authors have advocated a triangulation of research methods (for example, Denzin 1978). However, one of the limitations of combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the same research project is that the data produced by each is different, and so not easily comparable (Bryman 1992) (see Section 6.1 for further discussion).

The research objectives of this study were originally to establish the nature of employment in the case study organisations, and investigate how and why retail managers make employee resourcing decisions, and at what level in the organisational hierarchy. These ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions suggested a case research approach (see Section 6.3.1), while the researcher’s epistemological approach of phenomenology dictated the use of field research. This would enable the researcher to gain access and

observation in the case study organisations for a longer period of time, such as was necessary to gain the insight required to fulfil the research question and objectives.

Evidence for case studies can come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artefacts (Yin 1994). The most appropriate data collection method for this study was deemed to be the use of interviews, which are considered to be “one of the most important sources of case study information” (Yin 1994:84). Interviews are also a commonly recognised qualitative research method (Saunders et al 2000). The research objectives of this research study were complex, requiring a depth of understanding which would be difficult to reach through deploying only quantitative research methods. The epistemological rationale for conducting interviews can be ascribed to the researcher’s belief that the data needed to satisfy the study’s objectives were contextual, situational, and interactional. This requirement for in-depth information cannot be simply articulated in responses to a short, standardised questionnaire. The use of quantitative research methods were rejected for this reason.

Interviews

An interview has been defined as “a purposeful discussion between two or more people” (Kahn and Cannell 1957 in Saunders et al 2000:242). Types of interviewing can be distinguished by their degree of format standardisation and the extent to which questions are prepared beforehand (Fontana and Frey 1998; Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Patton 1990). Interviews can be highly formalised and structured, semi-structured, or informal and unstructured. Patton

(1990) classified these three basic approaches as: the informal conversational interview; the general interview; and the standardised open-ended interview. The researcher's epistemology is grounded in a phenomenological paradigm.

Consequently, the qualitative interviewing of managers formed the key basis of the research design. The goal of a qualitative research interview is to view the research topic from the viewpoint and in the language of the interviewee (King 1994; Patton 1990; Walker 1985). Valentine (1997) summarised the key advantage of the qualitative interview as:

“...it is sensitive and people-oriented, allowing interviewees to construct their own accounts of the experiences by describing their lives in their own words.”
(p.111)

The interview type adopted was the general interview guide, also known as the in-depth, or semi-structured interview (Jones 1985; Patton 1990). Using this approach the researcher prepares a list of themes and questions to be covered beforehand, although these can vary from interview to interview. This interview format was adopted to enable comparability between managers at different levels within the same embedded unit, as well as the more holistic case study, and also between the four case study organisations. Such interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to reveal and understand the ‘what’ and ‘how’, as well as placing a greater emphasis on the ‘why’ (Robson 1993; Saunders et al 2000). They provide the opportunity for researchers to ‘probe’ answers by getting interviewees to explain and build on their answers. The semi-structured interview allows respondents to raise issues that the interviewer may not have considered (Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Silverman 1993). This helps to minimise Patton's (1990) concern that if these issues are omitted from the interview guide under the formal approach, important topics may be missed.

While it has been found that participants prefer to be interviewed than fill in a questionnaire (Healey 1991), and “well informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation” (Yin 1994:85), the interview research methodology is not without its critics. The lack of standardisation can lead to concerns about reliability (Robson 1993). Bias can take the form of either interviewer or response bias, which could mean that alternative interviewers draw different findings and conclusions (Easterby-Smith et al 1991; Healey and Rawlinson 1994). A research study’s validity could also be threatened by either interviewer or interviewee bias. Interviewees may choose not to reveal and discuss all aspects of a topic, so that only partial information is given as the interviewee casts themselves, or their employer, in a ‘socially desirable’ role (Saunders et al 2000). As with all qualitative research, generalisations about the entire population cannot not be made from interviews, particularly when using semi-structured, or open-ended interviews. This is the situation in a case study research design (Yin 1994).

The interview questions for this research study covered a number of topic areas, relative to the original research aims. The structure of the interviews was designed using Hart’s (1989) suggestion for three stages to interviews. After a brief introduction about the study, the interviewer would begin with questions about the respondent, such as job title and responsibilities, organisational context, length of employment with the company, career development, store structure and workforce composition. These would guide the respondent into the interview with non-threatening and easy to answer questions encouraging them to talk descriptively about themselves and their role (King 1994; Patton 1990). Following on from this, questions

were asked about specific areas, as dictated by the research objectives, such as the impact of corporate strategy and company policies, the management of working hours, the role of technology, and the recruitment, selection, and training of employees. Further details of the interview structure and questions can be found in Appendices six to eight.

A key aspect of any research design is outlining those individuals within the case study who the researcher wishes to interview. This is important both for research design purposes, as well as for negotiating successful, and useful, access to organisations. Given that the research objectives required a focus on the operational level of retail organisations, managers at the embedded sub-units became the main focus of the fieldwork research process. However, the second objective of the research, “investigate how, why, and at what levels managers...make employee resourcing decisions, and the relationship of these to corporate strategy”, necessitated interviews with senior managers at head office or regional office level. Consequently the research objectives placed the focus of the data collection around two key parties: managers at head office, and managers at store level. An interview with all managers at the sub-units, together with supporting interviews with appropriate managers at head office or regional office was considered a suitable research sample. An initial data-gathering interview with ‘gatekeepers’ of each case study would enable the researcher to become familiar with the organisational structure and identify those individuals required for interview.

This interview sample translated to a cross-section of each case study organisation's management hierarchy. This was envisaged by the researcher as enriching the data collected in a number of ways to:

- enable a comparison of the choices and constraints of managers at different levels of an organisation;
- facilitate an examination of where in an organisation's structure employee resourcing decisions are taken and executed;
- allow a comparison of local managers' interpretations of organisational strategy and policies.

Access to each case study was requested for a maximum of one year. Research visits to stores were scheduled for once a month, with the purpose of interviewing store level managers. An interview schedule for the fieldwork period would be devised to ensure that at each visit different managers were interviewed. The rationale of this approach was to ensure all managers at store level were interviewed, without making excessive demands on the sub-units during each research visit. It would also allow the researcher to gain an impression of changes occurring in the case studies from a longer-term prospect.

Documentation:

Documents of various types can also be used to triangulate the findings of other data collection techniques (Shipman 1988). They can take the form of letters, memorandums, and other communiqués, agendas, announcements and minutes of

meetings, administrative documents, and media reports (Yin 1994). Documents are a form of secondary, as opposed to primary data. For the purpose of this study, documentation would be requested on corporate strategy and policies (particularly regarding the management of human resources) and employment statistics. Other publications such as annual reports, promotional literature, and media reports would also be collected to develop a fuller understanding of the organisational context of each case study.

6.5 DATA ANALYSIS

As raised by Yin (1994), the process of data analysis is a very important, but often neglected, aspect of research design. The central research tools of this research study were qualitative, and so this section begins by outlining the process of qualitative analysis to be undertaken. There is not a standardised approach to analysing qualitative data (Patton 1990; Saunders 1997; Saunders et al 2000), yet data analysis is an integral part of the research design:

“The process of qualitative data analysis takes many forms, but it is fundamentally a non-mathematical, analytical procedure that involves examining the meaning of people’s words and actions. Qualitative research findings are inductively derived from this data.” (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:121)

Saunders (1997) recommends desegregating qualitative data into categories, the identification of which are guided by the research question and objectives. The identification of these categories for this research study derived from the research objectives. These were ascertained from an extensive literature review to determine which factors needed to be considered when examining the potential circumstances that could influence employee resourcing in multiple store retailing. Yin (1994)

recommends this approach, particularly for inexperienced researchers, to help organise and direct data analysis. It enables the research study to be linked to existing knowledge and provides an initial analytical framework for the researcher to work from. Using the project's original research objectives the following classifications were identified for the purpose of data analysis:

- Case study background information
- Embedded unit (store) background information
- Interviewee characteristics and background information
- Employee resourcing decision making responsibilities and processes
- The influence of corporate strategy on the use of flexible employment
- The influence of the nature of the retail industry on the use of flexible employment
- The influence of gender on the use of flexible employment
- The influence of technology on the use of flexible employment
- The influence of skill levels and requirements on the use of flexible employment
- The influence of supply side preferences on the use of flexible employment

Once categories have been formed for the purpose of organising and reducing qualitative data, the next step is 'unitising' the data (Saunders et al 2000:383). This refers to attaching the relevant parts of the data to an appropriate category. At this stage a computer can be used to process the data, or the researcher can adopt a manual approach. The basic characteristics of qualitative data lie behind the key advantages for using computers in qualitative data: it is usually textual, voluminous and analytically demanding (Lee and Fielding 1991). Those in favour of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) argue that it can more easily,

quickly, and efficiently do anything that is possible on paper (Lee and Fielding 1991; Richards 1995); and can help facilitate the mechanical and clerical tasks involved in coding qualitative data (Lee and Fielding 1991). These advantages enable the researcher to 'play' with the data which further encourages analytical insight (Tesch 1991). However, there have been a number of problems with the use of CAQDAS. The range of programs available can mean that the researcher may end up using a program that is unsuitable for the analytical procedures they wish to perform (Lee and Fielding 1991). It can reduce the data analysis to 'word crunching' (Saunders et al 2000:401) where the researcher is more concerned with analysis based on quantification than exploration of meaning (Fisher 1997). Other issues include the need to learn both how to analyse qualitative data, as well as choosing and using appropriate software for the problem (Lee and Fielding 1991); and many of the programs may not be available for the researcher to explore and evaluate within their institution.

Considering these debates, it was decided that a manual approach to data analysis would be employed for the purposes of this research study. The rationale for this was predominately the lack of facilities within the researcher's institution, as well as a need for the less experienced researcher to learn and understand the actual process of qualitative data analysis as part of the research process. Consequently, interview transcripts were to be coded manually, and then using the 'Cut and Paste' mechanism on a word processing computer package, unitised onto a computer file for each category. This would enable relationships between data and categories to be

established; as well as developing any new categories which might arise during the data-analysis process.

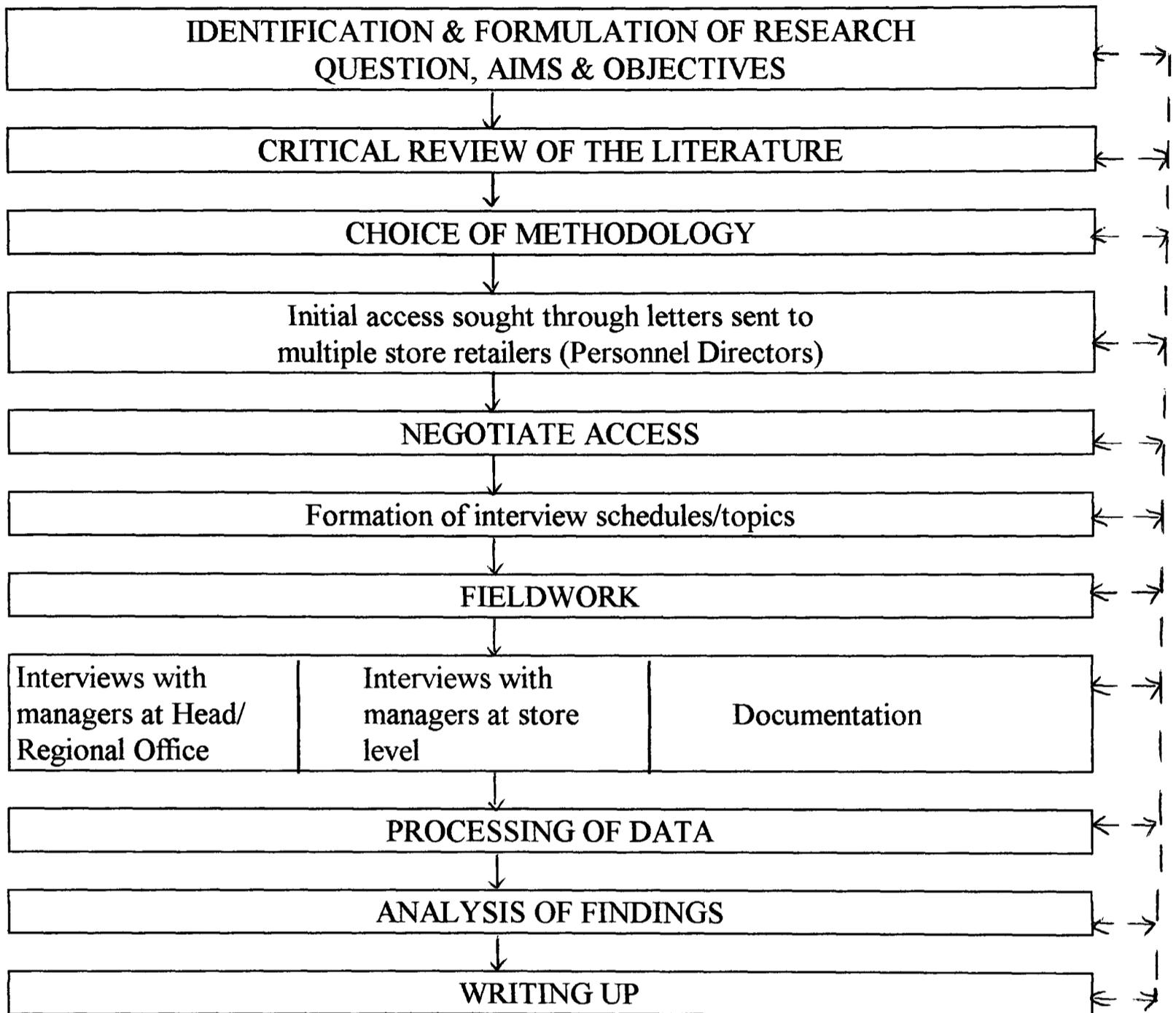
6.6 SUMMARY

Figure three illustrates the final research design process, which mirrors the research process model suggested by Saunders (1997). It should be noted that while the model is largely linear in format, the processes of both forward planning, and reflection and revisions, were central to the research process.

This chapter has sought to introduce and discuss the research design and methodological aspects of this study. A case study approach was adopted, with the research design focusing on four units of analysis, and two embedded units within each of these. These case studies were UK multiple store retailers, and the embedded units were stores within these organisations.

The researcher's epistemology was grounded in a phenomenological paradigm and so qualitative face-to-face interviews were the central research tool adopted. The chapter then discussed the approach to data analysis, outlining the rationale for adopting a manual approach, and the categories to be used for the data analysis process.

Figure 3: The Research Process



Chapter 7

THE FIELDWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

The previous chapter set out the conceptual foundations for this study, narrowed the focus of the research to four case studies, and detailed the research design and methodology. The research strategy consisted of multiple embedded case studies. This involved a series of face-to-face qualitative interviews with managers in retail organisations at both head office and store level, documentation collected during field visits, and fieldnote observations. The data collected was then manually analysed using the inductive method, with a subsequent refinement of the original research objectives.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As Neuman (1997) outlined, qualitative research tends to be cyclical, rather than moving in a straight line. Gummesson (1991) criticised what he termed “the taboos of the research process” (p.98), where the traditional model of the research process is an idealised model. When confronted with reality, the research process is often characterised by complexity and intractability because “there is no such thing as flawless research” (McGrath 1982:76). Consequently qualitative research reports often have a “personal autobiography tailored to a particular study” (Neuman 1997:330), which is most common for field research. This chapter takes the approach of a “personal autobiography” and outlines the research process during both the fieldwork and data analysis stages.

7.2 NEGOTIATING ACCESS TO THE CASE STUDIES

Access to a site is a key factor in determining success (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). With no personal contacts for the researcher to gain access, the names and addresses of the HR Directors of UK multiple store retail organisations were sought through desk research. An initial contact letter was sent to HR Directors in October 1995 (see appendix one). After a poor response a second letter and further details of the research project were sent in November 1995 (see appendix two). As a result seven retailers expressed an interest in the research project. Five of these operated in the superstore sector, whilst the other two were high street retailers. Given the research design's requirement of four retailers it was decided to concentrate the research on the superstore sector of multiple store retailing using those retail organisations who had expressed an interest in co-operating with the research study.

Meetings were arranged with each of these organisations to discuss the research study in more detail and determine whether the requisite access could be provided. These meetings were held at head office or regional level. After this initial meeting one organisation decided it could not provide the level of access and commitment required for the study. Consequently, the remaining four superstore retailers were selected as the organisations under study.

In each of the four organisations an initial interview was conducted with a member of the Personnel department at head office or regional level. The aim of this interview was to provide further details about the research project, and to outline the information required from the organisation. As highlighted by Saunders et al (2000), one area of

concern for organisations can be sensitivity and confidentiality, with anonymity of organisations and individual participants often necessary. The four retail organisations agreed to provide access for the research study on the proviso that they were granted anonymity in the research report. To achieve this pseudonyms were used in place of the organisation's name (see Table two).

Table 2: Pseudonyms given to the case study organisations

ORGANISATION	SECTOR	PSEUDONYM
A	Grocery	Superco
B	Grocery	Groceryco
C	Home Improvement and Gardening	Homeco
D	Electrical	Electrico

In three of the four companies access to two of their stores was granted immediately, with contact names and details provided. This fulfilled the original research design objective of securing two embedded units for each case study. Electrico initially provided only one store for access, but promised to provide contact details of another soon after. The selection of the stores for each organisation varied for numerous reasons, as outlined in Table three. (Further details about the characteristics of each store can be found in Chapters 8 to 10).

Table 3: Rationale for the choice of embedded units (stores)

ORGANISATION	CONTACT	RATIONALE FOR CHOICE OF STORES
Superco	General Manager	Surrey Quays - top store in region Lewisham - General Manager likely to be co-operative with the research.
Groceryco	HR Manager	A comparison between an older, smaller store (Blackfen), and a newly opened large store (Camden).
Homeco	Store Manager	An older, unrefurbished store with a new manager (West Thurrock); compared to a newly refurbished store (Oxford).
Electrico	Store Manager	A successful manager considered likely to be co-operative. The store was one of the top performing stores in its region.

Gummesson (1991) outlined three levels of access which need to be negotiated for any research study to succeed. These include physical access or initial entry into the organisation; continuing access where the access required is not limited to a single event; and cognitive access. This entails gaining access to the data required from the research participants in order for the researcher to understand their social reality and to enable the research question and objectives to be addressed. While physical access had been gained to the four case study organisations, there was also a need to ensure both continuing and cognitive access. As Saunders et al (2000) expressed:

“simply obtaining physical access is inadequate unless you can also negotiate yourself into a position where you can reveal the identity of what is occurring in relation to your research question.” (p.115)

The research design required continuing research access, particularly to the stores designated as sub-units. The design designated the need for monthly visits over a twelve-month period. A longitudinal study, where access to the organisation and

research participants is required on more than one occasion, can make obtaining access more difficult because of the intrusive methods and greater demands on the organisation (Buchanan et al 1988; Johnson 1975; Raimond 1993). There was also the added difficulty of operating as an external researcher where “gaining physical access is a major issue to overcome; and will remain in relation to negotiating continued and cognitive research” (Saunders et al 2000:116).

The requirements of the research design placed a heavy emphasis on the role of the gatekeeper, particularly at store level where the research demands were considerably more onerous. Gatekeepers can be defined as:

“those individuals in an organisation that have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations for the purposes of research.” (Burgess 1984:48)
At each store the person with responsibility for arranging the researcher’s access to managers for the purposes of interview was identified. Table four outlines the designated gatekeepers for each store. These individuals were important because they not only formed one of the interview groups, but also controlled access to the other managers at store level. Appendix four outlines the negotiation process to the level of store gatekeepers in more detail for each case study organisation.

Regular communication was maintained with the gatekeepers to ensure that access to managers for the purpose of interviews was granted. A schedule of planned interviews was agreed with these gatekeepers at the outset of the fieldwork (as discussed in Section 7.3.1). The gatekeepers at head office or regional level (see Appendix Three) were also kept updated about the research progress, and arrangements for any further interviews with senior management were made through these individuals.

Table 4: Designated Gatekeepers For Each Embedded Unit

COMPANY	STORE	GATEKEEPER
Superco	Lewisham	General Manager
Superco	Surrey Quays	Personnel Manager
Groceryco	Blackfen	Human Resources Manager
Groceryco	Camden	Human Resources Manager
Homeco	Oxford	Assistant Store Manager
Homeco	West Thurrock	Store Manager
Electrico	Orpington	Store Manager

7.3 DATA COLLECTION

7.3.1 Interviews

The original aim of the research design was to interview all managers at store level in each of the seven stores where access had been granted, which would then be supplemented by interviews with senior managers at head office or regional level. This provides the rationale for the greater number of interviews conducted at Superco than the other three case study companies. The embedded units of Superco were larger, and hence employed a larger number of managers. Table five outlines the number of interviews conducted within each case study.

Table 5: Number of Interviews Conducted

COMPANY	NUMBER OF HEAD OFFICE/ REGIONAL LEVEL INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF STORE LEVEL INTERVIEWS	TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Superco	3	24 (Lewisham - 12 Surrey Quays - 12)	27
Groceryco	2	19 (Blackfen - 9 Camden - 10)	21
Homeco	3	11 (Oxford - 5 W. Thurrock - 6)	14
Electrico	1	5	6
TOTAL	9	59	68

Where research objectives require semi-structured in-depth interviews, the logistics of scheduling interviews must be carefully considered. To overcome this a proposed schedule of interviews was provided to the gatekeeper of each store at the very beginning of the fieldwork. This clearly demonstrated the commitment and resources required to co-operate with the research study, as well as allowing the gatekeeper time to arrange the interviews. As Saunders et al (2000) expressed, where a research design involves a study of one establishment over a period of time it may be more practical to undertake a number of interviews in one day. Up to three interviews were arranged on a single monthly visit to the stores. This figure was dependent upon the size of the store and subsequent total number of managers to be interviewed at each embedded site.

The interviews were scheduled on a hierarchical basis so that senior store managers were interviewed initially, followed by junior managers. This enabled responses from senior managers to be compared to junior managers later responses. It also provided

some logic to the interview schedule for the benefit of the gatekeepers arranging the interviews. As with most qualitative research, the actual dates of the interviews did not exactly correspond with the proposed schedule set out at the beginning of the fieldwork. The actual schedule of interviews can be found in Appendix five, which outlines the dates on which each interview was conducted, and with whom, for each case study and embedded unit.

Interviews were planned to take 45 to 60 minutes; in practice the interviews ranged from 40 to 105 minutes. In every interview the researcher was able to cover all the planned topics in the time allowed, and in the majority of cases other areas were also explored. The use of a tape-recorder can increase the accuracy of data collection (Dolan 1985; Ely et al 1991; Saunders et al 2000), as well as allowing the interviewer to concentrate more fully on the interviewee (Patton 1990; Saunders et al 2000; Valentine 1997). However, there are disadvantages to tape recording interviews including situations where it might adversely affect the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, or where it could inhibit the interviewee responses and thus reduce validity. There are also technical considerations to be made and the time required to transcribe tapes (Saunders et al 2000). For the purpose of this research study it was decided not to tape record the interviews, but to rely instead on taking notes during the interviews themselves. Immediately after the interview the researcher typed up the interview notes in full detail, to be kept on computer file. Interviews were not tape recorded because of the threat it posed to the validity of responses given by the interviewees. It was feared that the methodology of taking a cross section of managers through the organisational hierarchy might rouse suspicions amongst the

respondents, particularly those at junior management level. Despite promises of confidentiality, the researcher felt managers would be more inhibited by the presence of a tape recorder, and therefore less likely to reveal “the reality behind the reality” (Saunders et al 2000:86). In making careful notes of potentially quotable material during the interviews, and immediately writing these notes up afterwards, the data and direct quotes were still available for use by the researcher.

The location in which the interviews were conducted varied according to each case study, and within each embedded unit. Interviews with senior management at head office and regional level generally took place in the interviewee’s office. At store level, where a senior manager had an office, the interview would take place there. However, this was generally only applicable to the Store Managers and Personnel Managers. Interviews with other managers took place in a variety of settings including meeting rooms, offices ‘borrowed’ from senior management, or the staff canteen. The locations were determined by a combination of the gatekeeper and the interviewee. Most commonly the staff canteen was used, which meant the researcher became a ‘familiar face’ within the stores concerned. This enabled the researcher to build a rapport within the case studies by “getting along with members in the field” (Neuman 1997:335). This helped to eradicate suspicions the respondents may have held over the researcher’s presence. This was particularly applicable at store level where the researcher visited every month. As Saunders et al (2000:116) noted, “researchers rely heavily on goodwill from the organisation at every level of access”, and “gaining co-operation from intended participants is about developing relationships”. This was facilitated by the frequent presence of the researcher and informal setting of the staff

canteen for many of the interviews. Through building relationships with members in the field, whilst also demonstrating integrity, the role of the researcher as an external proved to be beneficial. Participants in the research were willing to accept the researcher as objective and without a covert agenda (Saunders et al 2000), and thus were more likely to answer the interview questions honestly and completely, increasing the validity of the data collected.

All interviews were one-to-one with no other people but the researcher and respondent present. The interviews were conducted with minimal interruptions, even when they were held in a 'public' place, such as the staff canteen. This meant that interviewees were not influenced by the presence of others, which can distort their responses to questions, and negatively impact on the validity of the data (Puwar 1997).

Another issue to consider when conducting research interviews is that of shared identities because "all interviews are interactional" (Silverman 1997:113) with a relationship of some kind formed between the interviewer and interviewee. Qualitative researchers believe there can never be a 'relationship-free' interview (King 1994).

Oakley (1981) stressed the importance of the researcher interacting and sharing information with respondents rather than simply treating them as subjects from which to extract information. This principle of reciprocity in research is often viewed as good practice (Valentine 1997).

The presence (or absence) of shared identities and links can influence the rapport between researcher and participants. Factors which can increase, or reduce the rapport

with participants through shared identities include gender, age, ethnicity, and common backgrounds such as locations, families, education and occupation (Chandler 1990; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Oakley 1981; Scott 1994; Valentine 1997). The author was the sole researcher and interviewer and, for background information, is a white female, who was aged twenty-four when the interviews took place. The gender of interviewee and respondent “does make a difference” (Fontana and Frey 1998:64), and the role of women researchers and their interaction with both male and female participants has been well documented (see, for example, Chandler 1990; Finch 1984). This led Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:84) to conclude that a position of “genderless neutrality” can never be achieved.

The majority of managers with whom interviews were conducted tended to be male due to the male domination of management roles in the retail industry, particularly at senior levels. This meant that the researcher often did not have a shared gender identity with the interviewee, and so had to build a rapport in other ways. At store level management this was often achieved through age as many of the store level managers were young, in their late twenties and early thirties. Some had also graduated from university and so had an empathy with the researcher as a higher education student. However, this is not to say that the researcher failed to establish a rapport with other respondents. The external nature of the researcher helped to establish trust between the respondents and herself, as did the frequent visits to the stores, which made the researcher a ‘familiar face’(as previously discussed). This neutrality and the researcher’s professionalism and integrity, together with a tape recorder not being used, led the researcher to believe that the interviewees felt

comfortable answering the interview questions fully and honestly. Indeed, even where questions were related to gender and equal opportunities, respondents did not seem deterred by the gender of the researcher in giving honest answers to the questions, although this conclusion is based only on the researcher's interpretation of the answers given.

7.3.2 Fieldnotes

As discussed in Section 7.3.1, during and immediately after each field visit the researcher made detailed written notes of the interviews, and any relevant observations. These were subsequently filed and used as the main source of data for the purpose of analysis.

7.3.3 Documentation

Documents were collected in each case study to try and triangulate the findings of the interviews and any observations. Such 'public documents' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994) can help put the fieldwork into context and a range of documents were gathered wherever possible, and where provided by the case study organisation. These included annual reports, recruitment literature, and training guides.

7.4 PROBLEMS AND BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE FIELDWORK RESEARCH

The approach of this research study and subsequent research design was qualitative, with an underlying phenomenological philosophy using a multiple embedded case study methodology. This required an aspect of longitudinal access to the case studies, in

particular to the embedded units of the retail stores. As summarised by Saunders et al (2000):

“Fieldwork is permeated with the conflict between what is theoretically desirable on the one hand and what is practically possible on the other. It is desirable to ensure representativeness in the sample, uniformity of interview procedures, adequate data collection across the range of topics to be explored, and so on. But the members of the organisation block access to information, constrain the time allowed on interviews, lose your questionnaires, go on holiday, and join other organisations in the middle of your unfinished study. In the conflict between the desirable and the possible, the possible always wins.” (p.115)

Such difficulties were particularly applicable to this fieldwork, and the problems of conducting case study research in the retail industry are outlined below. For ease of clarity the problems faced are discussed for each case study company individually.

7.4.1 Superco

The problems encountered at Superco were caused principally by the movement of staff between stores. These issues only occurred at the Lewisham store. The gatekeeper and General Manager at the Surrey Quays store remained in their positions for the duration of the fieldwork. This enabled relationships to be built up to ensure the continuation of access and support for the research study.

At the Lewisham store the General Manager was moved on secondment to an internal company project, four months into the fieldwork. This left the store without a General Manager. The manager of the Surrey Quays store (the other store under research) took dual responsibility for both stores. The loss of the General Manager from the Lewisham store meant that the researcher was without a gatekeeper for arranging future interviews and research access. This was compounded by the researcher not

being informed by Lewisham's General Manager of his imminent departure. The researcher instead asked the Personnel Manager of the Lewisham store to act as the gatekeeper (as in the Surrey Quays store). This was agreed and interviews were arranged for the following monthly research visit. However, this gatekeeper shortly left on maternity leave. The gatekeeper role was then transferred to the store's Training Manager who arranged the remaining interviews, which enabled the successful completion of all required interviews at both Superco stores. Nevertheless, this staff mobility provided a potential threat to the completion of the fieldwork at the Lewisham store. It required careful management and diplomacy to successfully re-negotiate new gatekeepers.

7.4.2 Groceryco

The problems encountered during the fieldwork stage occurred at the Camden store, and were again due to staff turnover and movement between stores. At the Blackfen store the gatekeeper remained constant throughout the research period, and arranged all the interviews requested by the researcher.

At the Camden store problems occurred with the gatekeeper. During the second month of the fieldwork the gatekeeper was absent for four weeks due to illness. This delayed the proposed interview schedule, which was then revised to accommodate the gatekeeper's absence. The gatekeeper returned for two weeks before being absent again on compassionate leave from which she never returned to the store.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to secure the new HR manager as a gatekeeper to arrange interviews with the requisite managers. Consequently, interviews had to be

arranged directly with the managers concerned, rather than through a gatekeeper. This proved difficult, and combined with many of the management positions being vacant, led to a low success rate in securing access to managers for the purpose of interviewing. However, interviews were secured with ten managers at the Camden store, which was considered a viable sample to continue the inclusion of this store as an embedded unit in the Groceryco case study.

7.4.3 Electrico

During the initial meeting the HR Controller of Operations at Head Office only identified one store for research access. The researcher was assured that a second store for access purposes would be provided shortly. Despite various attempts by the researcher via letter and telephone communication a second store was never provided. This limited the number of interviews that could be conducted to one store. Access to the store was provided by the Store Manager, who acted as the gatekeeper for the research. However, after two months of the fieldwork period he was promoted to another role at a different location. The gatekeeper role was transferred to the new Store Manager (who had previously been the Assistant Store Manager). This transfer was arranged by the previous Store Manager and proved very successful until September 1996 (8 months into the research project) when this second gatekeeper was also transferred to another store. The researcher was telephoned by the second gatekeeper to inform her of the name of the new Store Manager at Orpington. He however warned the researcher that he doubted the new manager would be very supportive of the research. This proved correct, as the new manager did not respond to any of the communication from the researcher. While all the interviews had been

completed at this point, the researcher wished to conduct some follow-up work to assess the impact of the managerial changes that had occurred at the store, but was unsuccessful in doing so due to the lack of co-operation from the new Store Manager.

7.4.4 Homeco

A number of barriers and problems occurred during the fieldwork stage of the Homeco case study. Physical access was initially granted by the Personnel Manager of Renewals stores, based at Head Office. Homeco was embarking on a project considering labour flexibility and productivity issues at the time of the researcher's request for access (see appendix four). This was the second occasion that the company had attempted to introduce flexibility initiatives - the first attempt had failed at the project stage.

The point of contact at head office was designated as a graduate trainee who was also working on the flexibility project. She required a monthly summary of the research findings to date and regular meetings for updating purposes. Research access was agreed for two stores, Fareham and West Thurrock, and the contact details provided. However, the contact details of the Store Managers provided by head office were incorrect, with the wrong telephone number for the Fareham store, and the wrong name of the store manager at the West Thurrock store. This caused problems in making initial contact with these managers to discuss the research requirements. Six weeks into the fieldwork, the Store Manager at Fareham was seconded to an internal company project. The researcher was given the two assistant managers as the point of contact for arranging future interviews. However, these managers were reluctant to

grant research access, despite head office's support of the fieldwork. Subsequently it was decided that an alternative store would be advisable and the Personnel Manager (Renewals) selected the Oxford store for this purpose. The research process began again, with interviews successfully arranged in this store with the requisite managers.

In June 1996 Homeco's flexibility project had internal problems. Due to a lack of progress by the company's project team there were moves to abandon the project again. The researcher was required to give a presentation outlining her contributions to the project, and the findings to date. The purpose of this presentation was to persuade the senior managers responsible for the flexibility project to allow continued research access, but the researcher's supervisor was refused permission to attend the presentation. The researcher secured continued research access to the stores as a result of this presentation and remained on site for a further six months. At the point of exiting the case study, plans were being made at head office to resurrect the company's flexibility project. However, it was considered by the researcher that the required data had been collated by this point, and hence was a suitable time for exiting the site.

7.5 DATA ANALYSIS

As described in Section 6.5, data analysis was conducted manually using categories determined by the research question and objectives derived from an extensive review of relevant literature. This 'unitisation' of the data was completed, which resulted in a reduction and rearrangement of the data into a more manageable and comprehensive form. As stated by Saunders et al (2000):

“Data collection, data analysis and the development and verification of relationships and conclusions are very much an interrelated and interactive set of processes. This analysis helps to shape the direction of data collection, especially where you are following a grounded theory approach.” (p.387)

During the period of data collection and analysis, the research design of this study adopted a deductive approach, using a pre-defined theoretical framework. However, during the data analysis stage the researcher found that this did not yield a sufficiently convincing answer to the research question and objectives. There were doubts placed on the extent to which the findings would make an original contribution to knowledge - a key purpose of the research study. As Bryman (1988) argued, the deductive approach to research design and data analysis limits the nature of the issues under investigation, “as well as the possibility of the theoretical constructs departing excessively from the views of the participants in a social setting” (p.88). Therefore an inductive approach to data analysis was considered as an option. This interaction allows themes, patterns and relationships to emerge as the data is collected and analysed. This enables a flexibility of process, which means data can be re-categorised or new categories developed.

During the data collection period, the researcher noted that interviewees provided information that had not been categorised within the original deductive approach to the research design and analysis. By re-analysing the data inductively themes that had not figured prominently in the deductive analysis were revealed as being important issues for the interviewees. This analytical strategy was more typical of the grounded approach to research where the themes and subsequent theory or explanation emerges as a result of the research process (see Section 6.1 for further discussion of the

grounded theory approach). While Yin (1994) maintained that such an approach was a difficult strategy to follow, it was decided that, for the purpose of this research study, the data should be re-analysed inductively to give those themes and issues, not identified through the deductive approach, the opportunity to emerge. By using the grounded approach this would also provided more opportunity to develop sound explanations or theory from the fieldwork data.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) outline three steps to analysing qualitative data using the grounded theory approach. Open coding refers to the categorisation of data into conceptual units. They suggested three main sources to derive names for these categories:

1. utilise terms that emerge from the data;
2. utilise terms that are used by the actual research participants;
3. utilise terms used in existing theory and literature.

It is through this process that a narrower focus to an initially broad research question is developed (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Using this approach, different issues emerged as being of greater importance to the interviewees than those originally defined using the deductive approach. The focus of the research study appeared to rest in the role of line managers in the management and deployment of human resources, with the influence of their choices and constraints emerging as an important issue. This included the role of corporate strategy and company policy in determining their deployment of human resources; the differences between managers at different levels of the case study; and the impact of store level managers' choices and constraints on

their employee resourcing decisions. As a result a different set of categories emerged from the data, as outlined below:

- Case study background information
- Store level management and progression
- Embedded unit (store) background information
- Interviewee characteristics and background information
- Labour use decision making responsibilities and processes
- The influence of corporate strategy on labour use decision making
- The influence of head office over store operations and employee resourcing
- The influence of store level managers on local employee resourcing

Within these categories a number of sub-sections emerged, which came through the process of axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This involved looking for relationships between the categories of data that emerged from the open coding. Relationships between the management of human resources and the choices and constraints of store level managers were developed. This involved the consideration of head office control through budgets, technology, strategy and policies. It also considered the extent of line managers' autonomy resulting from decentralisation and managers' strategies of independence.

The final stage of data analysis is termed 'selective coding' (Strauss and Corbin 1998), where:

“the emphasis is placed on recognising the relationships between the principal categories which have emerged from this grounded approach in order to develop an explanatory theory.” (Saunders et al 2000:398)



The principle theme emerged as the tensions that exist between the centralisation and decentralisation of store level managers' responsibilities, and the subsequent impact of this on the employee resourcing decision-making process. The relationship between this and the sub-categories was then established.

The inductive approach adopted for the data analysis stage meant that the research study's aims and objectives needed to be re-considered. Consequently the research question became:

“How do the choices and constraints of local managers' decision-making powers influence the process of employee resourcing in multiple store retailing?”

and the original aims of the study redefined as:

- identify the role of local managers in the management of human resources in multiple store retailing;
- assess how the choices and constraints of these managers impact on local employee resourcing decisions in multiple store retailing.

During this inductive process the weakness of the data collected from the Electrico case study was exposed. This could be attributed to two factors: access was only granted to one store (despite the researcher's request for two embedded sites); the store itself was disproportionately smaller than the stores in the other three case studies, which led to only six managers being interviewed. It was decided to omit Electrico from the final data analysis stage and writing up of the case studies, because

the number of interviews conducted in this organisation were too few to enable a viable comparison with the other three organisations to take place.

7.6 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The change in focus of the research as a result of the inductive approach to data analysis also necessitated a second literature review. This was to incorporate the new focus of the research study and assess where gaps in current knowledge existed to ensure the study met its main purpose of making an original contribution to the body of knowledge. A full assessment of the literature pertaining to this research has been provided in chapters two and five. This section presents a review of the main areas of literature, identifying gaps in the literature, and detailing how this study contributes to current knowledge.

Employment in retailing has historically been one of the least considered aspects of the distributive trades (Doogan 1992; Lowe and Wrigley 1996; Sparks 1987). Yet the pivotal role of retailing in today's UK service economy (Rajan 1987), and the scale of the sector (Lowe and Crewe 1991), makes understanding retail employment relations vital (Freathy and Sparks 1996). Recent research interests in different aspects of retail employment is emerging, and many disciplines & approaches need to be incorporated into any assessment (Freathy & Sparks 1994, 1995). However, the employment and training implications of the changes in the retail industry have been less than well documented (Dawson et al 1987; Doogan 1992; Sparks 1983, 1987, 1991). Very little research has addressed how changes in the retail industry have impacted upon the people most likely to be affected by the changes made to corporate culture and

strategy (Shackleton 1998). As a result, calls have been made to ensure that further analyses of corporate restructuring within UK food retailing should incorporate human, as well as economic factors in order to generate an holistic picture of the complex processes involved (Shackleton 1998). This research study aims to take that more holistic approach to the management of human resources through assessing the role of local managers and the factors that influence their HR decision making processes.

Marchington (1995a) maintained that one of the major problems with current research examining HRM in the retail industry is its tendency to focus on very specific issues, rather than adopting a more holistic approach. He argued that a broad theory needed to be developed that was capable of analysing corporate strategies and practices, employee strategies and practices, the relationship between employers and employees, as well as the interaction between managers, employees and the political, social, and economic context within which organisations operate. Freathy and Sparks (1995) suggested that the most important retail labour issue may not be one of shop-floor staff, but one of managerial concerns. Yet “this is a topic that has not received as much attention as it deserves” (Freathy and Sparks 1996:182). Therefore the inclusion of junior management in this research design facilitates a more in-depth study of managerial processes. This is particularly important as junior managers have been largely ignored in the literature, especially in terms of HRM (Lowe 1992). This is in spite of empirical evidence of the increasing devolution of HRM to line management (Armstrong 1989; Bevan and Hayday 1994; Guest 1982; Hill and Pickering 1986;

Hutchinson 1995; Kinnie 1989; Maund 2001; Sisson and Scullion 1985; Tamkin et al 1997; Tyson and Fell 1995).

This research study and its accompanying research design aimed to establish the impact of head office control over local managers, on the employee resourcing decisions taken at store level. This would involve examining both the formation of strategy and policy at head office level, as well as implementation at store level. As Marchington and Parker (1990) pointed out, research must differentiate between the formulation of strategy and its implementation, as well as resistance to management actions. By describing strategies without assessing whether or not these operate on the shop floor, is “only presenting a partial picture” (p.74). The methodology of this research study examines management decision making at different levels of an organisation, so filling the ‘partial picture’ presented by existing research findings focused at only one level of organisations.

To summarise, this research study contributes to the body of knowledge on the management of employee resourcing in the retail industry; the role of line managers in the management of employee resourcing; and the influence of choices and constraints of line managers in their employee resourcing decisions.

7.7 ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND FIELDWORK

This section provides an assessment of the research and acknowledges the limitations of the data gathered. The selection of site and sample are crucial decisions that can affect the viability of the whole study (Marshall and Rossman 1989). However, as

acknowledged in the research methodology literature, fieldwork is permeated with the conflict between what is theoretically desirable and what is practically possible. It has even been suggested that researchers should recognise that the reality of undertaking a research project may be to consider where access is likely to be gained and to develop a topic to fit the nature of that access (Johnson 1975). There is also the recognition that requests for access are more likely to be accepted if the amount of time and resources required are kept to a minimum (Easterby-Smith et al 1991). The research design of this study was ambitious, requesting access over the period of one year to embedded sites that operate under very competitive and demanding conditions. While this may have deterred some organisations from becoming involved with the study, access to four national multiple store retailers was secured. However, these retail organisations 'self-selected' to co-operate with the research, and were all concentrated in the superstore sector of multiple store retailing. They may not therefore be a representative sample of UK multiple store retailers. Further research would need to be conducted to enable generalisability of the research findings to the retail industry as a whole. However, because this research was grounded in a phenomenological approach using qualitative and case study methodology, generalisability was not the aim of the thesis.

Working on a longer term project within the retail industry proved difficult because of the frequency with which 'gatekeepers' were lost through staff moving to other stores, or being seconded onto in-company projects. This had the potential to threaten the research study on a number of occasions and the researcher had to rely heavily on the

relationships established prior to the gatekeeper leaving, or the support of head office, to secure continuing access.

Through the case study stores being selected by head office or regional level managers, there is the possibility of bias in their choice. Head office may have selected 'exemplar' stores to cast their organisation in a 'socially desirable' role (Saunders et al 2000). The researcher was aware of the possible bias that organisational gatekeepers could exert in their selection of embedded units, and took the methodological step of requesting two stores to minimise these problems.

Through gaining access via head office or regional level, the researcher had to make clear to respondents at store level that this was an independent research study. Initially the researcher was sometimes greeted with suspicion when first entering the embedded sites until relationships and trust between the researcher and the research participants had been established. An ideal methodology would have been to relate the results of the store level interviews to managers at head office to ascertain their awareness of store level managers' activities, and provide a triangulation of results. However, it was believed by the researcher that local managers would have been very reluctant to relate honestly in the interviews if they were aware that their confidentiality and revelations would be revealed to senior management. Therefore, the ideal research design had to be compromised in order to ensure maximum validity of the data collected was maintained.

Qualitative research can never be wholly objective, and there can never be a 'relationship-free' interview (King 1994:15). However, many authors (for example, Oakley 1981; Valentine 1997) stress that the value of qualitative research is that the researcher can interact and respond with the subject. For the purposes of this study the problems of interviews were discussed in Section 6.4.1, and the weaknesses of this methodology were minimised as far as possible. The researcher was given full access to managers for interviewing purposes, which overcame some elements of bias that gatekeepers could exert in their selection of interviewees (Valentine 1997).

Analysing the data using both a deductive and inductive approach proved very time consuming, intensive, and reflective. While the results of this process were encouraging and worthwhile, it significantly delayed completion of the research study. This was particularly so, given that a second literature review had to be conducted at a later stage to enable the results of the inductive data analysis process to be linked to current knowledge.

This chapter has provided an autobiographical account of the fieldwork conducted for this research study. It highlights the practicalities of the research methodologies used, and the problems encountered in each of the case study organisations. It takes the reader through the process of data analysis and the re-evaluation of the study's research aims and objectives. The chapter concluded with an assessment of the research, including acknowledgement of the limitations of the data gathered and the methodologies employed.

Chapter 8

THE SUPERCO CASE STUDY

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical research conducted using the embedded case study method. The data gathered provides background information to the case study organisation, outlining the nature of store level management and HRM in Superco. The chapter examines the choices and constraints of store level managers and the consequences of these for the management of human resources.

8.1 BACKGROUND HISTORY

Superco plc. operates in the multiple grocery retailing sector and was the leading supermarket retailer in the UK at the time of this research (1996). It opened its first store in 1956, and by 1996 operated 568 branches throughout the UK, employing over 10,000 people. Superco took over as market leader of the UK grocery retail sector in 1995, with an annual turnover of £1.2 billion, and profit of £681 million in 1996.

At the time of this empirical research the company was divided into three divisions of Head Office, Distribution, and Retail. This research study concentrated on the Retail division, which was structured on a regional basis. Twenty four regions in the UK were split between eight Regional Directors. Each Regional Director had responsibility for up to 24 stores. A Regional Development Manager reported to the Regional Director. General Managers of each store reported to the Regional Development Manager.

There were a variety of store formats in operation throughout the Superco branch network, which were designed to suit a variety of customer shopping patterns. This case study focuses on the superstore format. 'Superstores' are those Superco stores over 38,000 square foot representing the company's longest established store format. They are generally found in out-of-town locations aimed predominately at customers with cars, shopping for their main weekly food and grocery needs. They offer a vast range of products, as well as additional services such as pharmacies, dry cleaning and petrol garages. The two stores selected for this research study were both of the superstore format.

8.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE CASE STUDY STORES

As outlined in Section 6.4 two embedded units were selected for each case study organisation. These were stores that were selected by the Regional Development Manager on the basis of ease of access and likely co-operation by the General Managers (as outlined in Section 7.2).

8.2.1 The Surrey Quays store

This store opened in October 1988 and is located in South East London. It was viewed as the region's 'flagship' store due to its size and high level of sales. The General Manager had been at the store for 8 months having previously managed the Lewisham Store. During the period of research (February 1996 to December 1996), the store increased its opening hours from 72 to 94 hours per week, opening an hour earlier in the morning at 08.00 hours and extending its evening opening from 20.00 to 21.00 hours. The store had been opening on Sundays since November 1993.

As can be seen in Table six, the store employed 450 workers, of which over two-thirds (71 per cent) worked part time. Just over half (56 per cent) of the workforce were female with the majority of part timers being women (65 per cent), and the majority of women working part time (83 per cent).

Table 6: Workforce composition of the Surrey Quays store

	Full time	Part time	Total
Male	86 (19.1%)	112 (24.9%)	198 (44.0%)
Female	43 (9.6%)	209 (46.4%)	252 (56.0%)
Total	129 (28.7%)	321 (71.3%)	450 (100.0%)

The store had four departments: Customer Services, Trading (Fresh Foods), Trading (Ambient), and Personnel, each with a Senior Manager. These managers, together with the General Manager, made up the store's senior management team. Under this Senior Management Team came responsibility for a number of sections managed by Section Managers (see appendix nine for store structure). The largest department in the store was Customer Services (because it contained checkouts thus demanding highly labour intensive working) with 229 employees. A vast proportion of these were female (72 per cent) and part time (89 per cent).

8.2.2 The Lewisham store

This store was eight years old and also based in South East London. The General Manager had been at the store for 7 months having previously managed the Brixton store. During the period of research (February 1996 to December 1996), the store

increased its opening hours from 72 to 100 hours a week through opening an hour earlier in the morning at 08.00 hours, and extending its evening opening from 20.00 to 22.00 hours. The store had been opening on Sundays since November 1993.

As can be seen in Table seven, the store employed 291 workers of which almost two thirds (65 per cent) worked part time. Just over half (56 per cent) of the workforce were female with the majority of part timers being women (64 per cent), and the majority of women working part time (83 per cent).

Table 7: Workforce composition of the Lewisham store

	Full Time	Part-time	Total
Male	58 (19.9%)	69 (23.7%)	127 (43.6%)
Female	43 (14.8%)	121 (41.6%)	164 (56.4%)
Total	101(34.7%)	190 (65.3%)	291 (100.0%)

The store had four departments: Customer Services, Trading (Fresh Foods), Trading (Ambient), and Personnel, each with a Senior Manager. These managers, together with the General Manager, made up the store's senior management team. Under this Senior Management Team came responsibility for a number of sections managed by Section Managers (see appendix nine for store structure). As in the Surrey Quays store, the largest department was Customer Services with 143 employees, and the largest proportion of employees in this department were female and worked part time.

The chapter from here onwards will be a discussion of the two case stores using empirical data gathered between February 1996 and December 1996. This was collected via a series of 26 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with managers at both head office and store level, and an examination of company documentation (as outlined in chapters six and seven).

8.3 CORPORATE STRATEGY: A BRIEF OUTLINE

Superco was committed to creating shareholder value through an innovative customer focused strategy. Increased competitive pressures and the economic recession of the early 1990s led to Superco reviewing their corporate strategy in 1991. Already pursuing a cost minimisation strategy, Superco introduced customer service to the heart of their competitive strategy. The revised strategy emphasised both quality enhancement and cost reduction, particularly in terms of offering a high standard of customer service, as well as low prices.

From 1991 onwards it was the company's plan to achieve a competitive advantage by maximising its ability to give customer satisfaction through improved product ranges, customer service and store formats, together with the use of loyalty cards. Corporate strategy was based on the following principles:

1. A commitment to providing customers with quality products at low prices.
2. An aim to provide first class customer service through a unique package of options.
3. Increasing and maintaining customer loyalty with the continual development and use of a loyalty card.

4. Working closely with suppliers to offer the highest quality products with the widest possible range.
5. Investing in existing stores and developing flexible store formats to give customers the very best shopping experience.

(Annual Report 1997:2)

Previous research has also found an association between the rise of customer service as an important facet of the retail business, and the competitive edge that can be gained (Gardner and Sheppard 1989). Superco's commitment to customer service was a very public and consistent strategy supported by an extensive company-wide training package, as also found by Legge (1995), which facilitated its clear communication to shop-floor staff. This new focus meant the company promoted its commitment to customers and emphasised that competition with the rest of the grocery retail sector was heavily based on the level and quality of customer service:

“The customer service in our stores gives us the edge over our competitors.”
(Annual Report, 1996:10)

During his interview the Retail Personnel and Training Director at Head Office revealed the extent of Superco's commitment to its customers:

“We completely changed our attitude towards customers and put them at the forefront of everything we do rather than as an afterthought as they were previously treated.”

Previous research has identified the importance of customer service in retail competitive strategies, which gained prevalence during the 1990s (Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 2000; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Ruston 1999; Sparks 1992c). Pledges were made to Superco's customers, through the 'First Class Service' initiative, and Superco stated that:

“a key business priority is to provide First Class Service to the customer”
(Annual Report 1996:3).

As Sparks (1992c) predicted, customers will increasingly reject inadequate service provision, which will force multiple store retailers to continue to apply customer service as a key strategic tool. In 1995 the company introduced initiatives to reduce checkout queues. A promise was made to customers that if more than one person was ahead of them at the checkout another till would be opened until all tills were staffed. As a result staff from all departments were trained as cashiers to cope with any peaks in demand, which amounted to a multi-skilling of the shop-floor workforce.

One method employed by Superco to increase customer service levels and customer satisfaction was the introduction of a loyalty card. Superco believed that earning the loyalty of customers made a vital contribution to their performance:

“everything we do is aimed at encouraging our customers, new and old, to stay with us and maintain their loyalty” (Annual Report, 1995: 10).

The loyalty card was launched nationwide in February 1995 and Superco claimed it was a “new and sensitive way of listening to customers and giving them a better service” (Annual Report, 1995:2).

At the same time as improving customer service, Superco was also pursuing a cost minimisation strategy. Previous research has also found an emphasis on cost minimisation in retail strategy, particularly in the food retailing sector (Christopherson 1996; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1988; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). As Legge (1995) found, increased cost controls often accompany quality initiatives in retailing. Being a publicly quoted company Superco was not owned and controlled by those in charge of its day-to-day running (Sparks 1989). Added to the

highly competitive nature of the retail industry, a strong share price was a key priority for Superco (Freathy & Sparks 1996; Legge 1995). Despite Mintzberg's (1989:365) dismissal of the notion of "shareholder value", Superco made it clear to shareholders that the costs of investment in customer service would be offset by improvements in productivity:

"we will continue to improve on our First Class Service.....the cost of this is some £20m. We have set ourselves the task to offset a large part of this by productivity initiatives." (Annual Report, 1996: 23).

Efforts to improve productivity and cut costs throughout the business were reflected in a reduction in labour costs between 1995 and 1996, so that wages as a percentage of sales reduced by 0.2 per cent to 9.7 per cent. In the same period profits increased by 14.5 per cent, and dividends per share by 11.6 per cent (Annual Report 1996). This highlights the cost minimisation approach adopted by Superco to fund its 'First Class Service'. Superco was concerned with efficiency, which Mintzberg (1989) found meant favouring tangible measurements at the expense of intangible benefits. Existing literature supports Mintzberg, outlining how an emphasis on short-term profitability in the UK often equates to managers enforcing quick-fix solutions, ignoring any long term and social consequences of their actions (Burnes 2000; Storey and Sisson 1993a, 1993b) and producing a focus on 'hard' versions of HRM (Ogbonna and Whipp 1999).

Using Porter's (1985) framework of competitive strategies it can be seen that on the one hand Superco was pursuing a 'cost-reduction strategy' through its aim to provide customers with competitively priced goods. At the same time Superco was seeking Porter's 'quality enhancement strategy' through its aim to provide customers with high quality goods from a wide range, first class levels of customer service, and innovative

store formats. Such a contradiction between strategy and store operations has been previously noted (Doogan 1992; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Lowe and Crewe 1996; Ogbonna 1992; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1992c, 2000a). Gardner and Sheppard (1989) concluded that the current strategies of multiple store retailers are “at best flawed and at worse suspicious” (p.207). The realities of Superco’s conflicting corporate strategy at operational level will be examined in Section 8.8.

8.4 THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

To fulfil this study’s research objectives, the nature of store level management at Superco was explored during the data-gathering period. A major re-structuring process in 1991 altered the nature of all store level managers’ roles and responsibilities. Superco pursued a de-layering exercise of the store management hierarchy that led to the deletion of two management levels. This de-layering at store level is a common theme across multiple store retailers, particularly in the superstore sector (Sparks 2000a, 2000b). Assistant Store Managers were replaced by a Senior Store Management team, while at the lower level, supervisory roles were removed and their responsibilities transferred to newly created ‘Section Managers’. This left two hierarchical store management levels. This trend of de-layering to two management levels in stores was also found by Sparks (2000b).

The creation of a Senior Management Team for each store (see section 8.2) formally positioned the General Manager on the same hierarchical level as other senior

managers in the organisational structure. In practice however, it was assumed throughout Superco that the General Manager had overall management control of a store. Senior Managers were responsible for their specific departments and Section Managers, as well as taking responsibility as Duty Manager (acting as General Manager in their absence) when required. In some stores Night Managers would form part of the senior management team while in others they had the same status as a Section Manager. In the Surrey Quays and Lewisham store the latter applied. In smaller stores one individual carried out the dual roles of Customer Services Manager and Personnel Manager, although this was not applicable to either the Surrey Quays or Lewisham stores due to their large size.

Section Managers formed the junior store management tier. Each member of the senior management team was responsible for his or her own department within the store. These departments were divided into sections with a manager responsible for one or more of these sections. The quantity of section managers in each store was determined at head office and based on store size and turnover. Section managers were responsible for the day to day management of their section and its employees. The de-layering initiative of 1991 effectively increased the span of control for Section Managers. This was accompanied by an increase in salary in acknowledgement of this job enlargement. This is in conflict with Mintzberg's (1983) conclusions that first-line supervisors "cannot really be called managers" (p.127).

All management positions in the two Superco case study stores were full time, a feature of retail employment also found by Freathy and Sparks (2000). Management

positions had always traditionally been full time and most managers considered part timers to be unsuitable for promotion, as also found by Hunter and MacInnes (1991), and Walsh (1990). Robinson (1990) found that retail employers emphasised perceived problems of promoting part timers, which had the effect of limiting promotion for part timers beyond a certain level (see also Tilly 1992). This was clearly evident at Superco where the company generally did not promote part time employees. There was one exception to this at the Surrey Quays store where a Checkouts Section Manager, who had previously worked full time, had been granted permission to reduce her hours for personal reasons.

The majority of managers at the case study stores were male, particularly at the senior level. Despite Superco's equal opportunities commitment, there appeared to be evidence of a 'glass ceiling' in operation. Although Superco had a predominately female workforce, only one third of the store level management positions, in the two case study stores, were held by women. Women tended to be in management positions in occupations which were gendered female and where a largely female workforce reported to them. This supports previous research findings that women are disproportionately represented within the lowest management and occupational grades in multiple store retailing (Broadbridge 1995, 1996, 1998; Collins 1990; Craig and Wilkinson 1985; Dawson et al 1987; Freathy 1993; Freathy and Sparks 2000; Hansard Society Commission 1990; Howe 1992; MacEwan Scott 1992; Sparks 1991, 1992a).

Freathy and Sparks (1996) found that senior and middle managers at store level generally have relatively secure conditions of employment, with structured career paths

to pursue. This was patent at Superco where promotion for senior store level managers was via a succession of different departments and stores. They were required to have a variety of experience at senior management level as a condition of becoming a General Manager. As part of management development and career progression senior managers were moved from store to store within their region with considerable frequency, as also found by Doogan (1992). They were promoted via roles in progressively larger stores until being located in one of Superco's 'flagship' stores, such as Surrey Quays. This could also explain women's low representation at senior store management level, as geographical mobility would prove a difficult criteria for many working mothers to fulfil.

The senior managers of both Surrey Quays and Lewisham stores were a combination of graduate entry and internally promoted employees. Recruits onto the Graduate Trainee Retail Management Scheme began their careers with Superco at Senior Store Management level. Four of the ten senior managers in the case study stores were graduates, and all were based at Surrey Quays. This store was viewed as one of the region's 'flagship' stores and where the company aimed to promote its most successful managers. Consequently, graduate trainees who were considered to be of high potential, were more likely to be based here. It was a mark of esteem to be promoted to this store, as described below by the store's Personnel Manager:

“Both myself and Gareth [the General Manager] find it funny that our ambition was to end up at the Quays - and we both achieved it at the same time.”

It appeared from the senior management profile that Superco was increasingly looking towards graduates to form its senior store management teams, particularly in their

‘flagship’ stores. This accords with previous research, which has noted the increasing employment of graduate trainees in multiple store retailing in an effort to professionalise the managerial workforce (Hendry and Pettigrew 1987; Ogbonna 1993; Freathy and Sparks 2000). As Bell (1973), and Crouch (1997) predicted, the new ‘elite’ workforce (Lovering 1990) of the retail industry is being increasingly recruited from the external labour market, with pre-market education an important qualification.

In contrast to senior store level managers, Section Managers were more likely to join Superco as school-leavers, or from other retail organisations, and promoted from the level of General Assistant. This supports previous research that has found a social and educational gap between qualified middle managers and unqualified supervisors (Child and Partridge 1982; Ogbonna 1993). The progression from sales floor to a supervisory position has been a traditional promotional path for secondary workers in the retail industry (Freathy 1993). However, as Freathy (1993) noted, these more junior managers tend to have limited opportunities to progress through the management hierarchy. This was evident at Superco where promotional opportunities for Section Managers were limited. This was compounded by the increasing employment of graduates directly to Senior Management positions, confirming a potential polarisation of the retail managerial workforce at store level.

8.5 HRM AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING AT SUPERCO

To consider the role of store level managers in the execution of HR policies and employee resourcing practices, it is important to examine the nature of HRM at both corporate and operational level. Current literature on HRM in multiple store retailing

points to a number of key trends including a poor regard for the HR profession; a low level of trade union membership and recognition; poor training and development of hourly paid sales assistants; and strategies aimed at labour efficiency. Consequently, much of the literature concludes that multiple store retailers tend to focus on 'hard' HRM techniques, although more progressive organisations are beginning to recognise the value of a 'softer' HRM approach.

It has been argued that to ensure human resource activities are built into the fabric of corporate strategy HRM directors should be on the board, or at least the executive committee of the business unit (Walker 1992). The Personnel Director at Superco had full director status as a member of Superco's Board. To some extent this should have ensured that employment issues were considered as corporate strategy was developed. However, Truss et al (1997) found more evidence of 'one-way' linkage (Golden and Ramanujan 1985) in organisations, where business strategy informs HR strategy, but not vice versa.

Superco's company literature emphasised a 'soft' approach to HRM:

"The driving force is our staff, who have done a sterling job in all parts of the company. Wherever we go people tell us how brilliant our staff are and how well they look after customers. We are determined to improve opportunities for their training and development, as well as offer them one of the best pay and benefits packages in the retail sector."

(Superco Chairman in Annual Report, 1996: 3)

It would appear that senior managers at Superco's head office believed investment in its workforce was a key contributor to competitive success. This was supported in an interview conducted with the Retail Personnel and Training Director (who reported directly to the Personnel Director) when he identified a number of employment

challenges facing Superco. However, these responses presented a greater emphasis on cost minimisation than the company literature - a feature characteristic of 'hard' HRM:

1. The issue of increasing productivity levels at minimum cost, particularly as the company paid a higher rate of pay than other food retailers.
2. The need to negotiate widely with trade unions as the company had a higher than average trade union representation for the food retail sector.
3. The need to balance the ratio of full time and part time employees effectively against the company's demands for a high level of customer service.
4. The need to ensure that where job cuts occurred those jobs cuts were legitimate as opposed to having the same number of employees undertaking the same or even an increased level of workload.

The Retail Personnel and Training Director outlined how Superco believed that a greater level of work force stability was needed to enable the company to provide a first class service to customers, and effectively manage its employment challenges. As a large employer of part timers, head office considered the effective balance between the ratio of full time and part time employees to be one of Superco's major challenges. The company wanted to increase the number of full time employees, and encourage the employment of longer-hour part timers, to create greater workforce stability and meet organisational goals. He believed that staff working longer hours would be more committed to Superco, and to fulfilling its competitive strategy of improving customer service:

“If we employ more full timers, or at least longer hour part timers, we can deliver our customer service promises because we will have staff genuinely committed to Superco. At the same time we will reduce the costs of high labour turnover and poor commitment associated with shorter hour part timers and temporary workers.”

He acknowledged there was a conflict between this strategy and consumer shopping habits. Customers were demanding longer opening hours, a higher quality of customer service, and competitively priced products, that would all potentially add to Superco's costs. Superco was therefore pursuing a high quality customer service strategy through the employment of full timers while attempting to keep costs to a minimum. This could appear superficially at least to generate a conflict of interests for store level managers attempting to implement this policy, as will be discussed later.

To satisfy Superco's cost minimisation element of its corporate strategy, head office was considering cost effective methods to cover longer store opening hours. It developed a 'minimum hours contract' where employees were guaranteed between 10-16 core, regular working hours each week, but needed to be available for up to 31 hours each week. These contracts were made available to stores for deployment in May 1996. Neathey and Hurstfield (1995), and Purcell and Purcell (1999) concluded that the use of minimum hours contracts would result in further fragmentation of working hours with employees on such contracts forming the true 'peripheral' workforce of the retail industry. This again highlights a potential incompatibility between the company's employment policies. Superco's goal of greater workforce stability and commitment through the employment of more full timers, would seem to be at odds with the introduction of minimum hours contracts. As Blyton and Morris (1992) commented, there is a potential conflict between flexibility and the pursuit of 'soft' HRM policies. However, Superco's Retail Personnel and Training Director believed the minimum hours contracts complemented their goal to increase full time and longer hour part time working:

“ We don’t want to demand huge amounts of flexibility from all our staff because that would be very disruptive and cause feelings of insecurity, which is the complete opposite of what we actually want to achieve. However we do suffer from peaks and troughs in our trading and some difficulties in predicting employment needs. Yet only about 20 per cent of our business falls into this category and so we really only need flexibility from 20 per cent of our workforce. Therefore while we introduce minimum hour working we are actually promoting greater workforce stability for the vast majority of our workforce.”

(Retail Personnel Director, Head Office)

However, the impact of these conflicting messages was yet to emerge at operational level due to their very recent introduction at the time of this research study.

Methods to encourage employee commitment included profit related reward schemes. Employees were encouraged to become involved in the financial performance of the company to increase the motivation and commitment of employees through a variety of schemes. The principle scheme was the employee profit-related scheme, open to both full time and part time employees with more than two years’ service, who received shares worth the equivalent of 4.15 per cent of their salary.

Further attempts to increase employee commitment and participation was an improvement in organisational communication to enable employees to feel more involved with the company and their jobs. Internal communications were designed to ensure that employees were well informed about the company. These included regular open forums held within each store where staff were encouraged to question senior store management about company issues. Superco also made use of an employee attitude survey called “ViewPoint” which sought opinions on such aspects as quality of working life, sense of appreciation, satisfaction of training levels, and opinions about

management style. More traditional forms of employee communication such as regular departmental meetings, staff notice boards, and a company magazine were also used.

However, of all these policies and procedures, head office could provide no written record of their existence, except in areas such as equal opportunities and Health and Safety (i.e. where a legal requirement existed). While the corporate strategy of quality enhancement and cost minimisation was widely published, the implications of this on Superco's management of its workforce was less prolific. Superco had no formal, explicit, written employment strategy. All information for this research study regarding employment strategy came from the Retail Personnel and Training Director who could offer little written documentation on the subject:

“All we have for our stores is a twelve point guide to best practice in managing human resources. We don't like to direct them explicitly because they should know how best to manage their employees.”

Employment policies were communicated to the workforce using a 'cascade' system that began at head office and ran through Superco's management hierarchy until it reached operational level. This places in doubt the rational, matching models of strategic HRM literature and makes the study of line managers' execution of employment policies imperative to understanding the reality of HRM practice at operational level.

Previous research (for example Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tamkin et al 1997; Tomlinson et al 1997) has found that multiple store retailers are most likely to devolve responsibility for HRM as far down the line as possible. This would suggest that the role of any manager at store level demands significant HR skills, for which specialist

training would be required (Tomlinson et al 1997). Store level managers at Superco did indeed have substantial responsibility for the management of human resources, much of which was devolved to the lowest level of management. Section Managers were responsible for local employee resourcing decisions, such as recruitment and selection, on the job training, staff scheduling, and the delegation of tasks (see also Hutchinson 1995; Maund 2001; Mullins 1999). The centralisation of control, evident in multiple store retailing, has led to a focus for store level managers on managing the store's workforce, and this remains their one area of relative autonomy (Sparks 2000b).

Section Managers had responsibility for nearly all the recruitment and selection of new staff. They determined the vacancy, conducted the short listing, interviewing, and final selection of candidates, although confined to head office budgets. Section Managers submitted a vacancy request which the General Manager would accept or reject according to the budget position. Store level Personnel Managers would assist with placing the vacancy advertisement, and the initial shortlisting of candidates via their application forms. They would only become involved in interviews for hourly paid sales assistants if specifically requested by the requisite Section Manager.

Although each store had a Training Manager, Section Managers had day-to-day responsibility for the training and development of new staff. The store's Training Manager was responsible for delivering the 'First Class Service' training packages devised by head office, as well as conducting a corporate induction programme for all new starters. However, once completed all on-the-job training was conducted at

Section level. Training was an area where tangible measurement and contribution to organisational success was difficult to measure. Therefore head office was unable to control training through measurement, and conceded responsibility for on-the-job training to store level. This is in contrast to Smith's (1988) findings where he found the content of training was set centrally to ensure consistency.

Responsibility for scheduling employees' working hours formed a large part of Section Managers' role:

"Section managers have responsibility for staff working hours because they are the ones who manage the employees." (Training Manager)
It was here that Section Managers had a higher degree of autonomy being responsible for deciding staffing hours for all their employees. The organisation of employees' working time has been found to have a significant impact on productivity, motivation and performance (Arrowsmith and Sisson 2000), thus highlighting the importance of this role.

The organisational restructuring in 1991 altered the role of store Personnel Managers. As a consequence they formed part of the senior management team, and so were required to act as Duty Managers for a significant proportion of their working week. Those individuals undertaking the role of Personnel Manager at the two case study stores had no personnel specific experience or qualifications. The role was perceived no differently to the other senior management roles. This scenario has the potential of undermining the importance of personnel-related activities at store level. Such demotion of personnel professionals in multiple store retailing is not uncommon (Howe 1992; Sparks 1992a, 1992b; Tomlinson et al 1997). This would suggest that store

level managers, particularly section managers, had a wide responsibility for the function of HR, particularly employee resourcing. The extent and execution of this responsibility will be examined in more detail in Section **8.8**.

8.6 THE CONSTRAINTS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

The objectives of this research study have been to examine the influence of line managers' choices and constraints on their management of human resources. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) pointed out, "making choices within parameters is central to the managerial role" (p.86). It is therefore important to consider the constraints of store level management in each case study organisation, and assess the impact of these limitations on local employee resourcing decisions. This is imperative given Kinnie's (1989) criticism that relatively little attention has been paid to changes in control systems and the impact of this on HRM.

As outlined in Chapter five, there are many methods of control that can be used to restrict the decision making powers of store level managers. These systems of control can either direct processes, or dictate output. Ways to achieve this in multiple store retailing include the implementation of corporate strategy, the design of the formal organisational structure, the setting of performance targets and budgets or the deployment of technology. According to Stewart (1982) corporate strategy determines the demands of a managers' job. Superco's competitive strategy was premised on a combination of cost minimisation and quality enhancement, as outlined in Section **8.3**. This impacted on store level operations in a number of ways, and informed Superco's control systems, as will be described in Sections **8.6.1** to **8.6.3**.

8.6.1 Organisational Structure and Management Hierarchy

The size and structure of an organisation can significantly influence the nature of its control systems (Child 1984; Mintzberg 1989; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Sparks 2000b; Smith 1988). Superco was a very large organisation, operating both in the UK and overseas. Its increase in size and market share was accompanied by a centralisation of control, supporting previous research findings (for example, Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Sparks 2000b; Smith 1988). This escalation of centralised control was driven by a need to make cost savings and ensure consistency throughout the stores:

“Superco has definitely become more professional over recent years. It has a clear customer service strategy, which has been effectively communicated to employees and customers alike, but is tightly managed by head office.”
(Section Manager)

This centralisation process is well described in current literature (for example Sparks 2000a), with many store management activities and functions being transferred to head office in multiple store retailing organisations.

There was evidence at Superco of a close monitoring and co-ordination of store activities, particularly through the use of budgets and technology (as discussed in Sections **8.6.2** and **8.6.3**). Head office controlled store operations through the formulation of strategy, imposing directives and systems that monitored store performance, thus defining the limits for store level managers. There were some aspects of store operations where head office maintained complete control in the decision-making process, such as a stores' opening hours. Another centralised process was the management of stock with head office taking control of ordering and pricing. The structure of stores was also determined by head office management, including the

re-structuring initiative of 1991. It became clear that the day-to-day management of employees and customer service were the only functional areas in which store level managers had some degree of autonomy and could impose their individual management styles, with a more significant input into the decision-making processes. The reduction in the decision-making responsibilities of store level managers led to local managers occupying a low position in the multiple chain of command in multiple store retailing organisations (Broadbridge 1998; Doogan 1992; Smith 1988).

Superco demonstrated characteristics of Mintzberg's (1989) 'machine' configuration in deploying rational processes of management control over its operations. These elements of control emphasise the machine nature of Superco, with cost minimisation, and the standardisation of work processes, key features of its control systems. As Stewart (1991) commented retail chain stores commonly exercise control by standardisation and specialisation. Subsequently, store level managers have a degree of autonomy, but within defined limits set by head office. This concurs with Smith's (1988) conclusions that the majority of multiple store retailers, particularly in the grocery sector, can be described as 'machine bureaucracies', using Mintzberg's (1989) organisational typologies. This will be further examined in Sections **8.6.2** and **8.6.3**, when the use of budgets and technology, to constrain store level managers' decision making powers, is considered.

Managers at head office were very detached from the realities of store operations, and so relied on information from management information systems to make decisions, and

maintain control. This problem of detachment was acknowledged by the Retail

Personnel and Training Director:

“Head office is very remote and distant from the stores and this link needs to be improved.”

Mintzberg (1989) put forward a typology of levels and corresponding management styles, which closely matched Superco. At the top of Superco's management hierarchy the 'thinnest' management approach was evident with managing by information the predominant method of control. This passive role of management was criticised by Mintzberg as merely a reviewing role with an emphasis on delegation and authorisation. This accords with head office managers at Superco who often stayed in their offices and used their authority to dictate bottom-line performance. Meanwhile Senior Store Management managed both through people and by information. Section Managers were both managing action and through people at the 'thickest' point of the management hierarchy. They held a leading role for their staff, particularly at group and individual level. However, they were also deeply involved in the management of their section's activities, continuing to do the regular work of General Assistants. This exacerbated the degree of 'thin' management at head office as they were unaware of the realities of store operations which provoked a divergence between head office and store level managers. Such an absence of mutuality was highlighted by Rawson (1997) when he talked of the divide between senior and middle managers.

A dichotomy between management hierarchies was also apparent at store level. There appeared to be a higher level of respect and loyalty for head office and their directives from Senior Store Managers, than Section Managers. Senior Store Managers saw the achievement of head office demands as the key to their own personal career

progression. As Walters and Hanrahan (2000) found, store managers are often measured against budgetary performance despite having very little control over major expenses. This accords with Legge's (2000) conclusions that management seek ways to demonstrate loyalty and commitment in the hope of "improving their chances of achieving the diminished prospect of promotion" (p.51). Conversely, Section Managers were more critical of head office and its lack of understanding of store operations. It was at the level of Section Manager where the realities of enhanced service and efficiency drives were most acutely felt. They had to transact head office customer service and productivity initiatives to their staff on a day-to-day basis while faced with the reality of managing their departments for longer opening hours without supervisory support. While they held significant responsibilities, particularly regarding local employee resourcing, they were not afforded the perks of senior management, but worked mainly on the shop-floor alongside the hourly paid sales assistants. They seemed to relate more closely with the level of General Assistant than senior store management. This was exacerbated by the fact that many were promoted from the level of General Assistant, particularly as an increasing number of Senior-Store Managers were direct entry graduate trainees.

It can be seen that the formal organisational structure and increasing centralisation of control had a significant impact on the constraints of store level managers. This was intensified by the divergence between head office and stores, resulting in 'thick' and 'thin' management styles.

8.6.2 Budgetary Control

A key aspect of Superco's corporate strategy was cost minimisation. The company promised its customers low prices, and its shareholders high returns on their investment. As outlined in the literature (for example Mintzberg 1983, 1989; Mullins 1999; Piper 1980; Stewart 1999) bureaucratic organisations commonly use accounting control systems, setting easily identifiable performance levels such as sales, costs and profits. Managers at store level were acutely aware of the cost-cutting mechanisms and productivity initiatives imposed by head office.

The biggest constraint placed on store operations by head office was the imposition of budgets and performance targets. These were a tangible method of control, and easily measurable, publicly defining store level managers' limits (Stewart 1991). Budgets allowed head office to maintain a significant element of control over stores.

Armstrong (1989) and Kinnie (1989) outlined this dominance of accountancy-driven managerial control systems in UK businesses, with retail head offices increasingly controlling stores through financial management systems. Store level managers were responsible for delivering performance targets within the constraints of increasing budgetary pressures.

The increasing demands made on the operational level at Superco were attributed to the need to maintain the company's position as market leader in the face of ever-increasing competition:

"The company has become more ruthless. Their reputation has improved dramatically and they are fighting to keep the Number 1 retailer spot. They are forever devising new ways to cut costs in order to stay there, although they have diverted some of these savings towards improved customer service."
(Produce Manager)

One example of this was the management of extended store opening hours. In order to make cost-savings the longer opening hours imposed by head office were claimed by store level managers to be accompanied by a decrease in budgets for staffing:

“The budget has been cut by 12% this year even though we’re opening for longer than we ever have before.” (General Manager)

Superco appeared to be more concerned with cutting the tangible costs of labour than employee welfare, a trend also identified in previous research (for example, Burnes 2000; Legge 1995; Mintzberg 1989; Sisson 1994). The impact of the productivity initiatives described in the company’s Annual Report were clearly evident at store level. Employees were expected to work at higher rates of efficiency in order for head office to continue the trend of reducing wage costs as a percentage of sales. This highlights the ‘thin’ nature of management at head office, detached from the realities of store operations, believing that the efficiency drives did not negatively impact on employees’ working lives. In addition to this, the Retail Personnel and Training Director stressed the importance of ensuring any job cuts did not result in an increased workload for remaining staff (see Section 8.5). However, this was disputed by managers at store level, who believed workloads had increased significantly over recent years:

“The company expects more from its employees to improve customer service and beat off the competition, but they are confined to the same budgets so we just have to work harder.” (Provisions Manager)

Marginson et al (1993) found that the increasing emphasis placed on financial disciplines, as a form of control, encouraged employees to identify a direct link between achieving financial targets and future employment security. This accords with Goold and Campbell’s (1987) financial control model of management, in which control

is exercised through the tight monitoring of performance and achievement of cost targets. This was apparent at Superco where the main control system exerted by Head office was financial and store level managers placed their priority on keeping within budgets, however difficult and constraining this made their management tasks.

Financial control systems were also extended to the management of human resources at store level. Where labour could be quantified head office set budgets and targets restricting store level managers' autonomy in managing the workforce. The amount of labour a store could deploy was determined by head office. A non-conformance team from head office visited stores and allocated a staffing allowance to each section. Hence, the ability of store level managers to resource their sections was controlled by head office. This approach was particularly consistent with 'harder' versions of HRM where attempts are made to measure human resources, as also found by Legge (1995) and Storey (1992). This led store level managers to place their priorities on achieving budgets and performance targets with the consequence of making the management of human resources very difficult for store level managers:

"When the department is run so tightly there is no leeway. This makes it really tough during the holiday season when people are away and there's little money to pay for overtime." (Bakery Manager)

It is apparent that where human resources were quantifiable head office at Superco maintained the greatest control. As a result store level managers focused their efforts on the achievement of financial targets and an emphasis on 'hard' HRM.

8.6.3 The Use of Technology

Multiple store retailers have been found to use technology to standardise the retail process and make cost savings (Tordjman 1994; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). The

impact of this new technology has been a further centralisation of control, transferring power from stores to head office (Child 1984; Houlton and Thomas 1990; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Lloyd and Rawlinson 1992; Ogbonna 1992; Smith 1988). The consequences of this for store level management at Superco was explored during the interviews.

In Superco, advances in technology, especially the Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS), enabled head office to increasingly centralise store level functions, as predicted by previous research (Child 1984; Houlton and Thomas 1990; Ogbonna 1992; Smith 1988). Those elements of customer service that were quantifiable, were subject to standardisation of output through performance targets, measured using technology. The 'First Class Service' initiative placed greater demands on stores particularly the 'One-in-Front' pledge. This quantification of customer service standards enabled head office to exploit technology to measure store performance in achieving this target. When prompted by the system, cashiers were expected to manually input the number of customers queuing at their checkout. Using this data, regional 'league tables' were produced publicising the performance achievements of each store. This use of technology to compare performance across organisations was noted by Lusch and Dunne (1990). Brockbank and Airey (1994b) argued that this encouraged career-conscious retail managers to present only evidence of effective performance to managers. Store level managers had to use these 'One-In-Front' league tables to adjust staffing schedules, to ensure Superco's commitment to its customers was being met. This impacted on employee working hours as stores struggled to meet this increased demand for improved customer service:

"We had to change employees' hours last June and we had a nightmare, an absolute nightmare. The store had a very bad history of service levels and it involved talking to people to change their hours in order to provide a better standard of customer service. All the changes were agreed amicably with the changes affecting approximately 120 employees in all." (Customer Service Manager)

This concurs with Mintzberg's (1989) concern that efficiency drives often lead to a disregard for 'social benefits', such as quality of working life. Here employees' working hours were changed in order to provide the tangible features of customer service. These performance targets were more readily measurable, via technology, and thus of more importance to 'thin' managers at head office.

Much has been written in the literature about the role of EPOS in multiple store retailing. Many (for example, Deery and Mahoney 1994; Freathy and Sparks 1994; Sparks 1987, 2000b; Tomlinson et al 1997) argue that EPOS enables retailers to match working time more closely and produce integrated staff scheduling systems. However, at the time of the research (1996) Superco was only beginning to pilot a computerised scheduling system for Checkouts. This does however demonstrate further attempts by head office to increase its control of store operations, making use of advancements in technology. It was an area where 'thin' managers at head office identified an opportunity to further centralise store operations, and quantify the use of labour. This removal of store level responsibilities to central control, as a result of improved technology, was also found by Ogbonna (1992), and supports Braverman's (1974) de-skilling thesis.

Superco's head office was primarily concerned with the measurable or 'hard' aspects of HRM, namely labour costs. Technology was increasing the ability to regulate the

use of labour at store level. This adheres to Mintzberg's 'machine' configuration, with the technostructure playing an increasingly important role in the organisation's structure, and fulfils Gershuny's (1987) and, Rajan's (1987), prediction that demand for technology in the retail industry will significantly increase.

8.7 STORE LEVEL MANAGERS' AUTONOMY

Although Superco can be described as a machine bureaucracy, its geographical dispersion meant it also displayed characteristics of Mintzberg's (1989) diversified organisation. Multiple store retailers necessarily require a degree of decentralisation arising from their size and the geographical dispersion of stores (Child 1984; Mullins 1999; Stewart 1999). This can give rise to areas of autonomy for local managers, particularly those at senior store management level. The extent of autonomy for store level managers at Superco was dependent upon the degree of formal decentralisation within the formal organisational structure. It also became clear that store level managers were manipulating their areas of autonomy to try and maintain independence from head office control.

A major cause of tension at Superco, between managers at store level and those at head office, was the degree of centralisation. This is a typical feature of Mintzberg's diversified organisation. Head office exerted a considerable influence on its stores through its corporate strategy and resulting policies. It thus conceded to Mintzberg's diversified structure by controlling the performance of stores through the standardisation of outputs. This corresponds with Freathy and Sparks's (1994) conclusions that control in multiple store retailing is maintained at head office, while

the responsibility for meeting targets rests at store level. The standardisation of outputs as a control system at Superco meant that once these targets were met, there was less intervention from head office in other aspects of store operations - another feature of Mintzberg's diversified configuration.

Store level managers held the greatest degree of autonomy in those components of store operations difficult for head office to quantify and measure. As Emmanuel et al (1990) highlighted, HRM is very difficult to measure in quantitative terms, which negates control using the standardisation of outputs methods. Instead a standardisation of work content might be employed as the control system for HRM and employee resourcing (Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1983). Senior store level managers considered there to be little interference from head office in the day-to-day management of a store, provided the store met its projected targets, within the confines of its budget:

“As long as we meet the targets set by head office, and keep within our budgets, they don't really bother us too much.” (Trading Manager)

It was largely human resource management where store level managers had least intervention from head office, namely local employee resourcing decisions, such as recruitment and selection, on-the-job training, staff scheduling and the delegation of tasks (see Section 8.5). This devolution of human resources to line managers was also found by Neathey and Hurstfield (1995), and Tomlinson et al (1997), in their studies of the retail industry. However, where human resources were quantifiable head office controlled their management via standardisation of outputs. Control was exercised by monitoring store results based on clearly defined performance standards. Mintzberg

(1989) argued that the influence of a head office in a 'diversified' typology eventually drives that organisation towards the 'machine' configuration, which results in an incomplete form of divisionalisation.

8.8 STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE

The previous sections of this chapter have described the degree of constraints and choices of store level management at Superco, which emanate from the formal organisational structure, and the balance between centralisation and decentralisation within this structure. During the interviews it became clear that store level managers did not always readily accept the increasing centralisation of their responsibilities. They also did not necessarily share, nor execute, the goals of Superco's corporate strategy. Existing literature already suggests that the formation of strategy and policy does not necessarily indicate successful implementation without resistance from employees (Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1989; Tamkin et al 1997). This section will describe the nature of store level management resistance to Superco's control systems and centralisation of power.

As found in previous research (Heller 1997; Johnson 1987; Mintzberg 1989) a gap existed between Superco's corporate strategy and the reality of store operations. A dichotomy between head office managers and store level managers was evident. Not only did interpretation of corporate strategy differ between the written, public statements and the reality of store operations, but so too did head office expectations and understanding of store activities. This corroborates with Mintzberg's model of 'thick' and 'thin' management. It also supports Johnson's (1987 in Blyton and

Turnbull 1992:35) claim that “business strategy is not a rational phenomenon”, but subject to managers’ interpretation according to their own frames of reference. This often results in changes to strategic intent as it progresses through the organisational hierarchy. Examples from the case organisation will illustrate this phenomenon.

The difference between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy was visible at Superco. This was recognised by Mintzberg (1989) when he spoke of the problems implementing strategy where:

“even if expressed intentions exist to what extent do other people in the organisation share them?” (p.29)

Store level managers did not necessarily hold the same strategic vision as head office.

It was at the operational level where the realities of implementing head office directives were most acutely felt. This widened the dichotomy between head office and store level managers as well as between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy.

Despite the commitment of head office to ‘First Class Service’ the reality at store level was sometimes very different. The introduction of Customer Service Assistants in all stores to help customers at every point of their shopping trip such as packing bags and loading cars, was one example. Head office believed Customer Service Assistants enhanced customer service provision, whereas store level managers viewed them as an extravagance, to be suspended during peak trading, or staff shortages. Customer Service Assistants were often seconded onto other sections, and so did not always provide the additional service expected of them. As illustrated by the quote below, when a vacancy arose within the store, if the budget position was tight, a Customer

Service Assistant would cover the vacancy, thus leaving a gap in the customer service provision:

“I was given the option of a Customer Service Assistant when a vacancy in my department arose. While we’re not supposed to use them on Sections, when the General Manager is trying to control budgets it happens.” (Produce Manager)

Consequently, while head office believed these staff were providing a premium level of service to customers, the reality at store level was that their deployment to provide this service was minimal. This meant that the company was not always delivering its promise of ‘First Class customer service’. This supports Mintzberg’s (1989) proposition that initiatives are often formulated by senior managers, with little knowledge of operational level pressures, while implementation is left to lower level managers, who know the initiatives cannot work. This problem was apparent at Superco where the company’s customer service promises were not always delivered at store level, due to budgetary constraints imposed by head office.

Equal opportunities was one aspect of Superco’s employment policy that was clearly articulated in written format:

“The group’s selection, training, development and promotion policies ensure equal opportunities for all employees regardless of gender, marital status, race, age or disability. All decisions are based on merit.” (Annual Report 1996:33). Despite such a commitment to equal opportunities, this was often undermined by store level managers responsible for local employee resourcing. At local level there was evidence of gendered occupational segregation with selection decisions based on managers’ stereotypes, and the segregation of workers according to personal circumstances. Previous research has also found that managers have very distinct notions of segmentation in the labour supply (for example, Beechey and Perkins 1987;

Burchell and Rubery 1990, 1994; Collinson et al 1990; Hunter and MacInnes 1991, Hunter et al 1993).

Gender assumptions played an important role in determining the suitability of employees for jobs in the retail industry, as found in previous research (Bradley 1989; MacEwan Scott 1994; Tomlinson et al 1997). Store level managers at Superco assumed that certain jobs and departments tended to be more suitable for men or women. In the Produce Section of both stores the work was perceived as:

“heavy work - carrying sacks of potatoes etc.” (Produce Manager)

This led to it being deemed a ‘masculine’ department, employing male staff. This was despite Lewisham’s Fresh Foods Trading Manager acknowledging that the physical demands of a job in the produce department were actually minimal:

“ While there are heavy pallets of produce to manoeuvre it’s not really much different to any other shop floor section. We have machinery to help with the heavy lifting, which actually makes the physical demands of the job fairly insignificant.”

Skill requirements of a job linked to the traditional perceptions of male work were also evident. The meat and bakery departments were deemed as skilled and traditionally male jobs, while sections such as checkouts and delicatessen were viewed as more suitable for female employees:

“There is very much a gender bias in the stores, for example meat and bakery are skilled and traditionally male jobs and so the idea is that you must employ a man.” (Fresh Foods Trading Manager)

Store level managers further applied their own stereotypes and perceptions to both potential and existing employees. This again had a significant impact on their employee resourcing decisions, which often undermined head office policy.

Distinctions were made between part timers and full timers. A large proportion of store level managers regarded part timers as less reliable and committed to their work than full timers due to their shorter working hours:

“Part timers are less trustworthy - they have less accountability as they are on the tills for shorter periods of time and there are more of them so they can easily blame the previous operator for any discrepancies.” (Customer Services Manager)

Another problem with commitment and reliability was the notion that part timers had too many other ‘distractions’ such as family, study, or second job commitments, which meant their work at Superco was not an essential source of income:

“Part timers only work for the money - the majority of part timers are young and without much discipline.” (Provisions Manager)

Distinctions were also made between the loyalty and value of different types of part timers, in terms of ‘life-cycle’ position. Older part timers were perceived as more reliable, offering the company a high level of commitment, and some numerical flexibility. The least flexible type of employee was cited as the working mother whose family commitments restricted their work life:

“They are constrained by children and husbands so can’t give so much to their job” (Fresh Foods Manager)

Younger part timers, usually students, were regarded as offering a high level of numerical flexibility, through being able to work additional hours and change shifts at short notice. However they were perceived as only working for “beer money”, which was believed to reduce their commitment and reliability. These perceptions were at variance with the company’s statement on equal opportunities and confirms the influence of managers’ stereotypes and perceptions. The findings of this research study endorse Dickens’ (2000) conclusions, that an equal opportunities policy does not necessarily alter employees’ behaviour and line managers are often the major site of

resistance. It demonstrates how ‘thick’ managers at head office, devised equal opportunity policy, unaware that many store level managers consistently undermined their initiatives.

Knowledge and execution of Superco’s employment policies at store level also varied in the deployment of labour. The recent head office policy of increasing the number of full timers vis a vis part time employees (see Section 8.5), was scarcely implemented by store level managers. Some senior managers at the stores acknowledged the changing approach to labour deployment:

“Superco now views employees as a resource to gain commitment from rather than as a commodity as they were ten years ago. Then the emphasis was on part time employment and cost considerations.” (General Manager)
Conversely, the majority of store level managers seemed unaware of this initiative, and were continuing to employ large numbers of part timers, believing this to be head office policy:

“The company is now looking towards employing more part timers.” (Ambient Section Manager)
This again demonstrates a poor execution of Superco’s employment goals and associated policies. This was the result of store level managers consciously, or unconsciously, undermining company policy.

Where head office attempted to increase demands and centralise store operations this was met with covert opposition from store level managers. This demonstrated further characteristics of Mintzberg’s diversified organisation with store level managers exerting a pull to ‘balkanise’ the structure and increase their independence from head office. They appeared to be opposing the rational, authoritarian management style

practised by head office. A number of examples of these strategies of independence were found at store level.

The main control mechanism in place at Superco was budgetary. However, as was noted by Berry et al (1995), accounting systems can be subject to manipulation from those whose behaviour it is supposed to control. During 1996 the Surrey Quays store was experiencing budgetary problems. Recruitment needs were driven entirely by budgets set at head office. The wage budget position was the key indicator at Superco as to whether there were the financial resources to recruit. In order to keep the budget under control the General Manager at Surrey Quays made a decision to freeze recruitment in order to reduce costs:

"Surrey Quays is a strange animal when it comes to recruitment. Recruitment is financially controlled so you look at the wages cost and look ahead to the budget squeeze and so you don't recruit. Then there is a desperate shortage of employees and so there is a mad rush to recruit." (Training Manager, Surrey Quays)

This recruitment freeze meant Section Managers were not granted permission to recruit new staff and instead had to rely on part timers to work additional hours (hours worked over their weekly contracted maximum, but paid at normal rate) to resource staff shortages:

"At Surrey Quays there is a budget problem and so we are not replacing leavers, but are using part timers' overtime as a short term option, until the budget comes back under control." (Ambient Trading Manager, Surrey Quays)

This ability to increase part timers' weekly hours without incurring premium rate overtime costs is said to be one of the most attractive features of their deployment (Dickens 1992, 1995; Gregory 1991; Robinson 1990; Walsh 1990, 1991).

The cost minimisation initiatives outlined in Superco's corporate strategy were interpreted by many store level managers as a requirement to employ part time employees, not full timers. Part timers were considered to be a cheaper form of labour and the solution to head office's efforts to reduce labour costs as a percentage of sales:

"More flexibility is now demanded by the company because flexible employees are cheaper. We've always had flexible workers, but budgets are becoming increasingly important higher up and cuts are occurring throughout the company." (Produce Manager)

Also, neither of the case study stores made use of the minimum hours contract, with managers seemingly unaware of its existence. Therefore its use and effectiveness could not be measured through this research. The ad hoc, operational responses to Superco's efficiency initiative witnessed at the two case study stores, concurs with previous research, which has found an association between cost minimisation and the employment of non-standard workers (Blyton and Morris 1992; Brewster et al 1993; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; O'Reilly 1994). This is in conflict with head office policy to increase the number of full timers to improve workforce stability to deliver a high quality of customer service.

Such contradictions between head office and local managers reinforces Mintzberg's notions of 'thick' and 'thin' management in operation at Superco. 'Thick' management at head office, formulated an employee resourcing policy to increase the proportion of full timers, when the reality of tight budgets made it impractical to implement. As Hunter et al (1993) found, the main explanation for employers' use of non-standard contracts was the presence of "immediate business needs" (p.396). With budgets and performance targets closely monitored at Superco, store level managers placed their priorities here, which equated to the employment of non-standard

workers. The priority of store level managers was to keep within budgets and targets ensuring a picture of competent store management was provided to head office. This was despite the impediment it placed on Section Managers, and the work intensification it inflicted on employees. This supports Armstrong's (1989) belief that when line management performance is evaluated and rewarded in budgetary terms, it turns the management of human resources "into an instrument for the achievement of short-term accounting targets" (p.164). The behaviour of store level managers was skewed because they emphasised the economic targets set by head office. They subsequently placed a lower priority on those management activities not measured by head office, as also found by Marginson et al (1993).

The strategies of independence deployed by local managers undermined head office policy, but were never questioned by head office because both stores achieved their prescribed budgets and targets. It demonstrates the detrimental impact a short-term perspective can have on employees, as has been outlined in existing literature (Blyton and Morris 1992; Burnes 2000; Mintzberg 1989; Sisson 1994). Store level managers at Superco were keen to implement a "quick fix" (Mintzberg 1989:357) to rectify the problems meeting budgets, in preference to disclosing the reality to head office. It illustrates the problems of 'incomplete divisionalisation' where division managers become heavily influenced by head office management's 'thin' directives, to the detriment of intangible benefits. This endorses Mintzberg's (1989) criticism of "incomplete divisionalisation" where managers "feel the gaze from above; they thus get distracted from time to time" (p.355).

In addition to budget setting, another area where store level managers had less formal control was in the organisational structure of stores. Managers at head office believed that restructuring was integral to the company's success. As previously discussed, the store management hierarchy had been reduced to two layers with the removal of Assistant Store Managers and Assistant Section Managers. Section Managers believed this caused a direct increase in their workload and responsibility, compounded by longer opening hours. Such consequences of de-layering were also identified by Gretton (1993), Legge (2000), and Sparrow (1998). Section Managers at Superco responded to these pressures by informally appointing a 'deputy' from their staff. This 'deputy' was usually an experienced, full time employee who would undertake minor management responsibilities and supervise the department when the Section Manager was absent, although they did not receive any increase in salary or job title to reflect these additional responsibilities. It was seen as an informal "developmental opportunity" (Ambient Manager) for employees considered by Section Managers to have management potential. At the same time Section Managers recognised the difficulty of this informal delegation of responsibility, over any long period of time, due to the process being unofficial:

"There is no extra money for anyone taking on additional responsibility so people are reluctant to do it for any length of time." (Produce Manager)

It was the informality of these 'deputies' that enabled store level managers' personal preferences to play an important role in determining which employees were selected. With head office unaware of the practice, this had both equal opportunity and staff development implications. This illustrates how Section Managers manipulated the

store structure to alleviate the pressures of managing their staff, at a time of increasing workload.

While store level managers manipulated budgets, doubts were also placed on stores' genuine achievement of customer service performance targets. The validity of 'One-in-front' league tables was placed in doubt by staff at the Lewisham store. Their region's league table was headed by the Surrey Quays store. Staff at Lewisham doubted the honesty with which cashiers at Surrey Quays inputted their queue length data:

“The Surrey Quays store must cheat to get a queue length consistently at one customer.” (Checkouts Manager, Lewisham)

Although this accusation (not surprisingly) was never confirmed by staff at the Surrey Quays store, it underlines the competitive nature of Superco, both with other retailers, but also between stores and regions within the organisation. Meeting budgets and targets was a key performance measurement. Therefore it could be possible that managers employed devious methods, to excel in these league tables of performance and gain credibility with head office. This was particularly so with the Surrey Quays store, considered to be the region's 'flagship' store. At this store there was greater pressure to perform well, and so managers could be more likely to “look up” (Mintzberg 1989:355) to head office's requirements, and conform to its tangible output control systems, by whatever methods were required to do so.

These examples highlight the strategies store level managers deployed to covertly contravene head office policy and intentions. Where possible they constructed situations which enabled them to best adapt to the constraints being placed on them by

head office and devised various tactics to ensure a facade of effective store management was depicted. Where head office directives were considered to be impractical store level managers devised methods to overcome the difficulties associated with them, all of which were intentionally unbeknown to head office.

8.9 DISCUSSION

This case study research has demonstrated the realities of local HRM and employee resourcing in a multiple retailing organisation. These include a divergence between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy, the degree of head office control over store operations, the increasing centralisation of store level tasks and the strategies of independence deployed by operational managers to undermine this control, and make the output control systems work.

Using Mintzberg's (1989) classification of organisations, Superco could be defined as a predominately 'machine' configuration. Head office made increasing attempts to control and centralise store operations making use of output control systems. It was the quantifiable components of store management which were subject to increased control and monitoring, a focus typical of 'machine' organisations with their emphasis on efficiency.

This research found a dichotomy between espoused strategy and the operational realities, as identified by Mintzberg (1989) and Heller (1997). The company's productivity initiatives and efficiency drive meant the 'needs of the business' took priority over the needs of employees. Budgets and targets set by head office guided

most management decisions taken at store level. The company's claim to provide a premium level of customer service was undermined by the actions of store level managers. Where budgets had to be met standards of customer service would be forfeited, and the quality of employees' working life sacrificed, in order to meet the tight financial requirements, without head office's knowledge. This was despite the apparent 'soft' HRM approach espoused by head office management and company literature. The reality of corporate strategy was work intensification, re-structuring, longer opening hours, budget cuts, additional service demands and increasing centralisation. This accords with the division of management in organisations referred to by Mintzberg (1989). 'Thin' management was in operation at head office where strategy was formulated, while 'thick' managers at store level juggled the realities of implementing these strategies. Managers and employees at store level did not necessarily hold the same strategic vision as head office. These differences between senior head office and store level managers were clear, leading to the disparities presented in this case study. Superco illustrates the dangers of 'thin' management as outlined by Mintzberg (1989), with a widening dichotomy between head office and store level managers as well as between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy.

Head office at Superco managed principally by information systems (Mintzberg 1999) to control store operations. Mintzberg argues that the reliance of 'thin managers' on management information systems means that information can be skewed as it is channelled through the various organisational level. This provided the opportunity for good news to be highlighted while bad news was blocked, in evidence at Superco where stores contrived the information, particularly the bad news, that was provided to

head office. Through detached management, both geographically and hierarchically, head office at Superco received an incomplete reality of store operations due to the dichotomies between themselves and the operational level.

Another feature of Superco, which was characteristic of Mintzberg's 'machine' configuration, was the increased centralisation of store level managers' responsibilities. This led to a loss of responsibility for those managers over various areas of work, such as stock ordering. Head office were striving towards increasing their control over stores using improved technical systems and regulation, as also found by Ogbonna (1992). It was those aspects of store operations that were quantifiable, tangible and thus measurable where store level managers were subject to greater centralisation and constraints in their decision-making powers. This set the boundaries of store level managers' autonomy, as discussed by Stewart (1999).

Despite a strong tendency towards the 'machine' configuration, Superco was structured along a regional basis which gave rise to some characteristics of Mintzberg's divisionalised configuration. Some managerial responsibilities were maintained at store level. The majority of local employee resourcing decisions were delegated to the lowest management level, with relative degrees of autonomy in this area. These were more difficult to quantify and bring under head office control and included recruitment and selection of new staff, on-the-job training, staff scheduling, employee appraisal and the organisation of tasks and responsibilities.

While head office made increasing demands on store level managers with accompanying centralisation, local managers responded by developing techniques to maintain their autonomy and circumvent head office control. This was evident throughout the management hierarchy as managers were concerned to ensure an image of competent management was displayed to their superiors. Senior store managers, particularly General Managers, were keen to adhere to head office's rational model of management and be seen to comply with the requirements placed on their store. Elaborate efforts were made to maintain independence from head office as well as ensuring competent management was exhibited. The information provided to head office was manipulated in order to give the impression that the store was operating within its prescribed budgets and targets. General Managers were in effect providing a facade of meeting head office's demands. This was in contrast to Sayles' (1999) claim that middle managers actually play a key role in highlighting problems to senior management.

In deploying these strategies of independence, General Managers hoped to assure head office that the current autonomy trusted to them was well-founded and no further centralisation or interference by head office was necessary. It also enabled them to demonstrate effective and competent management skills to head office, who were responsible for determining their career advancement. Sayles (1999) found similar managers in his research:

“traditional middle managers who managed by results, massaged data..... and devoted their attention primarily to looking good and pleasing the boss They often appeared to be meeting their budgeted performance requirement”.
(p.602)

The manipulation of data appeared endemic across Superco, which meant the information received by head office was imperfect. This included the manipulation of budgets and performance targets, an unofficial recruitment freeze and the re-layering of store hierarchy.

The differences between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ (Mintzberg 1989) or ‘philosophical’ and ‘art’ (Duncan 1975) management have been clearly borne out in this research. Head office managers devised corporate strategy which store level managers interpreted and implemented within the operational context. Having detailed knowledge of store operations they were aware that some head office directives were unfeasible, but were reluctant to communicate this to head office. Instead they ‘rejigged’ (Sayles 1999) the systems where possible to fit with the constraints and demands of the shop-floor. Therefore it is argued that they predominately acted as “disturbance handlers” (Mintzberg 1989: 20) responding to the pressures and demands of head office.

The contradictory nature of Superco’s corporate strategy and the focus on quantifiable budgets and targets had a significant impact on the local management of human resources. With employee resourcing the main area of responsibility for store level managers, it was in this function where strategies of independence were more likely to be found. The use of output control systems meant a focus on tangible measurements throughout Superco. This focus on the measurable, particularly the accounting control system, meant that store level managers focused mainly on these issues in order to be seen to be satisfying head office demands. It skewed senior store managers’ decision-making towards the measurable as this was how their management ability was largely

judged by head office. This encouraged store level managers to focus on the ‘hard’ tangible areas of employee resourcing, often at the expense of company policy and any initiatives using ‘soft’ HRM tools. This resulted in recruitment freezes; the increased employment of part timers, particularly students; the alteration of employees’ working hours to accommodate customer service performance targets; the contravention of equal opportunity policy; and informal re-layering of the store management hierarchy (without the reward packages that previously existed). These practices were all enacted without head office consent or knowledge, but were possible due to the autonomy afforded to store level managers in local employee resourcing.

The findings of this research illustrate the dichotomies between the rhetoric and reality of organisational life as well as the divergence between managers at different levels in the organisation. It can be seen the store level managers acted predominately as “disturbance handlers” (Mintzberg 1989:20) adhering to Head Office demands within the local context. To achieve this they deployed various strategies of independence to ensure they satisfied the demands of Superco’s output control systems. These strategies of independence were found in the one remaining function yet to be fully centralised - employee resourcing. Consequently, employee resources were manipulated, sometimes in contravention of company policy, generally resulting in a ‘hard’ approach to HRM at store level.

This chapter has presented a discussion and analysis of the empirical data for the Superco case study. Background information providing a contextual perspective to the case study organisation and stores was given, before an examination of local

management constraints and autonomy. The existence of various strategies of independence were detailed, and subsequent conclusions drawn.

Chapter 9

THE GROCERYCO CASE STUDY

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical research conducted using the embedded case study method. The data gathered provides background information to the case study organisation, and outlines the nature of store level management and HRM in Groceryco. The chapter examines the choices and constraints of store level management, and the consequences of these for the management of human resources and employee resourcing.

9.1 BACKGROUND HISTORY

Groceryco operates in the multiple food retail sector and was one of the leading supermarket retailers in the UK at the time of this research (1996). In 1996 it had 370 stores, an annual turnover of £6.5 billion, and a profit of £401 million. Groceryco held the third largest market share of the food retailing sector in 1996.

Each Groceryco store was managed by a Store Manager who was supported by a Senior Management Team. Stores had four senior managers responsible for Replenishment, Human Resources, Support Services and Customer Services. Under this Senior Management Team came responsibility for Sections which were managed by Controllers. The quantity of Controllers in each store was determined by store size, turnover, number of employees and the variety of services offered. Some stores provided additional services such as a petrol station, post office, dry cleaners, a crèche, and cafe. Dependent upon the size of the store there was a further supervisory level

termed Assistant Controllers, who would deputise for Controllers (see appendix 10 for store structure).

9.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE CASE STUDY STORES

As outlined in Section 6.4, two embedded units were selected for each case study organisation. These embedded units took the form of stores which were selected by the Regional Human Resources Manager. They were selected to enable a comparison between a newly opened superstore (Camden) and an older, smaller store (Blackfen).

9.2.1 The Blackfen Store

This store had been operating for approximately 30 years, and is based in North West Kent. The Store Manager had been at the store for six years, having previously managed the Gravesend store. In 1995 the store's opening hours were increased from 67 to 78 hours a week, from 08.00 to 20.00 hours, Monday to Saturday, and 10.00 to 16.00 hours, on Sundays.

As can be seen from Table eight, the store employed 117 employees of which 79 (68 per cent) worked part time. Just over half (51 per cent) of the workforce were female, with the majority of part timers (63 per cent) being female, and the majority of women (83 per cent) working part time.

Table 8: Workforce composition of the Blackfen store

	Full time	Part time	Total
Male	28 (23.9%)	29 (24.8%)	57 (48.7%)
Female	10 (8.6%)	50 (42.7%)	60 (51.3%)
Total	38 (32.5%)	79 (67.5%)	117 (100.0%)

The store had four departments and six sections. This equated to five Senior Managers (including the Store Manager), and seven Controllers. The largest department was Checkouts with 48 employees, and the highest proportion of female and part time employees.

9.2.2 The Camden Store

This store was opened in February 1995 and based in Camden, North London. The Store Manager had been at the store since its opening, having previously managed the Wood Green store. The store opened for 88.5 hours a week from 08.30 to 22.00 hours Monday to Wednesday; 08.00 to 22.00 hours Thursday to Saturday; and 10.00 to 16.00 on Sundays. There had been no change to the store's operating hours since its opening in 1995.

As can be seen from Table nine the store employed 260 workers of which 185 (71 per cent) worked part time. Just over half (57 per cent) of the workforce were female, with the majority of part timers being female (69 per cent), and the majority of women (88 per cent) working part time.

Table 9: Workforce composition of the Camden store

	Full time	Part time	Total
Male	57 (21.9%)	57 (21.9%)	114 (43.8%)
Female	18 (6.9%)	128 (49.3%)	146 (56.2%)
Total	75 (28.8%)	185 (71.2%)	260 (100%)

The Camden store had four Departments and eight Sections. This equated to five Senior Managers (including the Store Manager), and ten Controllers (The Checkouts Section had three full time and 1 part time Controller). As the Camden store was larger than Blackfen it had a greater number of Sections and Controllers. As in the Blackfen store, the largest Department was Customer Services accounting for 146 workers, with the largest proportion of female and part time employees.

The chapter from here onwards will be a comparison of the two case study stores, using the empirical data gathered between March 1996 and November 1996. This information was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with managers, at both head office and store level, and an examination of company literature, as outlined in chapter seven.

9.3 CORPORATE STRATEGY: A BRIEF OUTLINE

The main objective of Groceryco's corporate strategy was to create a distinct culture that differentiated the company from its competitors. Its aims were to be the first choice retailers for everyday food and household needs for the family, as well as being the most dynamic and innovative retailer in the food retailing sector. With this strategy

Groceryco anticipated it would increase shareholder value faster than its competitors through increased profits.

In 1993 a review of store operations was undertaken entitled 'Groceryco 2000'. The twin objectives of this review were to improve Groceryco's operating efficiency and marketing effectiveness. The retailing strategy of creating a culture to differentiate Groceryco from its competitors involved an apparent 'value-added' approach. This consisted of added service provisions in-store including a bakery, post office, dry cleaners, cafe, crèche, and petrol station in some stores, with a strong own-label presence and an attractive display of fresh produce. Groceryco also introduced customer panels to bring its links with customers closer to significantly improve its provision of high quality customer service - a key focus of its competitive strategy. Previous research has identified the importance of customer service in retail competitive strategies, which particularly gained prevalence during the 1990s (Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 2000; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Ruston 1999; Sparks 1992c). As Sparks (1992) predicted, customers will increasingly reject inadequate service provision, which will enforce multiple store retailers to continue to apply customer service as a key strategic tool.

Completion of the review and implementation of its recommendations were undertaken in 1994. The 'Groceryco 2000' project had a two year timetable and was completed late summer 1996. The programme consisted of three phases commencing with an initial examination of the strengths and weaknesses of Groceryco's business. Phase Two involved the implementation of 'Groceryco 2000', while Phase Three undertook

the change process necessary to ensure the new strategies were adopted and understood by the workforce. A key goal of 'Groceryco 2000' was improved sales performance, with a target to increase the company's average sales per square foot from £12.86 to £15.00 per week, within three years. In conjunction with this, a target of making £60 million cost savings was also made. Previous research confirms this emphasis on cost minimisation prevalent in retail strategy, particularly in the food retailing sector (Christopherson 1996; Freathy and Sparks 1997; Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1988; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999).

The new strategy for Groceryco became a focus on family shoppers. The rationale being that opportunities lay in meeting the needs of younger people as they begin to have families to give Groceryco access to a larger proportion of high spending customers, whilst concurrently instilling brand loyalty amongst the younger members of the family. This strategy involved a range of changes which were introduced progressively across the business to ensure that product ranges, price, customer service, store layout and design and marketing were accurately targeted at family shoppers.

The implementation stage of 'Groceryco 2000' involved a number of key focus areas including a review of the range and services offered. This was together with a more aggressive pricing policy, which included the introduction of a range of economy brands. More resources were devoted to marketing and the function was given a more prominent strategic role in the business, together with a review of promotional policies. Additions to the range of customer services provided were made, including

bag packers. Store design and layout was also improved through widening aisles, lowering shelving and making signage clearer. The entire business was re-designed to simplify decision making, improve cross-functional team working and introduce new technology. This involved the re-structuring of the store organisation structure and resulted in a significant reduction in numbers of management and staff in almost every area of the business in 1994. The re-organisation resulted in 3,500 employees leaving the company through redundancy or early retirement, and 9,500 employees having a different job by the end of 1994.

A review of the company's store and asset profile concluded that financial and management resources would be concentrated on only those stores which could fully deliver the new strategy, and that all non-core assets and business should be divested. In May 1995 twenty Groceryco stores were closed with an aggregate sales area of 285,000 square feet and the loss of a further 1,800 jobs, 270 of which were store managers taking early retirement.

Groceryco also introduced new forms of shopping including customer self-scanning in over 100 stores in the first year of 'Groceryco 2000's' implementation. This allowed customers to conduct the scanning of goods themselves whilst they were shopping and paying for the total at specially designated checkouts. Sales assistants were trained as 'QueueBusters' to help customers at peak shopping times. It was hoped that as customers made use of self-scanning so manpower from the checkouts would be freed up and deployed to wherever in the stores queues may be building up. Groceryco was

also the first supermarket chain to offer crèche facilities with 36 in operation by the end of 1996.

In 1996 Groceryco introduced a customer loyalty card with which shoppers could earn points to redeem against either cash discounts or to buy products in store. By the end of 1996 almost 4 million Groceryco customers owned a loyalty card. In 1997 the company moved into financial services with the launch of a household management account in a strategic alliance with a leading bank. This was subsequently extended to offer customers a broad range of financial services.

However the major problem about devising innovative strategy in the retail industry is the ease with which competitors can replicate strategy (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Walker 1992).

“In the food retailing sector, most attempts by any of the major players to gain a competitive advantage over the others are quickly copied or bettered.”
(Annual Report 1996:13)

This meant that the strategies of ‘Groceryco 2000’ were very similar to other initiatives in the food retailing sector. This ability to easily replicate competitors’ strategy is said to be perpetuated by the need for openness on issues of strategy and performance demanded of multiple retailers by their investors (Dawson 2000). This is evident when comparing Groceryco’s competitive strategy with that of Superco (see chapter eight), where cost minimisation, quality enhancement and innovation are all key features for both organisations’ strategic goals. This results in similar problems at Groceryco of apparently contradictory strategies in place at the same time (as in the Superco case study). The emphasis on cost minimisation and quality enhancement in multiple retailers’ strategies has been noted in the literature (Doogan 1992; Gardner

and Sheppard 1989; Lowe and Crewe 1996; Ogbonna 1992; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1996), with Gardner and Sheppard (1989) concluding that the current strategies of multiple store retailers are “at best flawed and at worse suspicious” (p.207). The consequences of these strategies for store level managers and local employee resourcing will be examined in Section 9.8.

9.4 THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

To fulfil this study’s research objectives the nature and characteristics of store level management at Groceryco was researched during the data-gathering period.

All management positions in the two Groceryco case study stores were full time, a feature of retail employment also found by Freathy and Sparks (2000). Management positions had always traditionally been full time and most managers considered part timers to be unsuitable for promotion, as also found by Hunter and MacInnes (1991) and Walsh (1990). Robinson (1990) revealed that retail employers emphasise perceived problems of promoting part timers, which has the affect of limiting promotion for part timers beyond a certain level (see also Tilly 1992). This was clear at Groceryco, where the company generally did not promote part time employees. The only exception to this was at Assistant Controller level where part timers were found to be working. However a part time supervisory position was only found at the Camden store and only in the Checkouts section, the largest section in the store. Promotion beyond the level of Assistant Checkout Controller generally required individuals to switch to full time employment. As the majority of the part time

workforce in both stores was women, their opportunities for progression through the company were severely hampered by the number of hours they worked.

The majority of management positions in both Groceryco case study stores were held by men. Defining a management position as any role between Store Manager and Assistant Controller 77 per cent of management positions in the Blackfen store, and 57 per cent in the Camden store were held by men. This was despite the majority of the workforce in both stores being female. Of the nine female managers in the Camden store six were located in the Customer Services Department. At senior management level the positions held by women included the Human Resources Manager in both stores and the Customer Services Manager in the Camden store. Women were therefore only in senior store management positions in occupations which were traditionally seen as 'female' and where a largely female workforce reported to them. This supports previous research findings that women are disproportionately represented within the lowest management and occupational grades in multiple store retailing (Broadbridge 1995, 1996, 1998; Collins 1990; Craig and Wilkinson 1985; Dawson et al 1987; Freathy 1993; Freathy and Sparks 2000; Hansard Society Commission 1990; Howe 1992; MacEwan Scott 1994; Sparks 1991, 1992a).

Store level managers at Groceryco had experienced significant change in the period prior to this research study as a result of organisational re-structuring. Stores became organised on a functional or process basis, rather than by product type as had happened prior to 1994:

"There are now process areas as opposed to section areas. It gives the skill in one process rather than just being multi-skilled in vegetables or dairy products." (Replenishment Manager)

The roles of assistant manager, department manager and supervisors were removed as part of a new strategy to improve efficiency. This de-layering at store level is a common theme across multiple store retailers, particularly in the superstore sector (Sparks 2000a, 2000b). Instead came the designation of a senior management team who supported the store manager in each of the following departments: replenishment, human resources, support services and customer services. The role of Department Manager was replaced with Controller and the role of Supervisor was either abolished completely or replaced with Assistant Controller, dependent upon the size of a store and its departments.

As part of the re-structuring process all store level managers (except Store Managers) and supervisors were required to apply for the newly created management positions. It was clear that the changes in store structure had implications for work responsibilities, and quality of working life, with many jobs completely changing as a result. The criteria on which employees had been traditionally promoted also changed:

"Stores are now structured on a functional basis and controllers are managers just as much as being good at the role. Previously the best baker was made manager; now it's the person with the best management skills." (Human Resources Manager)

The changes instigated by 'Groceryco 2000' led to low morale amongst store level managers who were expected to re-apply for the newly created management jobs. Many former Assistant Managers felt they had been demoted in terms of job status. Under the new structure they often worked alongside employees whom they had previously managed:

"I used to be an Assistant Manager, but am now on the same level as old Department Managers. I have more experience than them and so they tend to lean on me a little bit more." (Customer Services Manager)

This accords with previous research (Dopson and Stewart 1993; Holbeche 1994, 1995; Kettley 1995; Legge 2000) that has found employees often report reduced morale after de-layering and down-sizing, the major reason being reduced career development opportunities, and the downgrading of an employee's job (Ezzamel et al 1996; Holbeche 1995; Inkson and Cole 1994). At Groceryco the down-sizing and de-layering occurred at store level which, as Cameron et al (1991) also found, only exacerbated employees' perception that the situation was handled unfairly (see also Guest and Peccei 1992; Holbeche 1994, 1995; Kinnie et al 1996).

Promotion and progression at store level was through the hierarchy of management and via a succession of different stores. All store level managers were required to have a variety of experience at Senior Management level before they could become a Store Manager. As part of management development and career progression senior managers were moved from store to store within their region (as also found by Doogan 1992). Promotion was via a management role in a larger store, until being located in one of Groceryco's larger stores, such as the newly opened Camden store.

The majority of managers at both stores were a combination of internally promoted employees with a significant length of service, or older employees recruited from the external labour market, often with previous retailing experience. Although Groceryco ran a graduate management scheme, it was not considered successful by store level managers:

“The company has tried to attract graduates, but it didn't work. They were either very good and only doing it as a stop-gap, whereas others had no comprehension of what retail involved - the hours just killed them. As a result the company seems to have gone away from this idea.”

(Support Services Manager)

This is in contrast to the increased of graduate trainees in multiple store retailing, identified in previous research (Freathy and Sparks 2000; Hendry and Pettigrew 1987). It would appear that the polarisation of the workforce, discussed by Bell (1973), and Crouch (1997), and the creation of an 'elite' workforce (Lovering 1990), had not taken place to any degree at Groceryco. Store level managers were instead commonly promoted via in the internal labour market. However, the insecurity caused by the changes instigated by Groceryco 2000 meant they did not necessarily have the secure conditions of employment found in other multiple store retailers (Freathy and Sparks 1996).

9.5 HRM AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING AT GROCERYCO

To consider the role of store level managers in the execution of HR policies and employee resourcing practices, it is important to examine the nature of HRM at both corporate and operational level. Current literature on HRM in multiple store retailing points to a number of key trends including a poor regard for the HR profession; a low level of trade union membership and recognition; poor training and development of hourly paid sales assistants; and, strategies aimed at labour efficiency. Consequently, much of the literature concludes that multiple store retailers tend to focus on 'hard' HRM techniques, although more progressive organisations are beginning to recognise the value of a 'softer' HRM approach (Truss et al 1997).

It has been argued that, to ensure human resource activities are built into the fabric of the corporate strategy, HRM directors should be on the board, or at least the executive committee of the business unit. The Human Resources Director at Groceryco was not

represented at the strategic level of the organisation, which according to Walker (1992) places doubt over the extent to which employment strategy was developed alongside corporate strategy. Truss et al (1997) found more evidence of 'one-way' linkage (Golden and Ramanujan 1985) in organisations, where business strategy informs HR strategy, but not vice versa.

Phase three of the 'Groceryco 2000' programme was to "invigorate" the business to ensure the principles and strategies which guided the new strategy were accepted by employees. The aim was to achieve this through employment strategy which resulted in the 'Make a Difference!' programme launched in 1995. This was a response to the problems caused by the immense changes brought about by 'Groceryco 2000':

“This review.....has resulted in staff uncertainty and substantial short term disruption to the business.” (Annual Report 1995:14)

The purpose of the 'Make a Difference!' programme was to "re-energise" people after the disruption, which led to the development of a 'People Strategy'. It involved the implementation of employment policies to support the changes initiated by the new strategy. Its aim was to build the commitment and performance of employees to achieve the corporate strategy, suggesting a 'soft' HRM approach to the employment of human resources:

“The key task in phase three will be to motivate and reinvigorate the business to ensure that the new priorities and principles, which guide our new strategy, are adopted enthusiastically and understood by everyone in Groceryco.”
(Annual Report 1995: 7)

The 'People Strategy' had six key elements:

1. A resourcing strategy to reduce the number of vacancies in the business at any given time and to ensure that the selection process was reliable.

2. A long term strategy for pay and benefits to attract and retain good quality staff.
3. A more professional induction to aid the retention of new employees.
4. A programme of staff development to help Store Managers and Human Resources Managers to lead, coach and develop staff.
5. A training programme for senior managers to develop the style of leadership and culture which would help Groceryco achieve the required level of performance.
6. An active communication programme to engage all employees in achieving Groceryco's goals.

The success for the 'People Strategy' was seen to lie in measurable improvements in customer service, reduced staff turnover and external recognition through the Investors in People programme.

At the same time as launching their employment strategy, Groceryco changed the role of store level Human Resources (HR) Managers, by significantly reducing their HR responsibilities. As part of the new organisational structure, HR Managers were required to act as Duty Managers, which equated to 25 hours each week deputising for the Store Manager. This involved working on the shop-floor and managing store operations. This left only 14 of their 39 weekly contracted hours to devote to HRM.

It prompted many store level HR Managers to leave the company:

“Those who were doing the job because they wanted to progress specifically in personnel weren't happy when the re-structuring happened. What it meant was that the job became more retail orientated which included having to work shifts. We lost a lot of HR Managers who left for personnel-specific jobs, often with non-retail companies.” (Store HR Manager)

As a result a greater number of managers without personnel experience were filling the role of store level HR Manager. This was compounded by head office policy

introduced in 1996, which required all Senior Managers, who wanted promotion to Store Manager level, to undertake the role of either HR Manager or Customer Services Manager, as part of their training. Therefore, a greater number of individuals were working as store level HR Managers with no experience, or qualifications, relating to the personnel profession. Such demotion of personnel professionals in multiple store retailing is not uncommon (Howe 1992; Sparks 1992a, 1992b; Tomlinson et al 1997).

This change in the role of store level Human Resource Manager tended to undermine the intentions of the 'People Strategy'. At a time when the employees' psychological contract needed to be restored, HR Managers were given minimal opportunities to do so. Much of their time devoted to HR tasks was spent allocating the store's labour allowances to departments, and managing the recruitment and selection process to ensure budgets were adhered to. This supports the findings of Freathy and Sparks (2000) where HR store managers held chief responsibility for recruitment and selection, training and disciplinary, with junior managers accountable for staff scheduling and day-to-day management. This restricted their ability to successfully implement the 'Make a Difference' programme, which ironically was espousing 'soft' HRM practices. This supports previous research which has found personnel to often be marginalised (Legge 1995; Kinnie et al 1996; Rees et al 1996; Storey 1992), and Legge's (2000) observations that often when organisations need expert attention to employees' psychological contract, the personnel role is "one of reacting to and patching up problems" (p.58). Consequently, while Groceryco's corporate rhetoric

espoused 'soft' HRM practices, the reality at store level involved a reduction in the resources available to implement these strategies.

The consequences of this reduction in HR managers devolution to HRM was the further devolution of HR to line managers. They became responsible for the recruitment and selection of new employees, training and development, staff scheduling and day-to-day management including the delegation of tasks and responsibilities, as also found by Hutchinson 1995, Maund 2001, Mullins 1999, Sparks 2000b. The centralisation of control evident in multiple store retailing has led to a focus for store level managers on managing the store's workforce, as this remains their one area of relative autonomy (Sparks 2000b).

This would suggest that store level managers had a wide responsibility for the function of HR, particularly employee resourcing. The extent and execution of this responsibility will be examined in more detail in Section 9.7.

9.6 THE CONSTRAINTS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

The objectives of this research study have been to examine the influence of line managers' choices and constraints on their management of human resources. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) pointed out, "making choices within parameters is central to the managerial role" (p.86). It is therefore important to consider the constraints of store level management in each case study organisation and assess the impact of these limitations on local employee resourcing decisions. This is imperative

given Kinnie's (1989) criticism that relatively little attention has been paid to changes in control systems and the impact of this on HRM.

As outlined in chapter five, there are many methods of control that can be used to restrict the decision making powers of store level managers. These systems of control can either direct processes, or dictate output. Ways to achieve this in multiple store retailing include the implementation of corporate strategy, the design of the formal organisational structure and budgets or the deployment of technology. Senior managers at Groceryco's head office formulated strategy and policies, as well as designing the organisational structure, the use of technology, and the setting of performance targets and budgets. These defined the limits of decision-making power for store level managers, through standardisation, as was also observed by Stewart (1991).

9.6.1 Organisational Structure and Management Hierarchy

The size and structure of an organisation can significantly influence the nature of its control systems (Child 1984; Mintzberg 1989; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Sparks 2000b; Smith 1988). 'Groceryco 2000' placed an emphasis on the standardisation of processes and outputs, achieved through an increase in centralised control:

“The work is much more standardised now with the re-structuring whereas it wasn't so much before.” (Fresh Food Controller)

There were some aspects of a stores' operations where head office maintained complete control in the decision-making process, including store opening hours, stock management and store structure. The company was increasingly centralising store level managers' decision-making powers. This centralisation process is well described

in current literature (for example Sparks 2000a), with many store management activities and functions being transferred to head office in multiple store retailing organisations. The reduction in the decision-making responsibilities of store level managers led to local managers occupying a low position in the multiple chain of command in multiple store retailing organisations (Broadbridge 1998; Doogan 1992; Smith 1988). Managers at store level attributed the increasing centralisation of store operations to the changes introduced via 'Groceryco 2000', which they believed reduced their decision-making powers, producing greater uniformity between stores:

“The stores are all very uniform now as there's little room for individualism. They only really differ in size.” (Replenishment Manager)

Howe (1992) drew a similar conclusion that multiple store retailers were increasingly centralising their management structures to satisfy the trend towards adopting an organisational-wide national image.

Senior managers at Groceryco were based at head office and very distant from store operations. They therefore had to 'manage by information' (Mintzberg 1999), and tended to adopt Mintzberg's (1999) 'controlling' role. Relying on data to make strategic decisions they developed systems, structures, and implemented policies, to maintain control of store operations. These features suggest that Groceryco was characteristic of Mintzberg's (1989) 'machine' configuration, through the attempts by 'thin' managers at head office to control store operations. Rationalising, such as budget cutting, re-structuring and redundancies, became the solution to organisational problems. Therefore, Groceryco supported Mintzberg's proposition that the countervailing power, which drives organisations towards a machine bureaucracy, is an obsession with control. This will be further examined in Sections **9.6.2** and **9.6.3**,

when the use of budgets and technology, to constrain the decision making powers of store level managers, is considered.

9.6.2 Budgetary Control

As a publicly quoted company a high share price was essential to Groceryco (Freathy and Sparks 1996), which has been found to lead to a focus on the maintenance of dividends and short-term results (Legge 1995; Sisson 1994). This translated into low product prices for customers, and high share prices for shareholders:

“We are committed to reassuring our customers that Groceryco provides excellent value for money week-in, week-out. We have adopted a more aggressive pricing policy.” (Annual Report 1995:7)

Efforts to cut costs were reflected in the target of making cost savings of £60 million, and improving average sales per square foot per week, from £12.86 to £15.00, within three years (see also section 9.3). This emphasis on efficiency and short-term needs has been much criticised in the literature (see, Blyton and Morris 1992; Burnes 2000; Mintzberg 1979, 1989; Storey and Sisson 1993a) for ignoring long term social consequences. This was exemplified by the pressures on store level managers to maximise the efficiency of labour, particularly in labour-intensive departments, such as checkouts, at the expense of employees' quality of work life:

“The number of hours given to each section were cut which meant greater use of flexibility was needed. The store had too many cashiers working during the day and not enough in the evening which we couldn't get away with when the section's hours were reduced. When we told them we had to change their hours for a business reason there was a lot of opposition from them. After holding individual meetings with the staff, and the Region's Personnel Manager, we had to give 12 employees notice of change of hours when they refused to change voluntarily.” (Store HR Manager)

Store level managers were acutely aware of the efficiency initiatives imposed by head office at the time of the research. All aspects of store level operations were subject to cost minimisation strategies. Although opening hours at the Blackfen store had been increased, this was not accompanied by any increase in budgets. Instead managers claimed that the number of staffing hours available to them by head office had actually been reduced:

"The company is now more demanding. There are less hours for each department, so greater efficiencies need to be achieved." (Stock Management Controller)

Store level managers also alleged that efforts had been made by head office to reduce the cost of labour, particularly in the area of unsociable pay, paid in recognition of late evening work:

"The company has cut back on wage costs by trying to cut back payment for unsociable hours even though there are more of them now with longer opening hours." (Fresh Food Controller)

Interviews with store level managers revealed the impact of the efficiencies demanded of them. As Groceryco made greater demands on stores this resulted in work intensification and multi-skilling for shop-floor employees:

"The company now expects a lot more in terms of job content."
(Administration Controller)

The increasing pressure on store level employees was compounded by the changes in store structure. One consequence of de-layering and re-structuring was a belief amongst store level managers that the level of responsibility, and accountability, had increased for all staff:

"There are higher demands on the whole team now. Previously it was the manager and supervisor who were accountable, but now criticism is aimed at the team as a whole." (Fresh Food Controller)

This trend has also been observed in previous research (for example, Gretton 1993; Legge 2000; Sparrow 1998), and again highlights the negative impact that a cost minimisation approach can have on employees. The predominance of control by budgets and targets, together with the large changes imposed by 'Groceryco 2000' had resulted in a demoralised, disconcerted work force, with store level managers losing components of their jobs to centralised systems:

"It's all changed so much. Everything has changed, particularly with the automated ordering and the re-structuring. There are now less hours for each section, with greater efficiency achieved, and both the work and company are more demanding." (Stock Management Controller)

The main focus of 'Groceryco 2000' was enhanced sales and cost minimisation. The key objectives of the strategy was "to increase its value to shareholders" (Annual Report 1995:1), and increase shareholder value faster than competitors, despite Mintzberg's (1989) rejection of this notion of 'shareholder value'. This led to a reliance on budgetary control systems. As outlined in the literature (for example Mintzberg 1983, 1989; Mullins 1999; Piper 1980; Stewart 1999) bureaucratic organisations commonly use accounting control systems, setting easily identifiable performance levels such as sales, costs and profits.

The main control system exerted by head office was financial and keeping within budgets was vital. These easily measurable costs allowed head office to maintain a significant element of control over stores, and publicly defined the limits of store level managers (Stewart 1991). It also enabled head office managers to enforce the efficiency drives it had promised its shareholders. This dominance of budgets and

shareholder priority was outlined by both Armstrong (1989) and Kinnie (1989), as retail head offices increasingly control stores through financial management systems.

The cost minimisation approach of 'Groceryco 2000' also impacted on the deployment of labour at store level. The amount of labour a store could deploy was determined by head office, guided by cost considerations on the basis of a store's forecast sales. Head office allocated the store's labour allowance to the HR Manager, who then distributed the allowances between the Departments. The ability to resource stores was largely controlled by head office and accords with Gould and Campbell's (1987) financial control mode of management.

There was no explicit policy from head office regarding the company's preferred ratio of full time to part time staff. This resulted in store level managers deploying labour using the budgets as a guideline, rather than any detailed operational prescription from head office. Many store level managers interpreted the cost minimisation initiatives as a requirement to employ more part timers. :

"There is no explicit direction that the company has indicated it wants to take, or that it wants a majority of part timers, but there is a general feeling that the company prefers part timers. The business is more feasible for part timers."
(Replenishment Manager)

"Head office doesn't officially indicate whether they would prefer us to recruit full timers or part timers, but it's probably part timers because they're cheaper." (Administration Controller)

"It's also cheaper to employ part timers in terms of overtime costs, benefits and national insurance." (Customer Service Manager)

This supports the conclusions of Brewster et al (1993), and Blyton and Morris (1992), that a focus on cost reduction often means an increased employment of non-standard labour. Neathey and Hurstfield (1995), and O'Reilly (1994), found retail managers commonly employ non-standard employees to reduce costs. Store level managers at Groceryco claimed the budget reductions, imposed by head office, restricted the employment of full timers:

“Now the company are cutting down on the hours you can't afford full timers any more.” (Stock Management Controller)

"There are not enough hours given by head office to run the department properly. In 1995 we had 425 hours a week to schedule for, but in 1996 it's down to 335. The business is only feasible for part timers now." (Fresh Food Controller)

A further implication of these cost-cutting initiatives was a change in the nature of part time shift patterns. Traditionally, part timers worked at week-ends, and in the evenings, to resource peaks in trading and cover the higher number of unsociable hours - a consequence of longer store opening hours. Cost reduction initiatives had necessitated a variety of part time shifts in an effort to make more effective use of labour, again reflecting the tight constraints under which store level managers had to operate:

"Since there has been a cutback in hours there are more part timers than ever before, but they are not all doing the same hours. There are now part timers who work during the week as well as the more traditional shifts at weekends and evenings." (Support Services Manager)

These ad hoc, operational responses to head office demands reflect UK employers' typical use of non-standard labour to fulfil short-term business needs (Blyton and Morris 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Hunter et al 1993; Marginson et al 1993; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; O'Reilly 1994).

It was where human resources were quantifiable that head office maintained the greatest control. Therefore, it was the ‘harder’, measurable aspects of HRM where head office took control, as also found by Storey (1987; 1995) and Legge (1995). This highlights the machine nature of Groceryco, with head office using financial control systems and performance targets to exert control over local stores.

As a result store level managers made a link between adhering to financial budgets and their future employment security, as also observed by Marginson et al (1993). With the employment security of store level managers at Groceryco threatened by recent redundancies and re-structuring, many saw the achievement of financial targets as even more essential to their future careers at Groceryco:

“We all lost our jobs and had to re-apply for the new ones. Can you imagine after working for Groceryco for so many years, they literally sack you and tell you to re-apply with no guarantee of getting a job at the same level, or one that you actually want? There’s no guarantee it won’t happen again either.”
(Replenishment Manager)

9.6.3 The Use of Technology

Multiple store retailers have been found to use technology to standardise the retail process and make cost savings (Tordjman 1994; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). The impact of this on the roles and responsibilities of store level managers at Groceryco will be detailed in this section.

Groceryco also matched Mintzberg’s machine configuration through their use of technology. The role of technology has, according to previous research (for example, Deery and Mahoney 1994; Freathy and Sparks 1994; Houlton and Thomas 1990; Martin 1987; Sparks 1987; Tomlinson et al 1997), enabled retailers to further

centralise store level functions. Head office managers at Groceryco recognised this opportunity:

“With routine but time consuming tasks such as product ordering being performed increasingly by technology we have been able to re-think radically store management structures.....Substantial cost savings have also been achieved as an important by-product of these changes.” (Annual Report 1995:14)

This accords with Ogbonna’s (1992) conclusions that technology frees store level management from routine tasks, to enable them to concentrate on HRM.

One function which had been centralised, as a result of increasing technology, was stock management. A computerised system, introduced in 1994, centrally placed orders for stock, relying on store sales data from the EPOS system. The removal of store level management discretion left managers frustrated, believing head office management was deliberately removing the remaining skill and discretion from their roles, in order to extend their control over store operations:

"I think it's what head office want as they are the ones directing this loss of skill at store level - they just want to control us as much as possible. Take the stock ordering, for example - we moved from a completely manual system to a combination of manual and automatic through to completely computerised in the space of just four years with no consultation with store level staff. Now we don't even get the chance to predict customer demands. I'm just a glorified shelf-filler now." (Replenishment Manager)

This standardisation of the labour process concurs with Braverman’s de-skilling theory and the ‘Fordist’ approach to management.

EPOS was used to measure cashier performance. Head office set cashiers a target of scanning 23 items per minute, who were measured via the EPOS system. Such monitoring of cashier throughput was also noted by Ogbonna and Whipp (1999).

Cashiers at the Blackfen store averaged only 19 items per minute, which was attributed to the higher age profile of the cashiers:

"They are going as fast as they physically can, although they do tend to stop and chat to the customers a lot, which slows them down. But then you are asking them to sacrifice customer service for speed. The system and the target set by head office takes no account of age." (Customer Service Manager)

This concurs with Mintzberg's (1989) machine configuration and its emphasis on efficiency leading to a preoccupation with the 'measurable', rather than social, intangible benefits.

While at the time of this research study EPOS was not directly deployed for staff scheduling purposes, its development was underway. The company aimed to introduce an automated labour scheduling system for all retail employees. The system would use store data on employees, sales forecast, the number, and throughput of checkouts producing a staff schedule for each department, with no store level management input. This demonstrated further attempts by head office to centralise store operations through technology. This was denied by head office managers who insisted it would 'liberate' store level managers to pursue customer service objectives:

"We want to continue to remove the more mundane tasks from managers so they can concentrate on customer service. We're hoping the computerised scheduling system will help achieve this. The main benefit of these changes is the ability of our retail managers to place a greater emphasis on customer service when their time isn't taken up with the more routine tasks such as staff scheduling." (HR Manager, Head Office)

This demonstrated the extent to which managers at head office managed from a distance, or practised 'thin' management. They seemed unaware of the social consequences of their policies. The de-motivation and frustration of store level managers, caused by the re-structuring, would only be exacerbated by this

computerised staff scheduling system. Yet head office managers legitimised their increased control as liberalisation for store level managers - the antithesis of store level managers' views and experiences.

It can be seen how improved technology facilitated the quantification of labour, which enabled head office to further standardise processes, increasing its control over store operations. This supports Ogbonna's (1992) findings of increased centralisation as a result of improved technology. It also accords with Mintzberg's machine organisation where "the technostructure.....emerges as the key part of the structure" (Mintzberg 1989:134), fulfilling Gershuny's (1987), and Rajan's (1987), prediction about the increased demand for technology in multiple store retailing.

9.7 STORE LEVEL MANAGERS' AUTONOMY

Although much of the data supports the notion of Groceryco operating as Mintzberg's (1989) machine configuration, at the same time, there were also features of his diversified typology in existence. Multiple store retailers necessarily require a degree of decentralisation arising from their size and the geographical dispersion of stores (Child 1984; Mullins 1999; Stewart 1999). This can give rise to areas of autonomy for local managers, particularly those at senior store management level.

As found by Freathy and Sparks (1994), head office managers at Groceryco set performance targets for store level managers to achieve. This standardisation of outputs meant that if these targets were achieved by store level managers, there was less intervention in other aspects of store operations - a feature of Mintzberg's

diversified configuration. Store level managers at Groceryco were resentful of the increasing centralisation of tasks and decisions, which had previously been theirs, tensions typical of Mintzberg's diversified organisation.

Store level managers felt there was less involvement from head office in those management tasks that were difficult to quantify. This was predominately in local employee resourcing, such as recruitment and selection, on-the-job training, staff scheduling and delegation of tasks. As Emmanuel et al (1990) highlighted, HRM is very difficult to measure in quantitative terms, which negates control using the standardisation of outputs methods. Instead a standardisation of work content might be employed as the control system for HRM and employee resourcing (Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1983). Thus, the day-to-day management of employees was left to local discretion:

"There really isn't much involvement with managers at a higher level. They act as merely an advisory service, but may give a gentle nudge when they realise something is wrong." (Store HR Manager)

"We're allowed a relatively high level of autonomy in the store's day to day running. They may have audits, and there is the ethnic monitoring form, but as long as best practice is followed and consistency maintained then the store is left alone." (Store Manager)

This devolution of HR activities to retail line managers was also found by Neathey and Hurstfield (1995), and Tomlinson et al (1997). While head office maintained control of staffing budgets there was little intervention in a store's management of its human resources, if budgets and targets were met:

"I have a fair bit of autonomy managing the checkouts as long as the queues and wage bills are low." (Checkout Controller)

The recruitment and selection of new employees was the responsibility of store level managers. While head office produced a company-wide recruitment process, store level managers conducted that process. They determined the vacancy, albeit within head office budgets, and made the final decision who to recruit:

“I’ll decide whether to replace the member of staff who has left and then what flexibility is required from that position. I’ll go to Jean [*HR Manager*] who tells me whether I can afford those hours or not. If I can then we’ll go ahead with advertising the vacancy. If I can’t then it’s back to the drawing board.”
(Support Services Manager)

“The interview is with the Controller who makes the final decision who to recruit. It is a devolved decision to the person who will ultimately have to manage that employee [*Controller*].” (Store HR Manager)

Although each store had a HR Manager, Controllers held responsibility for the training and development of new staff. An induction training programme was centrally designed, but once completed all on-the-job training was conducted at Section level:

“Individual sections are responsible for training which is overseen by me as the HR Manager.” (Store HR Manager)

Training is an aspect of management, notoriously difficult to quantify, and thus head office managers at Groceryco conceded responsibility for on-the-job training to store level. This is in contrast to Smith’s (1988) findings where he found the content of training was set centrally to ensure consistency.

As mentioned in Section 9.5, responsibility for scheduling employees’ working hours was at store level, with the activity forming a large part of a manager’s job. The importance of this task was highlighted by Arrowsmith and Sisson (2000), and demonstrates the control store level managers held over employees’ quality of work life. While this role was an important area of autonomy for store level managers, it must be remembered that head office planned to centralise this function using

technology. This adds support for Mintzberg's (1989) belief that head office control in a diversified organisation eventually drives it to a 'machine' configuration.

9.8 STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE

This chapter so far has described the degree of choices and constraints of store level management at Groceryco. This emanates from Groceryco's corporate strategy, and the balance between centralisation and decentralisation in the formal organisational structure. During the interviews with Groceryco managers it became clear that discrepancies existed between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy and policies. This was caused by a combination of store level managers resisting the increasing centralisation and transfer of power to head office, and their manipulation of the remaining areas of autonomy available to them.

As previous research has identified (Heller 1997; Johnson 1987; Mintzberg 1989), there is often a gap between organisational strategy and what actually happens in large organisations. This has been attributed to the differences between managers at senior level, who devise the strategies, and those at operational level, who are the implementors. Due to the size and geographical dispersion of Groceryco and its stores, managers at head office were very distant from store operations. They relied heavily on formal information to formulate strategy. Mintzberg (1989) defined this detached management approach as 'thin' management. Meanwhile store level managers at Groceryco, were highly involved in operational issues, and could be defined as Mintzberg's (1989) 'thick' managers. Using Duncan's (1975) model, head



office managers operated at the ‘philosophical’ level, while store level managers worked at the ‘art’ level.

Existing literature already suggests that the formation of strategy and policy does not necessarily indicate successful implementation without resistance from employees (Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1989; Tamkin et al 1997). This was evident at Groceryco and manifested itself in a variety of ways, as the following examples will illustrate.

A key goal of the ‘Groceryco 2000’ strategy was the improvement of customer service:

“Customer service is the key priority.” (Annual Report 1995:14)

Such a link between the improvement of customer service and the competitive advantage it can provide, was identified by Gardner and Sheppard (1989). However, Groceryco’s competitors also made customer service a priority. This ability to easily replicate strategy (see Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Walker 1992) reflects the ‘thin’ nature of strategy formulation at Groceryco, despite their claims of innovation.

Part of Groceryco’s customer service strategy included additions to the customer service provision. Bag packers were introduced, to help customers at the checkouts, as well as ‘Queuebusters’, who were existing members of staff, from across the store, till-trained to work on checkouts during peak shopping periods. The intentions of these initiatives were to improve the level of customer service, and fulfil the company’s

internal target of queues length. While head office believed these initiatives significantly improved Groceryco's standard of customer service, store level managers held a very different perspective. They maintained that the deployment of bag packers was not feasible because of the budgetary pressures. Staff officially designated as bag packers were often deployed on checkouts to reduce the length of queues. As a result, the customer service initiatives introduced by head office were not always providing the anticipated premium level of service. The introduction of 'Queuebusters' was also negatively received by store level managers. They complained about the extent to which staff were taken from their shop-floor duties to work on the checkouts:

" I lose about 5 hours a week to the tills, which is a lot of hours when you are running a tight ship." (Support Services Manager)

Store level managers argued that Queuebusters did not improve the standard of customer service, because staff were taken away from their departments, which left shelves without stock and service counters under-staffed:

"When my staff are away manning the checkouts [sic] the department is left with no one to fill the shelves. It has to be done, so we end up doing it at the end of the shift, when there are hardly any customers in the store. Meanwhile the cashiers go home as soon as their shift ends which causes a lot of resentment amongst my staff, who are only having to work late because they helped out on checkouts earlier in the day." (Replenishment Manager)

This highlights the differences between levels of management at Groceryco. 'Thin' managers at head office believed the new customer service initiatives were a success. Meanwhile store level managers, with a 'thick' management perspective, knew these initiatives were impractical in the climate of cost minimisation, so failed to support them.

With the 'Groceryco 2000' strategy came a new organisational structure for stores.

The creation of a Customer Service Manager was hailed as an important part of

Groceryco's strategy to build a "true customer service culture throughout Groceryco"

(Annual Report 1996: 9):

"The Customer Service Manager is there to ensure we deliver our promises to customers and use this to our competitive advantage." (HR Manager, Head Office)

The emphasis placed on the new role of Customer Service Manager in delivering the

Groceryco 2000 strategy was reiterated in the company's Annual Report:

"Responsibility for service at store level now clearly rests with a Customer Service Manager, second in seniority only to the Store Manager, whose main task is to ensure customer satisfaction." (Annual Report 1996: 9)

Despite these claims, the reality of the Customer Service Manager at store level was revealed during the interviews. The Customer Service Manager position at the Camden store was vacant throughout the period of research, despite the high profile nature of this store. This undermined Groceryco's commitment to customer service, with its inability to resource the Customer Service Manager position in one of its key stores. It also demonstrated the implications of 'thick' and 'thin' management.

Managers at head office were keen to publicise the role of Customer Service Manager, where the reality was a difficulty recruiting to this position.

Meanwhile, store level managers were juggling the consequences of Groceryco's conflicting strategies of customer service and cost reduction. The cost minimisation approach adopted by Groceryco meant store level managers were confronted with the reality of trying to deliver higher standards of customer service whilst making cost savings. The reality of these two conflicting strategies was exposed

during interviews with store level managers:

"Flexibility may be the key to success, but only to a certain extent. You have to balance flexibility and efficiency with customer service. You can't ask everyone to work as quickly as possible without taking any time out to actually talk to the customers." (Customer Services Manager)

The research has revealed that the rhetoric and reality of customer service levels was often very different at Groceryco. The budget restrictions meant that customer service initiatives were often not implemented by store level managers. They operated as 'thick' managers, and hence were aware of operational realities, which meant many of the customer service initiatives were not feasible in the day-to-day operations of a store. As a result there was a gap between head office managers' perceptions, of the standard of service provided at Groceryco stores, and the reality of the operational level itself.

Further examples of the variance between the rhetoric and reality of organisational life were seen in the implementation of employment policies. The third, and final, phase of 'Groceryco 2000', was the introduction of the 'Make a Difference' programme, and the development of a 'People Strategy'. Managers at head office believed Phase three of 'Groceryco 2000' had been successful in achieving its aims:

"Our 'Make a Difference' programme has enabled us to strengthen our relationship with our employees. This long term strategy has manifested into the 'People Strategy' which builds on the commitment and performance of our employees." (HR Manager, Head Office)

The 'People Strategy' aimed to improve the recruitment and retention of retail staff.

Head office believed the quality of staff recruited to store level would improve, and as a result labour turnover would reduce. However, the reality at store level was continuing difficulties recruiting and retaining quality employees:

"The calibre of staff who we attract is low. The good staff are only there as a stop gap or that's all they want to do and they don't want to progress."
(Support Services Manager)

Part of the 'People Strategy' was to encourage employees to take responsibility for their own training and development. To achieve this all employees were provided with

Personal Development Planners:

"All staff now have their own Personal Development Planner which is to make the individual as responsible for their development as much as the company. This encourages suggestions from the employees themselves so they have some input and control over their development and training." (HR Manager, Head Office)

Yet the reality of this training initiative was very different with few store level managers citing the use of these planners. Many dismissed the initiative as too idealistic:

"All staff now have Personal Development Planners, but we don't really have the time to sit down with staff and work through them." (Support Services Manager)

This again highlights the 'thin' nature of management at head office, who developed such 'soft' HRM initiatives. They were unaware that increasing head office demands on stores rendered these policies superfluous, because 'thick' managers at store level were without adequate resources to implement them.

While the impact of Phases 1 and 2 of 'Groceryco 2000' had been fully experienced by all staff, the impact of the third phase, focusing on communicating the new employment strategy, appeared to be minimal. Many store level managers instead condemned the company for its lack of support for employees during the implementation of 'Groceryco 2000':

"The changes in store structure meant that morale went down with the feelings of uncertainty. The training and support was practically non-existent." (Fresh Food Controller)

This contradicts the rhetoric of Groceryco's 'People Strategy' and head office managers' perceived success of the initiative. It highlights the difference between thick and thin (Mintzberg 1989) management at Groceryco, and exposes the mismatch of central policy and its actual implementation at operational level.

As Legge (1995) found, the rhetoric and reality of employment strategy tended to match where business strategy corresponded with 'hard' model HRM. In the 'hard' aspects of employment, where adherence to company policy tended to be more easily measured and monitored, the views of head office and store level managers were more likely to correlate. One example was the use of premium rate overtime. Company policy stated that full time employees were not permitted to work overtime (due to the additional costs). All managers at store level were aware of this policy and generally adhered to it:

"Full-timers work overtime very, very rarely - it's a taboo."
(Stock Control Manager)

Thus, where the management of human resources could be measured, store level managers adhered to policy, as divergence was much more easily spotted by head office.

Groceryco had in place an equal opportunities policy that promoted equality beyond the requirements of the law. Together with Groceryco being a founding member of Opportunity 2000, this emphasises the company's strong commitment to equal opportunities:

"We are committed to promoting policies to ensure that employees and those who seek to work for us are treated equally regardless of sex, marital status, age, creed, colour, race or ethnic origin." (Annual Report 1995:27)

However, the reality at shop-floor level was one of occupational segregation, selection decisions based on managers' stereotypes, and the segregation of workers according to personal circumstances. This accords with previous research, (for example, Beechey and Perkins 1987; Burchell and Rubery 1990, 1994; Collinson et al 1991; Hunter and MacInnes 1991), which found that managers have very distinct notions of segmentation in the labour supply, which influence their employment decisions.

Gender assumptions played an important role in determining the suitability of employees for jobs, as found in previous research (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Bradley 1989; Burchell and Rubery 1990, 1994; Collinson et al 1991; Hunter and MacInnes 1991; Hunter et al 1993; MacEwan Scott 1994; Milkman 1983; Tomlinson et al 1997). Skill requirements of a job linked to the traditional perceptions of male and female work was evident. Women at Groceryco were more highly represented in Customer Service and Support Service departments. Here traditionally female jobs were found, such as cashiers and administration assistants, utilising feminine skills.

Notwithstanding their equal opportunities statement there appeared to be evidence of a 'glass ceiling' in operation at Groceryco. Despite being a predominately female workforce at store level, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of management positions, in the two case study stores, were held by men. Women tended to be involved in management positions where their staff were predominately female, and the role was gendered female. This underlines both the horizontal and vertical segregation of the Groceryco retail workforce.

The employee resourcing decisions taken by store level managers were heavily influenced by their personal attitudes and stereotypes, which often undermined Groceryco's equal opportunities policy. Many of these stereotypes were based on the number of hours an employee worked. Store level managers were critical of part timers on the basis of quality, commitment and reliability. External commitments, such as family or study, were viewed by many managers as preventing part timers from offering total commitment. The strongest assumptions held by store level managers involved the further categorisation of part timers according to their personal circumstances. Managers tended to classify part timers into three categories of older workers, young student workers, and working mothers. Older workers were perceived to offer a high degree of reliability, and quality, but little real numerical flexibility:

"Some part timers are very good - those who are a little bit older take a pride in their work." (Fresh Food Controller)

"Some cashiers are causing problems - they are the older workers who are very inflexible." (Customer Service Manager)

Younger employees were consistently regarded as offering a high degree of numerical flexibility (in terms of hours they could cover), whilst not being very committed. It appeared that managers at the Blackfen store considered themselves fortunate to have good quality part time students due to the proximity of the store to local grammar schools:

"The students are good for part time work as we have some good schools in the local area." (Store HR Manager)

While students were unilaterally cited as the most flexible type of part time employee, there was a gender dimension with store level managers perceiving younger male workers to be most flexible:

"It's certainly the younger ones who are more flexible - more often males as they seem to want the money more." (Support Services Manager)

However, male student workers were often perceived as only working for 'beer money', which was believed to have a detrimental impact on their level of commitment:

"The young lads don't take such a pride in their work as they only work for beer money." (Fresh Food Controller)

Working mothers were consistently viewed as very inflexible due to family responsibilities which restricted their numerical flexibility. This led some store level managers to question working mothers' level of commitment:

"It is fine line between part timers and their cost, commitment, reliability and quality. In the Blackfen area there are a lot of mothers who are looking for part time work to fit in with their child care arrangements. But they always put their family first so can't be so committed to Groceryco." (Customer Service Manager)

As with younger workers, managers perceived working mothers to have little financial need for employment, which again was seen to inhibit their commitment:

"Women are only working for pocket money and so won't want the extra shifts because they don't need the money so much." (Fresh Foods Controller)

This perception that part timers only worked for 'pin' or 'beer' money had serious consequences when managers made decisions as some store level managers indicated that part timers' shifts were less secure than full timers:

"I had to change the hours of staff within my department and wrote a business case which I presented to the staff. I concentrated on cutting and changing the part timers' hours because full-timers need the money more than part timers." (Replenishment Manager)

This supports previous research findings that part timers are often treated as peripheral by their employers (Hunter and MacInnes 1992; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Robinson 1990).

These findings illustrate the importance of managers' perceptions and their contradiction with Groceryco's equal opportunities policy. These findings add credence to Dickens' (2000) conclusions, that equal opportunities policies do not necessarily indicate a change in employee behaviour. 'Thin' managers at head office were unaware of the impact stereotypes held by store level managers had on local employee resourcing. Budgetary pressures increased the employment of part timers, which only exacerbated the prevalence of this stereo-typing.

Interviews with store level managers exposed the extent to which they deployed various strategies of independence to circumvent head office control. They made attempts to maintain some independence from head office in spite of their feelings of low morale, job insecurity, and the increasing centralisation of their tasks. This adds further support to Mintzberg's 'diversified' organisation, where lower order managers exert a pull to 'balkanise' the structure and minimise centralisation. Some examples of these strategies of independence were found at store level.

Store level managers held the greatest degree of autonomy in the scheduling of staffing hours, which provided the opportunity to deploy strategies of independence. For example, company policy required staff schedules to be written four weeks in advance. However the reality at shop floor was very different, and the schedules only written two weeks in advance:

"We write the schedules two weeks in advance, but the company wants us to increase this to four weeks. The reality is that it's easier to write the schedules every fortnight as you have more of an idea of the absences you've got to work around." (Replenishment Manager)

Official company policy allowed store level managers to change an employee's shift up to 48 hours prior to its commencement, but no later, and employees were entitled to refuse to work the altered shift. In reality store level managers demanded greater flexibility from their staff:

"Official company policy is 48 hours notice of any change and then the employees don't have to work it. Unofficially they change their hours or work extra at much less notice. It's about give and take." (Ambient Controller)

Head office policy demanded that all employees work flexible shifts (i.e. different shift patterns each week). However store level managers maintained that this was not feasible if certain segments of the labour market were to be recruited, and retained. As a result many working mothers effectively worked fixed hours due to their inability to offer numerical flexibility:

"We get flexibility from everyone except for the mums who tend to work 10.30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m. or 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. which is okay because they cover the lunch breaks and lunchtime rush." (Store HR Manager)

These examples show that, despite the insecurity caused by 'Groceryco 2000', store level managers made efforts to maintain their independence from head office. Where head office control remained minimal, predominately in some aspects of employee resourcing, store level managers were able to adapt company policy to best deal with the increasing demands and constraints placed on them. Where company policy was perceived by store level managers as impractical, and where limited head office control existed, strategies of independence were deployed, which were intentionally unbeknown to head office. However, the extent of these strategies of independence was minimal, exemplifying the increasing control exercised by head office over store operations.

9.9. DISCUSSION

This case study research has demonstrated the realities of local HRM and employee resourcing in a multiple store retail organisation. This includes a divergence between corporate strategy and operational reality, the degree of head office control over store operations, and strategies of independence deployed by operational managers to undermine this control, in order to make the systems work.

Groceryco demonstrated many of Mintzberg's (1989) 'machine' configuration characteristics. Corporate strategy and policies focused on efficiency, while efforts were made by head office to increasingly control and centralise store operations. Use of financial management control systems were made, which enabled head office to set quantifiable performance targets for store level managers to achieve. This focus on output control, with an emphasis on efficiency, is typical of 'machine' organisations.

This research found differences between the formulation of corporate strategy at senior management level and the implementation at store level as also identified by Mintzberg (1989) and Heller (1997). This again highlights the machine nature of Groceryco, with 'thick' and 'thin' management (Mintzberg 1989) in operation at different levels of the organisation. It was evident that managers at head office and store level at Groceryco did not always hold the same strategic vision, with store level managers juggling the realities of strategy implementation.

One key trend at Groceryco was the increasing centralisation of store level managers' tasks and responsibilities. Improved technology enabled head office to centralise many

operational functions, including stock management, cashier performance, and ultimately staff scheduling, as also found by Ogbonna (1992).

Despite strong evidence of Mintzberg's 'machine' configuration predominating at Groceryco, there was also support for a 'diversified' configuration. The regional structure and large size of the organisation meant that some aspects of operational management had to be devolved to store level. It was those aspects of management that were difficult for head office to quantify, and thus control, where store level management autonomy was witnessed. This was primarily local employee resourcing including recruitment and selection, on-the-job training, staff scheduling and the organisation of tasks and responsibilities.

As head office increasingly centralised operational decision-making, and imposed greater demands, store level managers made some attempts to circumvent head office control and policies. Where store level managers believed company policies and systems to be unworkable, they deployed strategies of independence to manage the system and its constraints. The contradictory nature of Groceryco's corporate strategy, demanding both cost minimisation and enhancement of customer service, actually encouraged these strategies of independence. With fewer resources available to store level managers to implement the quality initiatives, they 'juggled' and 'manipulated' organisational policy to try and deliver the company's strategic goals.

The predominance of quantifiable budgets and targets as a means of controlling store level operations impacted on the management of local HRM. As a consequence, store

level managers directed their efforts towards that which was measured as this was the main criteria by which head office judged their management capabilities. With employee resourcing the main area of responsibility for store level managers, it was in this function where strategies of independence prevailed. The focus on tangible measurements, encouraged by the organisational control systems, led to an emphasis on 'hard' HRM at store level. This was regardless of any 'soft' HR company policies that existed, such as the 'Training and Development Planner' initiative. It also resulted in an increased employment of part timers (considered cheaper to employ), particularly students; the alteration of employees' working hours to meet customer service performance targets; and contravention of the equal opportunity policy.

'Groceryco 2000' posed enormous threats to job security through redundancies, de-layering and re-organisation. This partly affected store level managers who generated defensive policies to protect their jobs and career prospects. As Legge (2000) found, managers hoped to safeguard their jobs, and enhance their career opportunities by portraying an image of competent management to head office. This was in contrast to Sayles' (1999: 600) claim that middle managers actually play a key role in highlighting problems to senior management. Consequently, store level managers masked any problems they experienced trying to meet head office demands. Yet these efforts were somewhat restricted by the increased centralisation of store level tasks through the sophisticated use of technology.

To summarise, the major source of head office control over store operations was through output control systems with improved technology providing the opportunity

for increased centralisation. Store level managers were the implementors of 'Groceryco 2000' and, as Sayles (1999) found, they often 'massaged' senior management demands to accommodate the operational context. Acting predominately as 'disturbance handlers' (Mintzberg 1989: 20) they adhered to the demands of 'thin' managers at head office within the constraints of operational level. Store level managers had greater autonomy over employee resourcing decisions, typically intangible aspects of management, difficult for head office to quantify, and thus control. Strategies of independence were deployed to counter the impact of increasing demands and centralisation of tasks by head office, mainly in local employee resourcing decisions.

This chapter has presented a discussion and analysis of the empirical data for the Groceryco case study. Background information providing a contextual perspective to the case study organisation and stores was given, before an examination of local management constraints and autonomy. The existence of various strategies of independence was detailed, and subsequent conclusions drawn.

Chapter 10

THE HOMECO CASE STUDY

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical research conducted using the embedded case study method. The data gathered provides background information to the case study organisation, and outlines the nature of store level management and HRM in Homeco. The chapter examines the choices and constraints of store level managers, and the consequences of these for the management of human resources and employee resourcing.

10.1 BACKGROUND HISTORY

Homeco plc. is a major DIY and garden multiple retailer both in the UK and overseas. The company began as a small DIY store in Southern England first offering shares for sale to the public in 1979 with 26 retail stores in operation. Homeco quickly expanded through the acquisition of other D.I.Y. companies and became market leader of the home improvement sector in 1986. In 1996 Homeco had 280 stores, an annual UK turnover of £1.5 billion and a profit of £97m.

Homeco operated two types of store formats called Supercentres and Warehouses, which were managed as separate divisions. This case study concentrates on the Supercentre Division in which Homeco's superstores were based. This division was structured on a regional basis. Nine districts in the UK split were between three Regional Directors. Each district was managed by a District Manager, with responsibility for approximately 12 stores, and to whom Store Managers reported (see

appendix eleven for store structure). Different styles of refurbishment were in operation. Stores which had been refurbished were referred to as 'Renewal' stores while those that had not undergone any refurbishment were known as 'Traditional' stores.

Each Supercentre, whether 'Traditional' or 'Renewal', had a Store Manager who held overall responsibility for the store's operations. Two assistant managers - a Sales Manager and Service Manager, assisted the Store Manager. Stores were split into departments with a manager assigned to each department. 'Traditional' stores had a further layer of management called 'Supervisors', who deputised for Department Managers.

10.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE CASE STUDY STORES

As outlined in Section 6.4, two embedded units were selected for each case study organisation. These embedded units took the form of stores, chosen to enable a comparison between a newly refurbished 'Traditional' store (West Thurrock) and a 'Renewal' store (Oxford).

10.2.1 The West Thurrock Store

This 'Traditional' store was eight years old at the time of the investigation, and based in a large out-of-town retail park, South Essex. The Store Manager had been at the store for one year having previously been a Store Manager with Homeco's main competitor. The store opened for 78 hours a week, 08.00 to 20.00 from Monday to Saturday and 10.00 to 16.00 on Sundays.

As can be seen from Table ten the store employed 70 workers, of which 49 (70 per cent) worked part-time. Eleven employees (16 per cent) were temporary, five of these from a local employment agency. Over half (60 per cent) of the work force were female, with the majority (81 per cent) of women working part-time

Table 10: Workforce composition of the West Thurrock store

	Full time	Part time	Total
Male	13 (18.6%)	15 (21.4%)	28 (40.0%)
Female	8 (11.4%)	34 (48.6%)	42 (60.0%)
Total	21 (30.0%)	49 (70%)	70 (100.0%)

As was usual for a 'Traditional' store, West Thurrock had two assistant store managers and three departments (Hardside, Softside and Administration). The three departments each had a manager responsible for various sections. Sections were then managed by supervisors who deputised for department managers in their absence. The largest department within the store was Administration, with 44 (63 per cent) employees, which included the staffing of checkouts (demanding more intensive labour).

10.2.2 The Oxford Store

The Oxford store was ten years old and based in an out-of-town retail park. It was classified as a 'Renewals' store having undergone major refurbishment in 1994. The store manager had been at the store for 8 months, having previously managed the

Banbury store. The store opened for 78 hours from 08.00 to 20.00 Monday to Saturdays and 10.00 to 16.00 on Sundays.

As can be seen in Table eleven the store employed 62 employees, of which only 9 (15 per cent) worked part-time. Managers attributed the unusually low percentage of part-timers to the local labour market, as discussed in Section 10.8. Just over half (52 per cent) of the work force were female, with 5 (15 per cent) of women working part-time.

Table 11: Workforce composition of the Oxford store

	Full time	Part time	Total
Male	26 (41.9%)	4 (6.5%)	30 (48.4%)
Female	27 (43.5%)	5 (8.1%)	32 (51.6%)
Total	53 (85.4%)	9 (14.6%)	62 (100%)

As a 'Renewal' store there were two assistant store managers, six departments and requisite managers, but no supervisory level. The Oxford store had six departments with the largest department being Customer Services employing 32 (52 per cent) staff.

The chapter from here onwards will be a discussion of the two case study stores, using data gathered from between January 1996 and January 1997. This was collected via semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted with managers at both Head Office and store-level, and an examination of company literature, as outlined in chapter seven.

10.3 CORPORATE STRATEGY: A BRIEF OUTLINE

The corporate strategy of Homeco had as its primary objective:

"to deliver consistent and superior returns to our shareholders by being one of Europe's most profitable volume retailers" (Annual report, 1997:1).

The goal of the strategy was to increase growth using the continuous development of offers to meet the changing needs and aspirations of customers more effectively than competitors. Such an emphasis on performance against specified quantifiable targets is the result of multiple store retailing becoming increasingly answerable to the City and shareholder pressure (Dawson 2000; Freathy and Sparks 1994; Sparks 1989).

Homeco's corporate strategy at the time of the research (January 1996 to December 1996) was to restore its profitability, develop plans for profitable growth and improve the organisation's infrastructure and processes. This was in response to a £12.7 million reduction in profit the previous year, resulting from a market downturn on Supercentre sales, combined with increased costs arising from the store refurbishment strategy.

Sales in 'Renewal' stores were ahead of predictions, but the majority of unrefurbished Supercentres had ended the same period with a decline in sales. To achieve their strategic goals a number of policies were introduced including an expansion of the store refurbishment programme, the introduction of a customer loyalty card and efforts to improve operational efficiency. In 1995 the company set a target of £20 million cost savings, outlining a cost minimisation approach to their corporate strategy. An emphasis on shareholder value has been identified in previous research (Legge 1995; Sisson 1994) and found to lead to a focus on short-term costs, and the maintenance of a high share price, despite Mintzberg's (1989) dismissal of the notion of 'shareholder value'. Concerns have also been raised about organisations placing a priority on

efficiency and short-term needs at the neglect of long-term social consequences (Blyton and Morris 1992; Burnes 2000; Mintzberg 1979, 1989). Store-level managers at Homeco were acutely aware of the cost pressures placed on them and felt the company placed too great an emphasis on costs:

“The company focuses too much on money.” (Store Manager, West Thurrock)

Previous research has also found an emphasis on cost minimisation in retail strategy, particularly in the food retailing sector (Christopherson 1996; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1988; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999).

A major impetus was placed on a ‘twin-track’ strategy. One track involved the refurbishment of Supercentres, and the other was the progressive roll out of the Warehouse format. This strategy was designed to stimulate market expansion and ensure growth through taking market share from weaker competitors, particularly in the independent and builders merchant sector. The store refurbishment programme was launched for existing stores to improve customer service and product ranges. Two programmes were in operation from 1994 onwards. The first format was known as the 'Fareham' model and 39 stores had been revamped under this programme by the end of 1996. Particular features included an orientation towards home decoration and significantly improved levels of customer service. Previous research has identified the importance of customer service in retail competitive strategies, which particularly gained prevalence during the 1990s (Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 2000; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Ruston 1999). As Sparks (1992c) predicted, customers will increasingly reject inadequate service provision, which will enforce multiple store retailers to continue to apply customer service as a key strategic tool.

An additional emphasis on service meant that staff levels were approximately 35 per cent higher than in a 'Traditional' store – staff which ideally included trade experts and an interior design team. This re-introduction of skilled personnel on the shop floor is a recent trend noted in multiple store retailing (Ruston 1999). A development of this was known as the 'Fareham II' model where improvements to the original 'Fareham' design were made.

The second refurbishment programme was called 'Project Wheel' under which 108 stores had been revamped. There was less emphasis on customer service under the 'Project Wheel' programme, but instead the emphasis was on store design. Stores were re-designed to make shopping easier in terms of layout, signage and increased product availability. Both programmes proved successful with the increase in sales paying back the cost of the 'Project Wheel' scheme within a year.

In 1993 Homeco introduced a customer loyalty card in collaboration with a major food retailer. Points were awarded to customers on their supermarket loyalty card for purchases made at Homeco. These points could then be redeemed at the supermarket. Concurrently a major advertising campaign was launched to emphasis value for money and good customer service - qualities seen as central to Homeco's brand image.

Homeco's strategy aimed to make operational efficiencies to increase profitability.

This was achieved by concentrating on supply chain management and stock management procedures. This strategy successfully reduced discontinued stock whilst improving product availability and stock turn, which worked towards achieving the

£20 million cost-savings target set in 1995. This again emphasises the cost minimisation focus of Homeco's corporate strategy. Such a priority in corporate strategy can lead to a focus on short-term profitability and 'quick-fix' solutions in multiple store retailing (Burnes 2000). The twin goals of quality enhancement, (via improved customer service and store design) and cost minimisation could be considered contradictory as argued in the literature (for example, Doogan 1992; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Lowe and Crewe 1996; Ogbonna 1992; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1996). The consequences of this will be examined in Section 10.8 when the realities of Homeco's strategies at store level will be discussed.

10.4 THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

To fulfil this study's research objectives the nature of store level management at Homeco was explored during the data gathering period. A re-structuring exercise in Renewal stores had removed the lower tier of management, as also noted by Sparks (2000b), whilst the organisational structure in 'Traditional' stores remained unchanged. In 'Renewal' stores the restructuring had led to an increase in responsibilities and span of control for Department Managers, reflected in an official change of title to Team Leader. For the purpose of this research study the term Department Manager will be used for this level of store management for clarification purposes.

Management and supervisory positions in the Homeco case study stores were organised, without exception, on a full-time basis, a feature of retail employment also found by Freathy and Sparks (2000). The company did not promote part-time employees unless they were prepared to switch to full-time employment, regardless of knowledge and experience gained:

"I have an experienced part-timer - a woman who delegates the work within the department when I'm away. But she'll never go any higher in the company than General Assistant because she won't work full-time." (Softside Manager)

This reluctance to promote part timers is well documented in the literature (for example Hunter and MacInnes 1991; Robinson 1990; Walsh 1990) and has the affect of limiting promotion for part-timers beyond a certain level (see also Tilly 1992). It was recognised that an increased use of part-timers made it difficult to maintain the internal promotion system:

"By using part-timers you have to go external for department managers - you don't get any career development with part-timers." (Assistant Manager)

Over half (56 per cent in West Thurrock, 60 per cent in Oxford) of all management positions in case study stores were held by men. Women were represented at senior store management level holding, for example, the store management position in Oxford and one of the assistant store management positions in West Thurrock. Neither were women necessarily in store management positions that were traditionally seen as 'female' or where a largely female workforce reported to them. Oxford had a female Hardside manager, while West Thurrock had a male Checkouts supervisor.

Promotion and progression at store level was through the hierarchy of management and via a succession of different stores. Senior store level managers were expected to

offer the company locational flexibility as part of their management development, as also found by Doogan (1992). The majority of managers at both case study stores were either internally promoted employees with a significant length of service, or older employees who had worked for other organisations, usually other retailers. The company was keen to recruit managers from the external labour market with previous retail experience. However the quality of these managers was questioned at store level:

“The company takes managers from third rate retail companies.” (Assistant Manager)

Although Homeco ran a graduate management scheme, the majority of graduates undertook roles at head office, rather than at store level. It would appear that the polarisation of the workforce discussed by Bell (1973) and Crouch (1997) was occurring between head office and stores at Homeco, rather than within stores themselves. It could therefore be argued that the ‘elite’ workforce Lovering (1990) talked of was being created at head office, rather than at store level. This could potentially increase any divergence between ‘thin’ managers at head office, and ‘thick’ managers at store level, as suggested by Mintzberg (1989).

10.5 HRM AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCING AT HOMECO

To consider the role of store level managers in the execution of HR policies and employee resourcing practices, it is important to examine the nature of HRM at both corporate and operational level. Current literature on HRM in multiple store retailing points to a number of key trends including a poor regard for the HR profession; a low level of trade union membership and recognition; poor training and development of hourly paid sales assistants; and strategies aimed at labour efficiency. Consequently,

much of the literature concludes that multiple store retailers tend to focus on 'hard' HRM techniques, although more progressive organisations are beginning to recognise the value of a 'softer' HRM approach (Truss et al 1997).

It has been argued that, to ensure human resource activities are built into the fabric of the corporate strategy, HRM directors should be on the board, or at least the executive committee of the business unit. This was not the case at Homeco which, according to Walker (1992), places doubt over the extent to which employment strategy was developed alongside corporate strategy. This supports the findings of Truss et al (1997) where there was more evidence of 'one-way' linkage (Golden and Ramanujan 1985) in organisations, where business strategy informs HR strategy, but not vice versa.

Homeco was facing a number of HR challenges at the time of this research study. These were outlined by the Personnel Manager at head office as being the need to make more efficient use of store level labour; problems recruiting staff at store level; and high labour turnover. The cost minimisation focus of Homeco's corporate strategy meant head office placed an increasing emphasis on the efficient use of labour in their stores. Homeco had already previously attempted to achieve this strategy of increased numerical flexibility at store level in 1994. During the empirical research Homeco again made attempts to consider the possibility of reducing labour costs through the introduction of greater numerically flexible working practices. The increased employment of part timers to achieve economic gains is a common feature of

multiple retailers' employee resourcing strategies (Gregory 1991; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Robinson 1990; Walsh 1990).

A project team was set up to consider the feasibility of the strategy during the period of the fieldwork for this case study. However in early 1995, the team was again disbanded after failing to devise any supporting policies for the strategy. As a result, head office intentions to increase flexibility within its stores were never communicated to operational level. In early 1996 the strategy was resurrected in response to the HR challenges the company was facing. Again a project team was set up to consider staff flexibility and productivity issues to determine the level of flexibility that was needed and how this could be achieved most effectively. Homeco wanted to introduce a computerised scheduling system to manage staff scheduling, thus removing the responsibility from managers in the stores. Such centralisation was also found by Doogan (1992), Smith (1988) and Sparks (2000a, 2000b).

Management consultants were appointed to look at productivity, and trading patterns within stores to assess the level of flexibility that was required by the company to improve efficiencies and make cost savings. Their role was to develop a 'time and motion' study at store level to determine the level of flexibility that was required. The project team was in existence for ten months, but experienced problems with the management consultants that it had appointed. The consultant's work was considered to be poorly managed and unproductive by the Homeco's project team at head office. The consultants were taken off the project which was subsequently abandoned in November 1996, and the project team again disbanded. It was resurrected in January

1997 overseen by a different internal management team who appointed new consultants. It was at this point that the fieldwork for this case study was completed. In terms of human resources Homeco suffered high labour turnover rates, and difficulties attracting new employees to the organisation. Homeco had an average annual turnover of labour at 48.5 per cent in 1991. Since 1993 Homeco had experienced difficulty recruiting school-leavers - a traditional source of labour for the organisation. This was exacerbated by the 'demographic time-bomb'. In the late 1980s the company attempted to address these problems by matching employees and the company more closely, using the recruitment and selection process. This involved giving job applicants an adaptability test at the interview to assess the candidate's data matching abilities (matching descriptions of goods to the goods themselves), disposition towards customers and basic numeracy.

These recruitment problems also led managers at head office to devise recruitment policies with the context of these demographic trends in mind. As a result a policy was adopted in the early 1990s which involved targeting recruitment at the over 50s. Homeco decided to test its new strategy by opening a store staffed entirely by older workers. It proved a success in lowering labour turnover, improving product knowledge amongst sales staff and the general standard of customer service. Consequently, Homeco actively encouraged applicants from the over 50s age group on a company-wide basis. Freathy and Sparks (1993) noted that superstores which focused upon the recruitment of older workers had been more successful in meeting their demand for labour.

Homeco recognised that some employees would benefit from the increased availability of flexible jobs that would result from the strategy to increase numerical flexibility.

This would offer the opportunity to draw upon a wider labour market by offering such flexible working arrangements. The ideal solution was seen to be the recruitment of more part-time workers to attract 'women returners'. It was felt that the recruitment shortages experienced by the company would be eased through opening up employment to working mothers via flexible working.

There was no company standard regarding the pattern of working hours for part time employees. All employment decisions were taken at store level, including the pattern of working hours. The payroll budget was determined at head office and represented 9 - 12 per cent of sales, depending on the type of store. Renewals stores were given a larger budget due to their commitment to higher levels of customer service. The payroll figure was calculated using the previous year's sales figures, thus conforming to control via the standardisation of outputs method (Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1983). Part timers tended to work fixed hours, whereas full timers were expected to work different hours each week - the organisation of this varied between stores. Part time employees were more likely to be used for overtime where a premium rate would not be incurred, although in stores where recruitment shortages were critical full timers would regularly work overtime. There was no company policy regarding the use of premium rate overtime and little consistency between and even within the stores on their use of full timers for overtime.

Homeco made wide and varied use of temporary contracts. The use of temporary staff has been identified as an important component of the retail workforce (Sparks 1992a, 1992b; Walsh 1990, 1991), with the seasonal variation in retail sales the main driving force (Hunter and MacInnes 1991). All new staff were recruited on a temporary contract through a 3 month probationary period, on successful completion of which employees were given a permanent contract. Homeco's stake in the gardening market meant a strongly seasonal trading pattern. Typically, the peak season for the gardening department ran from March to August, during which additional staff were recruited on fixed term contracts. Some stores making use of recruitment agencies due to difficulties recruiting from the local labour market. An analysis shows that in 1995, during the peak gardening trading month of May, 14 per cent of staff in Homeco's Supercentres were classified as temporary employees, falling to 3 per cent in December.

To support the strategy of enhanced levels of customer service Homeco claimed that it had “further developed its training for our people on the shop floor” (Annual Report 1996: 7), whilst insisting that they invested “heavily in recruiting and training all its staff” (Annual Report 1996: 3). Homeco also had in place an equal opportunity policy that underlined its membership of Opportunity 2000:

“The Group’s equal opportunities policy reflects the value that we attach to the differences in people and aims to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of each individual achieving their full potential”. (Annual Report 1996:33)

This commitment was supported by an Equal Opportunities Review Group which had been in operation for four years. Such policies suggest a ‘soft’ HRM approach to the

management of human resources, in contrast to the 'hard' HRM focus of the cost minimisation and numerical flexibility policies.

The role of store level managers was highly significant in terms of the deployment of labour at the operational level. Department Managers were responsible for recruitment and selection, training and development of the store's workforce, the deployment of labour, and staff scheduling. The centralisation of control evident in multiple store retailing led to a focus for store level managers on managing the store's workforce, as this remained their one area of relative autonomy (Hutchinson 1995; Maund 2001; Mullins 1999; Sparks 2000b). It was clear in Homeco that employment issues were devolved to store level with very few policies or guidelines from head office. Previous research has also found that multiple store retailers are most likely to devolve responsibility for HRM as far down the line as possible (for example Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tamkin et al 1997; Tomlinson et al 1997). The only intervention from head office was in the form of legal requirements such as Health and Safety, and equal opportunities. Any attempts by head office to intervene in labour decisions at store level were on an ad hoc basis. Such employment policies were often poorly communicated to managers in the stores which often resulted in confusion and a dismissal of the policies. This would suggest that store level managers had a wide responsibility for the function of HR, particularly employee resourcing, without much guidance from company policy. The extent and execution of this responsibility will be examined in more detail in Section 10.7.

10.6 THE CONSTRAINTS OF STORE LEVEL MANAGEMENT

An objective of this research study has been to examine the influence of line managers' choices and constraints on their management of human resources. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) pointed out, "making choices within parameters is central to the managerial role" (p.86). It is therefore important to consider the constraints of store level management in each case study organisation, and assess the impact of these limitations on local employee resourcing decisions. This is imperative given Kinnie's (1989) criticism that relatively little attention has been paid to changes in control systems and the impact of this on HRM.

As outlined in chapter five, there are many methods of control that can be used to restrict the decision making powers of store level managers. These systems of control can either direct processes, or dictate output. Ways to achieve this in multiple store retailing include the implementation of corporate strategy, the design of the formal organisational structure, the setting of performance targets and budgets, or the deployment of technology.

In many ways store level managers at Homeco were afforded much autonomy in their management of day-to-day operations which provided evidence for Mintzberg's 'diversified' configuration. As Child (1984) commented, communication links can become more tenuous in large organisations, resulting in a lack of co-ordination. Yet head office did make a few attempts to control store operations, and provided evidence of 'thin' management techniques and Mintzberg's (1989) 'machine' configuration.

Some aspects of operational management were subject to constraints instigated by head office. The centre maintained complete control in the decision-making process for store structuring, opening hours, stock management, and the setting of budgets and targets. Head office decided which stores would be refurbished, under which format, and imposed any accompanying re-structuring. Other evidence of centralisation was in the ordering of stock, with head office taking full responsibility for this. However, the effectiveness with which this was carried out was questioned by managers at store level. Some even held suspicions about the rationale behind the stock ordering process:

“Head office judge the levels of stock we need during the year and make the orders. There’s usually too much of it at the beginning of the season and then after a couple of months it dwindles off. Head office must bulk buy all its products although I reckon they receive a back hander for all these bulk buys because it’s rarely the stock we actually need.” (Hardside Manager)

This highlights the differences between levels of management, with store level managers questioning the abilities, and morals, of head office managers. Such a dichotomy corresponds with Mintzberg’s (1989) typology of management levels with head office operating a ‘thin’ management style, while store level managers were ‘managing through people’ with a ‘thick’ approach.

The biggest constraint placed on stores by head office was through budgets and targets. As outlined by Armstrong (1989), Kinnie (1989) and Stewart (1991), financial management control systems enable head office management to publicly define store-level managers’ limits through easily measurable targets. These accountancy control systems were extended to the management of human resources at store level. The staffing budget was determined by head office and represented 9 - 12 per cent of sales

using the previous year's sales figures, and dependent on the store format. 'Renewal' stores were given a larger budget due to their commitment to higher levels of customer service. The Oxford store had a staffing budget of 11 per cent of sales, compared to West Thurrock with a budget of 9 per cent. Head office expected higher levels of sales after refurbishment. To compensate for the additional costs the Oxford store was set a target of increasing sales by 20 per cent after its refurbishment. The emphasis for store level managers was on keeping within the budgets and meeting the sales targets. This was one of Homeco's few 'machine' (Mintzberg 1989) characteristics, with head office exercising control over store operations, through the use of financial control systems and performance targets. However there were few other attempts operationalised by head office to extend its control over store operations, suggesting that Mintzberg's (1989) 'diversified' typology was the more dominant configuration at Homeco.

10.7 STORE LEVEL MANAGERS' AUTONOMY

Beyond the restriction of budgets and performance targets, store level managers at Homeco held control over most operational decisions, which was particularly evident in the management of human resources, (see Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tomlinson 1997). As Emmanuel et al (1990) highlighted, HRM is very difficult to measure in quantitative terms, which negates control using the standardisation of outputs methods. Instead a standardisation of work content might be employed as the control system for HRM and employee resourcing (Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1983). Managers, at both case study stores, clearly regarded store managers as holding

greater power at store level than head office management; particularly in determining the management style, culture and practices of a store:

“Different management styles have a huge impact on the stores themselves.”
(Assistant Manager)

Despite efforts by head office management to centralise features of employment practice through company policy, such as increased numerical flexibility, store level managers considered themselves subject to few limitations from head office in terms of employment decisions:

"Employment decisions depend very much on the store manager. There is very little direction or impact from head office." (Hardside Manager)

This could be attributed to the lack of success at head office level to develop and communicate corporate strategies and policies. The culture of the company was described by store level managers as "relaxed", "very laid back" and also, significantly, "different according to different stores". This makes an examination of the informal organisation very important to fully appreciate the reality of control systems at Homeco (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Mars 1982; Mullins 1999). This informal culture contributed to the autonomy of store level managers, and was attributed to the lack of central control from head office and the resulting autonomy granted to managers at store level:

“The culture of the company is very informal. There are no rigid rules or regulations, more guidelines and parameters. A lot of initiative is allowed at store level.” (Store Manager)

“It’s such a laid back approach from the company together with a lack of intervention from head office.” (Assistant Manager)

“The only interference from head office is via any cost cutting measures they impose and making sure you fill out their paperwork. You really just need to achieve your job tasks and there’s quite a bit of autonomy in how you do it.”
(Assistant Manager)

This illustrates Homeco's lack of what Mintzberg (1989) termed 'co-ordinating mechanisms'. Few attempts were made by managers at Homeco to introduce standardisation between stores, the antithesis of the machine configuration. There were considerable differences between the two case study stores in terms of structure, procedures, and culture. This went far beyond the differences in store structures attributable to the various refurbishment programmes. Despite central control exercised by budgets and targets, there was a diversity between store outlets attributable to the weakness of head office and its failure to impose its authority on other aspects of store operations:

"I've worked at Chadwell Heath, Waltham Forest, Tottenham and Thurrock stores. Everything is different - it's like working for a different company with each new store." (Administration Manager)

"It's very different depending on which store you are in. This is a result of the laissez-faire attitude from head office." (Assistant Manager)

As previously noted, the major restriction placed on a store's use of labour was through financial control systems. However, as Berry et al (1995) also found, accounting systems can be subject to manipulation from those whose behaviour it is supposed to control:

"There is an overall staffing budget of 9% of sales. This covers the whole year and takes no account of peaks and troughs in trading. During quiet periods you can spend all 9% and no one at head office will question it, but then you'll only have the same amount to spend when you're busy which doesn't make sense." (Store Manager)

As in Mintzberg's 'machine' configuration efforts had been made by head office management to rationalise and centralise decision-making, but the informal culture and lack of co-ordinating mechanisms at Homeco meant a limited impact. As is typical in

the ‘divisionalised’ structure (Mintzberg 1989), the driving force for Homeco’s store level managers was their independence and autonomy.

Decisions regarding the basis on which to recruit new staff was the responsibility of the senior store level managers. There was no evidence of a formal company employee resourcing policy, with store level managers unaware of any company-wide recruitment process. This was despite head office claims that a more progressive recruitment and selection process was in operation (see Section 10.5). The only restrictions placed on the recruitment process by head office related to budgets, equal opportunities, and the use of a company standard application form. This led to a very informal, and sometimes disorganised recruitment and selection process:

“I don’t really know how we reach a recruitment decision.” (Assistant Manager)

Different recruitment and selection methods were deployed for different types of employee. A full time vacancy warranted two interviews, with different managers, while a part time vacancy normally justified one interview, with one manager, although many variations were found at each of the case study stores. This inconsistency posed issues relating to equal opportunities, and effective recruitment and selection.

Training for new and existing staff was also the responsibility of store level managers. This is in contrast to Smith’s (1988) findings where he found the content of training was set centrally to ensure consistency. Conversely at Homeco there was little coherence between managers regarding the level and methods of training employees received as a result of the lack of central co-ordination. Over half of the managers

interviewed provided the same level of training for both full-time and part-time employees:

"Full timers and part timers get the same training, although for full timers more is achieved in a shorter period of time because they are present more often than a full timer." (Assistant Manager)

However, the remaining managers conducted training according to whether an employee was full time or part time:

"For part timers the training is scaled down. They will only spend a couple of hours in each department rather than a whole day like full timers would."
(Hardside Manager)

This informality of the training provision meant divergence in the methods used to train staff, and the level of training individual employees actually received. This underlined the inconsistencies which existed between stores in the management of human resources, attributable to the lack of central control in this area. This again highlights a lack of co-ordinating mechanisms, with little effort made by Homeco's head office to standardise skills or norms, as discussed by Mintzberg (1989).

As with other employee resourcing issues, managers had relative autonomy regarding the deployment of labour in the store. The store manager at West Thurrock had a personal preference for using part-timers and, at the time of the research, was aiming to increase the store's proportion of part-timers. Paradoxically, in the Oxford store only 15 per cent of the workforce worked part-time, and there were no efforts to increase this figure. This highlights the control store level managers held over employee resourcing, which resulted in very different work force compositions for the two case study stores. However, this deployment of labour was never questioned by managers at head office because both stores kept within their staffing budgets. Head office seemed only interested in standardising outputs through a financial control

system specifying store performance targets. Beyond this few efforts were made to control store level HR operations.

A large part of a store level managers' role involved staff scheduling, but no training was provided:

“No training was given and there is no set rota pattern for the company. You really learn on the job and through experience.” (Gardening Manager)

With a lack of training and company-wide policy, the methods used to write staffing schedules were archaic, with no exploitation of EPOS data. Schedules were very simply devised using "just pen and paper" (Assistant Manager). Store level managers also had the ability to change shift patterns, without requiring permission from head office. The importance of staff scheduling was highlighted by Arrowsmith and Sisson (2000), who found it significantly impacted on employees' productivity, motivation and performance. The autonomy of store level managers was demonstrated at the West Thurrock store, when the Store Manager changed the working hours of the 'twilight' shift from 18.00 - 20.00 to 20.00 - 22.00. This change was communicated to staff via a briefing session, with four weeks notice, as required by their employment contract; the only restriction placed on the process by company policy. This was a change in working practice initiated at local level, and one that was not found at the Oxford store. Not requiring authorisation from head office, it again emphasised the high level of autonomy held by store level managers. This demonstrated a lack of standardisation of work processes, which left store level managers to control how staff conducted their tasks.

Managers at store level held an extensive degree of autonomy in managing human resources, beyond the restrictions of budgets and targets. They were accountable for staff scheduling, recruitment and selection, training and development, and the organisation of tasks and responsibilities. It was these areas of employee resourcing where head office appeared to have less formal control. Poor communication from head office regarding their goals and employment policies meant store level managers were often unaware of the company's strategic intent. Together with the informal culture of the organisation, managers at store level were able to exert much influence. It was local employee resourcing, which head office found difficult to quantify, where store level managers held the greatest degree of autonomy.

10.8 STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE

The previous sections of this chapter have described the degree of choices and constraints of store level management at Homeco which emanates from Homeco's corporate strategy, and the balance between centralisation and decentralisation in the formal organisational structure. During the interviews with Homeco managers it became clear that discrepancies existed between the rhetoric and reality of company strategy and policy. Store level managers resisting the increasing centralisation and transfer of power to head office, was combined with store level managers' manipulation of the remaining areas of autonomy available to them.

As previous research has identified (Child 1984; Heller 1997; Johnson 1987; Mintzberg 1989), there is often a gap between organisational strategy and what actually happens in large organisations. This has been attributed to the differences

between managers at senior level, who devise the strategies, and those at operational level, who are the implementors. Due to the size and geographical dispersion of Homeco and its stores, managers at head office were very distant from store operations. They relied heavily on formal information to formulate strategy, confirming their 'thin' management style.

Existing literature already suggests that the formation of strategy and policy does not necessarily indicate successful implementation with no resistance from employees (Child 1984; Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1989; Tamkin et al 1997). This manifested itself in a variety of ways at Homeco, as the following examples illustrate.

The strategic goal of cost minimisation was reflected in the various attempts by head office to assess and improve the productivity and efficiency of their retail work force through the flexibility project teams. External consultants were engaged to conduct time and motion studies, on various occasions, to address worker productivity issues. Despite head office's apparent focus on labour productivity and efficiency, store level managers admitted the continuance of an inefficient deployment of retail staff:

“There are times throughout the week when we have too many employees for customers, or vice versa, although weekends tend to be busier. It happens most when the rota mucks up.” (Hardside Manager)

“When checkouts are busy the section is understaffed and vice versa. The rota is out of synch with customer shopping patterns.” (Store Manager)

Store level managers made few attempts to improve labour efficiency and did not normally review staffing schedules in terms of improving efficiency:

“Schedules aren't really reviewed - only in terms of holidays and sickness or if there's a visit to be made to the store.” (Softside Manager)

Efficiency drives were advocated by head office management, but did not appear to be a management priority at store level. Operational managers ensured budgets and targets were adhered to, but did not complain significantly of any cost-cutting measures.

In line with its 'Renewal' status, the staffing budget for the Oxford store was higher to enable the provision of funding for additional labour and deliver an enhanced standard of customer service. However, the Oxford store was suffering from under-staffing caused by difficulties recruiting from the local labour market, with an inability to attract trade experts:

“We haven't got a carpenter or interior designer here because we just can't seem to attract them to the store.” (Assistant Manager)

This meant in reality that the store was failing to deliver the higher level of customer service or expertise, considered to be “an essential feature of the offer” (Annual Report 1995: 13) of stores refurbished under the 'Fareham' format. Managers at head office believed that 'Renewal' stores heralded a new culture and philosophy for the company, and were the solution to Homeco's profitability problems. However there was little evidence of this at store level. While the Oxford store had a higher staffing budget they faced similar problems to the West Thurrock store, including staff shortages. This inhibited their ability to provide a premium level of customer service; a key feature of the refurbishment strategy.

Homeco claimed to compete with other home improvement retailers on their quality of customer service. Company literature made consistent references to the level of customer service provided in Homeco stores:

“At Homeco investment in improved customer service is a key factor in its strategy to retain outright market leadership.” (1995: 7)

Despite this public commitment, policy implementation on the basis of customer service appeared to be unknown at store level, and therefore was not enacted.

Evidence of improved customer service was never mentioned by head office or store-level managers during interviews. When questioned local managers in fact acknowledged a lack of consideration for customer service, thus discrediting the company’s commitment to customer service:

“Head office have to say they’re committed to customer service because all our competitors do, but really they’re just interested in cutting costs and making money.” (Assistant Manager)

This highlights the difference between the public rhetoric at Homeco and the reality of store operations (Heller 1997).

Further examples of the divergence between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy was seen in the implementation of employment policies. Head office management espoused various policies and philosophies regarding human resources, which were often contradicted by store level managers. This again underlines the disparity between ‘thick’ management at head office, and ‘thin’ management at store level (Mintzberg 1989).

One area where store-level managers held relative autonomy was in the recruitment and selection of new staff. However differences were evident between the policies advocated by managers at head office, and the reality of the process at store level. Homeco had high labour turnover rates, of up to 48.5 per cent, whilst also experiencing difficulty meeting recruitment targets. According to head office

managers these problems were addressed in the early 1990s via a policy of matching employees and the company more closely, through using a variety of tests at the selection stage. However, at store level there was no evidence of any test in operation. Staff shortages and high labour turnover remained a perennial problem. Managers at head office did not consider the rate of pay for their employees to be a reason for the high rate of labour turnover, despite paying some of the lowest rates in the retail sector. Conversely managers at store level regarded the rate of pay to be a major reason for the difficulties they experienced in recruiting and retaining staff:

“We are only paying £3.79 an hour which makes it difficult to compete with other retailers for staff. Ikea are opening up opposite shortly, and they pay £5.05 an hour which means no doubt we’ll lose some staff to them, and have even greater problems recruiting.” (Assistant Manager)

Store level managers believed the local labour market had a greater impact on employee resourcing than any head office initiatives, but managers at head office did not acknowledge this. The manager of the Oxford store attributed the store’s high proportion of full time workers, relative to other Homeco stores, to problems recruiting from the local labour market. A large proportion of the local community was employed at a nearby car manufacturing plant. It was also an area of high unemployment and managers felt that, in order to attract employees from the local labour market, jobs had to be offered on a full-time basis:

"There is a 'factory mentality' towards work in this area. You need the 90 per cent full time split in this store because people around here won't work for anything less. Those looking for work are only interested in full time employment because of this 'factory mentality', and it's not worth them coming off unemployment benefit for anything less than full time work - especially with the level of pay that we offer." (Assistant Manager)

This demonstrates the disparity between head office and operational level in terms of resourcing difficulties. There appeared to be minimal communication between stores and head office which only exacerbated their different perspectives. These differences are again examples of Mintzberg's (1989) 'thick' and 'thin' management. At the two different levels of the organisation, managers held almost opposing views on employee resourcing.

Due to demographic changes Homeco had problems recruiting staff, aggravated by the reduction in the supply of school leavers to the labour market, a traditional source of labour for Homeco. Homeco publicly stated it was overcoming this problem through targeting recruitment at the over 50s. However, there was little evidence of older workers being actively recruited to either case study store, exemplifying the poor execution of head office policies. Managers at head office admitted that the recruitment of older workers was not a strategy, but had been a result of 'serendipity', underlining their ad hoc approach to the development of employment strategy:

“It was a complete fluke that we discovered the value of the over 50 employee. We didn't strategically develop a policy of recruiting older workers, but sort of stumbled onto the value of this age group, and went from there.” (Personnel Manager, Head Office)

Despite the problems of recruitment and retention, head office management believed its retail work force to be very committed. A time and motion study by external consultants in 1994 revealed that Homeco retail employees worked additional hours, without pay, beyond the requirement of their contracts. This was interpreted by head office as a sign of employee loyalty. However, the feelings at store level were very different, suggesting head office lacked an understanding of their retail workforce. Employees were not motivated to work harder because of their commitment to

Homeco. Instead store level managers believed employees worked these hours out of necessity to cover staff shortages and support colleagues and employee commitment was actually decreasing:

“Over the years my opinion of the company has changed where staffing is concerned. There’s a bad culture now. There is high labour turnover and the store is understaffed, which puts pressure on everyone else.” (Gardening Manager)

This contradiction confirms the ‘thin’ nature of management at Homeco’s head office. They managed from a distance, failing to recognise, and address, key employee resourcing problems.

Homeco indicated that it had significantly developed its staff training provision.

However, the reality at store level was very different with managers claiming that training, which had been carried out in the past, had been abolished, particularly in the area of product training:

“There’s no longer a Homeco training package for employees. Head office aren’t very good at communicating product changes so employees often know nothing about it when the customers ask.” (Assistant Manager)

“Product training is very poor because head office hasn’t taken any responsibility for it. They just tell employees to read the labels.” (Hardside Manager)

Even at the Oxford store, a ‘Renewal’ store expected to deliver a premium level of customer service, training appeared to be very minimal:

“They’re not too hot on training in this company - I’ve never really had any. They just don’t give support in that area.” (Hardside Manager)

The public employment strategies of Homeco were not evident at store level. Training and investment in staff appeared minimal, even at the Oxford store, which was considered a ‘flagship’ store for improved training.

Efforts to respond to recruitment problems and initiate cost savings were made throughout the mid-1990s at Homeco. Head office believed resourcing problems at store level could be resolved through increased 'flexible' working. Managers at head office decided that by increasing part time working at store level more working mothers would be attracted to the organisation. Recruitment shortages experienced by the company would then ease, whilst labour costs fall, producing a more 'flexible' work force, where demand and supply of labour could be more closely matched. While managers at head office wanted to increase part time working, store level managers held very different views, highlighting further the lack of communication. The majority of store level managers in fact regarded part timers as less reliable and committed to their work than full timers, and reported difficulties recruiting 'quality' part timers. Many held negative assumptions about part timers relating to their commitment, reliability and quality:

"You definitely don't get the same level of commitment from part timers. Full timers need the job for their wage; they take pride in what they do and look to development and promotion. Part timers only earn pin money - they don't need the job so they just do their hours and go." (Hardside Manager)

As a result it was believed that part timers took less pride in their work. They were considered to be less committed to their work believed to have higher rates of absence and were felt to be unconcerned about the quality of their work:

"Part timers just want to do their hours and go home. If they make a mistake it gets sorted out before they're next in so they never know about it or have to take responsibility for it. There is also a higher sickness level for part timers." (Gardening Manager)

This undermined the attempts by head office to increase part-time working in stores with store level managers so very critical of these employees.

As discussed in section 10.5 a series of project teams were set up by head office to implement and oversee the numerical flexibility initiatives and introduction of a computerised scheduling system to manage staff scheduling. However, none of the three were successful and the failure of these project teams to progress head office intention to increase part time employment undermined the control that head office could exert on stores. As a result head office failed to implement its 'flexibility' policy, and operational management continued to pursue whatever resourcing policy suited them:

"There is no pressure from head office to use part timers, to increase the number of part timers or to go for more flexibility of employment. It is all down to the personal preference of the store manager." (Store Manager)

Another feature of Homeco's employee resourcing practices was the use of temporary contracts to cover a store's peak trading periods, which ran from March to August, as a result of the seasonality of gardening (see section 10.5). Head office believed the use of temporary contracts was effective, but store level managers were less enthusiastic about their use. Managers at store level did not always believe that temporary employees were an ideal solution to the changes in trading patterns:

"They should theoretically work, but the problem is they don't coincide with students' diaries. We want temporary workers during term time, but students aren't available to work many hours at this time, which makes it very difficult to recruit anyone. We need to re-think how we manage our seasonal peaks and troughs." (Store Manager)

While head office was keen to see the continuing use of full-time temporary contracts mainly to resource seasonal peaks, store level managers felt they had the wrong priorities. Faced with recruitment shortages during the entire year, they wanted to see more initiatives from head office to address this longer-term problem. They were

totally unaware that head office had been assessing the use of more part time employees to overcome recruitment problems, and attempting to introduce such a policy for five years. This again clearly highlights the particularly poor communication between head office and store level managers in this company, confirming Mintzberg's notions of 'thin' and 'thick' management operating at different levels of an organisation.

Further differences between head office and store level managers in employee resourcing policy were revealed when examining Homeco's overtime policy. While head office officially banned the use of premium overtime as a cost reduction measure, the majority of store level managers claimed to be unaware of this policy. Of those managers who knew of the premium overtime ban, many admitted that they continued to authorise premium overtime in their stores:

"Officially we don't use overtime in the store because there's a complete ban - but unofficially yes we do use it." (Assistant Manager)

It would appear that even when company policy was successfully communicated to store level managers, there was the opportunity for it to be ignored, without repercussions.

Despite a public commitment to equal opportunities the reality at store level was very different. There was evidence of gendered occupational segregation, selection decisions based on managers' stereotypes, and the segregation of workers according to personal circumstances. This supports Hunter et al's (1993) findings that decision-making over types of contracts is often based on managers' stereotypes. Previous research has also found this (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Burchell and Rubery 1990,

1994; Collinson et al 1991; Hunter and MacInnes 1991), which has been corroborated by research conducted specifically in the retail industry (Bradley 1989; MacEwan Scott 1994; Tomlinson et al 1997).

At Homeco women were concentrated in a small number of sections within each store, such as checkouts, customer service desk and administration, traditionally 'female' jobs. Skill requirements of a job linked to the traditional perceptions of male work was also evident. The Hardside department contained power tools, timber, building materials, and was considered more suitable for male employees. It was believed that female employees were less likely to have experience of carrying out repairs around their homes, due to the domestic division of labour, and were therefore viewed by managers as unsuitable for these departments:

"the dirtier, messier side of DIY - the side that women don't get involved in at all." (Hardside Manager)

As a result a smaller proportion of females was found in the Hardside than the Softside department. This illustrates the phenomenon of horizontal occupational segregation, which was evident in both case study stores.

While head office was hoping to attract more working mothers to the company, some managers at store level were reluctant to recruit from this sector of the labour market.

Working mothers with family responsibilities were perceived as very inflexible.

Outside commitments prevented them working additional hours, or changing their shift patterns easily. For some managers this played an important role in the recruitment decisions they made, which was again at variance with the company's equal opportunities policy:

"The least flexible workers are women with children who have child care restrictions. It is a difficult decision when recruiting new staff and you are faced with a very capable person who can do the job well, but will be limited in the flexibility which they can offer. It is a big issue and if you do offer them the job you usually end up shooting yourself in the foot." (Store Manager)

Linked with managers' reluctance to recruit working mothers, there were problems at store level for employees who needed to change their working hours. The attitude of store level managers was firmly towards the needs of the business, rather than the needs of employees:

"They [*employees*] have to fit around what the company requires and not the other way round." (Hardside Manager)

This lack of balance between company and employee demands would discourage many working mothers from working for Homeco, as their personal circumstances often requires a more flexible approach. Therefore, the reality at store level was often in direct contrast to head office's intentions to recruit more part-time working mothers.

This research has revealed indisputable differences between the views of those strategically managing the organisation at head office, and those managing the operational functions at store level. Not only did interpretation of corporate strategy differ between written statements and reality, but so too did head office expectations and understanding of store operations. Head office's ability to develop any effective long-term employment strategy was treated with scepticism at store level, and head office was often ridiculed:

"The company is very short-sighted and has gone through a lot of changes. Two years ago they even had an American theme making us do drill exercises before work. That's how mad they are up at head office." (Hardside Manager)

"The company is very short-term in perspective, and the result is that it only ever follows trends." (Assistant Manager)

It was at the operational level where the gap between head office intentions and day-to-day reality was fully exposed. Stores were meeting budgets and achieving their profit targets, but also circumventing the methods and policies of head office. There appeared to be a large gap in communications between head office and stores, together with diametrically different conceptions about the most effective management of stores' operations. The notions of Mintzberg's 'thin' and 'thick', and Duncan's (1975) 'philosophical' and 'art' management, have been clearly borne out in this research. This research found much evidence in favour of Mintzberg's 'diversified' configuration. Few co-ordinating mechanisms were set up by head office, which gave significant control of day-to-day operations to store level managers. Where head office attempted to exert control over stores, it was met with covert opposition from store-level managers who employed various tactics to evade control and manipulate the information sent to head office. Evidence of these strategies of independence were found during interviews conducted with store level managers.

The 'Renewals' stores had a higher profile within the company because this format was viewed as the future success of Homeco. As a result these stores were subject to a greater number of visits from head office senior managers, who regularly checked that the strategy of store refurbishment was successful. This demonstrated efforts by head office managers to become involved in operational, 'thick' (Mintzberg 1989) management, whilst monitoring store performance. However Mintzberg (1989) noted that as organisations grow in size it becomes very difficult to practice 'thick' management at a senior level. This was evident at Homeco, where even visits from head office management failed to escape from local managers' strategies of

independence. Such visits from head office managers caused particular problems for the Oxford store. Its staff shortages meant it could not deliver the premium level of customer service expected of it. In order to ensure that the store operated at its optimum level of customer service when a visit from head office took place, staff were requested, by local managers, to work overtime to conceal the staffing shortages. Consequently, when head office managers visited the Oxford store there was a full complement of staff. For example, door greeters were present on the day of a head office visit, when in reality there was never a sufficient complement of staff to provide this enhanced level of customer service. Due to the high proportion of full timers working in the Oxford store, these visits meant requiring them to work overtime, at a premium rate:

"Now that Oxford is a Renewals store it has become more high profile and receives more visits. This causes staffing problems where a greater proportion of part timers would be useful to 'flex up' to cover for these visits, rather than using full timers at premium rate." (Softside Manager)

Managers at store level effectively concealed the extent of their employee resourcing problems, rather than exposing them. As a result head office were of the belief that stores were running according to their expectations. Store level managers appeared to be fulfilling the company's strategy, within prescribed budgets which gained them credibility with head office. Legge (2000) also found that managers seek ways of demonstrating their loyalty and commitment to senior management, in order to enhance their career prospects. These strategies of independence significantly contributed to the discrepancies between the views of head office and store level managers about the effectiveness of the company's strategies and policies.

10.9 DISCUSSION

This case study research has exposed the divergence between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy at Homeco. It also reveals the degree of decentralisation and its impact at store level, and the strategies of independence deployed at operational level to circumvent any head office control. It has demonstrated the realities of local HRM and employee resourcing in a multiple retail organisation.

Using Mintzberg's (1989) classification of organisations, Homeco operated along the lines of a diversified configuration. It had a strong informal organisation, which gave significant autonomy in decision-making to store-level managers. This resulted in a dichotomy between the espoused corporate strategy and the operational realities, and a diversity of operations between stores. Such divergence between strategy formation and implementation has been found in previous research (Mintzberg 1989; Heller 1997).

This research highlights the difference between the rhetoric and reality of Homeco's corporate strategy. Equal opportunities, training and customer service were not priorities for managers at store level, despite the prominence given to these areas in company literature. There were indisputable differences between the perceptions of managers at head office, and those at store level. The lack of experience of operations at store level of head office graduates must contribute to this. A change in policy in graduate training and development may be called for. While managers at head office intended to have a more considered approach to managing human resources, they seemed unable to produce any clear strategy or supporting policies. This was

particularly clear from their abortive and ineffective attempts to increase part-time working. There was also poor communication between head office and store level managers. Few managers at head office had any great experience of managing at operational level, in part caused by the company's graduate trainees taking jobs at head office, rather than at store-level. Consequently, there was minimal involvement from head office in a store's management of human resources, and very little respect for head office at store level.

The greatest dichotomy was apparent between company policy and practice in the management of human resources. While head office aimed to increase the proportion of part timers, the reality at store level was one of differing work force compositions, and varying attitudes amongst managers. The failure of three successive project teams set up to examine the validity of increased part time deployment, highlights the inability of the company to produce any coherent long-term employment strategy. This meant a minimal involvement of head office in employment policy and procedure, and led to little conformity between stores in their approach to the management of human resources.

The role of managers at store level was very significant, in terms of the management of human resources. While subject to some aspects of centralisation in the form of budgets, targets, and stock management, it was clear that employment issues were devolved to store level with very few guidelines from head office. Even the company's commitment to equal opportunities was questionable at store level, with managers' stereotyped perceptions playing a key role in employee resourcing decision making.

Any other attempts by head office to intervene in labour decisions at store level were on an ad hoc basis, or were never developed into clear policies, and hence not communicated to store level. The lack of central control of stores' management of human resources meant there was much informality. Managers had the autonomy to dictate their own preferences for the type of workers they recruited and developed, using the methods they felt most suitable. This informality became more important in the new organisational structure of 'Renewal' stores with greater degrees of delegation afforded to Department Managers.

Nevertheless there were some areas where head office had control of a store's operations, and store level managers were keen to retain autonomy of their remaining decision-making powers. To do this they employed elaborate tactics to ensure a facade of effective management was demonstrated to head office. In doing this they hoped to assure managers at head office that the current autonomy trusted to them was well-founded. This would then avoid any further centralisation of their tasks, and allow them to continue to manage stores with their own preferred methods and styles.

While head office's main control over staffing in stores was through budgetary constraints, store level managers used various techniques to project an image of effective store management. Managers were able to conceal store staffing deficits, even when visited by head office managers, through the use of overtime. As long as managers kept within the prescribed budgets and met the targets set by head office, the management of their human resources was rarely questioned. This again gave much autonomy to store level managers in local employee resourcing.

This research highlights that the minimal involvement from head office, in terms of employment practices, meant the stores' approaches to employee resourcing varied greatly. Managers were keen to maintain their autonomy over staffing issues and used various techniques to bypass head office centralisation as far as possible. This approach was used by store level managers to preserve their independence from head office, and safeguard their roles. While head office were attempting to generate greater centralisation and control of store activities they were clearly unable to do this. The strength of the informal organisation meant many policies, particularly employment policies, were rarely formalised. This led to some confusion at operational level, as was also identified by Stewart (1999), which granted store-level managers a notable degree of autonomy in the decision-making process. Because of the tradition of relative freedom of operation at store level at Homeco, head office attempts to increase control tended to be thwarted. head office's history of failure to implement initiatives also further exacerbated the bifunction between stores and the centre.

This chapter has presented a discussion and analysis of the empirical data for the Homeco case study. Background information providing a contextual perspective to the case study organisation and stores was given, before an examination of local management constraints and autonomy. The existence of various strategies of independence was detailed, and subsequent conclusions drawn. The following chapter will discuss the comparative findings from the three case study organisations, before the thesis is concluded in chapter twelve.

Chapter 11

DISCUSSION

This chapter will draw together the findings of the research and relate the primary results back to the literature review. It will examine and discuss the main findings of the empirical research, focusing particularly on the similarities and differences between the three case study organisations.

11.1 CONTEXT OF THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

The retail industry is a major employer in the UK. Its market leaders are amongst the country's largest companies in both financial and employment terms (Labour Research 1994). Research has confirmed the retail industry as a low pay sector, as well as primarily a feminised and youthful industry (Craig and Wilkinson 1985; MacEwan Scott 1994; NRTC 1995; Sparks 1992b). All three case study companies employed a large proportion of female workers, particularly in Superco and Groceryco - the two food retailers. The industry is also characterised by high levels of labour turnover, and low levels of unionisation (Sparks 1992a, 1992b). Homeco was a good example of this with high levels of labour turnover causing staffing shortages and no trade union recognition.

Retail organisations employ a large number of part time workers (Hakim 1987; IDS 1993a; IRS 1994; Naylour 1994; NRTC 1995; Sparks 1992a, 1992b), with a significant increase occurring between 1984 and 1994 (Dex and McCulloch 1995;

Naylour 1994). We have witnessed the introduction of zero hour contracts in an attempt to achieve maximum flexibility of working time (IDS 1993a; 1993b; Neathey and Hurstfield 1995). All three case companies in this research were large organisations, operating within the multiple branch retailing sector. Within this sector they operated predominately within the superstore sector. This sector has been characterised by a higher use of part time staff than high street stores (Dawson et al 1986; MacEwan Scott 1994). This was evident in the two food retailers, with an average 69 per cent of their combined store workforces employed on a part time basis, and the introduction of minimum hours contracts in Superco.

Large multiple branch retailers have been associated with the most modern changes in the labour process, particularly through their use of technology (Walters and Hanrahan 2000). The deployment of EPOS has enabled managers at head office to enhance their control of store operations, and impose cost savings (Lloyd and Rawlinson 1992; Retail Business 1990; Tomlinson et al 1997; Tordjman 1994). Advancements in information technology have been cited as a key component of competitive advantage in the retail industry (Johnson 1992), with the adoption of EPOS hailed as having revolutionary implications (Retail Business 1990; Smith 1988). This was evident in all three case study companies, particularly the food retailers, where a sophisticated use of technology to save costs and control store operations was witnessed.

Each of the case study companies were under competitive pressures, although this seemed more exigent in the food retailing sector. As Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) noted, the UK food retailing sector is “intensely competitive” (p.80). As a result food

retailers tend to be at the forefront of the retail industry in terms of competitive strategies. This was apparent during this research study with Homeco remaining market leader of the home improvement sector, and being relatively unchallenged competitively for over a decade. Meanwhile, at the time of the research, Superco had only recently become the leading food retailer, while Groceryco was employing significant strategic changes to maintain its Number 3 position. Thus, Superco and Groceryco appeared to be under greater competitive pressures, and subject to the development of more exacting competitive strategies than Homeco. This may account for the differences between the two supermarkets and Homeco in this research, and for the concurrent similarities that tended to exist between Superco and Groceryco.

In conjunction with competitive pressures each case study company was answerable to several stakeholders. The two major pressure groups were shareholders and customers. As publicly quoted companies the maintenance of a high share price was essential to all three companies, particularly with the possibility of mergers and acquisitions in such a competitive industry (Freathy and Sparks 1996). As outlined in the literature (Blyton and Morris 1992; Burnes 2000; Legge 1995; Sisson 1994), such a focus on shareholder value, usually leads to the predominance of short term financial results, and hence cost savings. In addition to the pressures from shareholders, each organisation had to satisfy increasing customer demands for longer opening hours, lower prices, plus improved standards of product and service (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996). This led to the twin strategic focus of cost minimisation and customer service, in attempts to satisfy these stakeholders, particularly in Superco and Groceryco.

The achievement and retention of a competitive advantage is seen to be crucial to a firm's growth and prosperity in large-scale, multiple store retailing (Walker 1992). Competitive strategies must also be devised in consideration of the pressures and demands from various stakeholders, as discussed above. This led many retailers to pursue cost-saving strategies in an attempt to satisfy both shareholder and customer demands (Brewster 1998, Freathy and Sparks 1996; Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1988; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999). All three case study companies emphasised their commitment to increasing shareholder value. This was apparent in all three case companies who were pursuing a competitive strategy based on the achievement of cost savings, through improving efficiency. Superco and Homeco were aiming to achieve £20 million worth of cost savings, while Groceryco had set a target of £60 million. To realise this target, efficiency measures and cost reduction policies were introduced in all three companies. It was hoped that these measures would be reflected on the bottom line by increasing shareholder value.

A second major feature of the competitive strategy of the case study companies was a focus on improving the quality of customer service. All three publicly stated in their company literature the importance of a high standard of customer service delivery in their stores, (as also found by Doogan 1992; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Ogbonna and Whipp 1999; and Sparks 1992c). However, this was only apparent at operational level in the two food retailing organisations. While Homeco articulated that improved customer service was a key factor in its competitive strategy, the reality was a lack of attention to customer service at both head office and store level. Instead Homeco focused on store refurbishment as a means of improving the shopping experience for

customers. Meanwhile, efforts were made to reduce queue lengths at checkouts, improve store layout, offer bag-packing services, and provide other additional services in the two supermarket chains. Superco quantified some of its promises, the most public and ambitious being its 'One in Front' pledge to customers. Meanwhile, Groceryco was more ambiguous about the nature and expectations of its customer service improvements, and did not make public quantifiable performance pledges to its customers.

In all three case study companies, adaptations to organisational structure were made to accommodate corporate strategy. This commonly took the form of de-layering, although more radical re-structuring took place at Groceryco where functional restructuring had taken place. Redundancies also formed a major role in Groceryco's restructuring programme. Superco instigated its restructuring policy in 1991, at least three years ahead of the other two companies. Further efforts to improve customer service, and retain customer loyalty were seen in the introduction of loyalty cards by all three companies. This occurred in 1995 at Superco, and 1996 for both Groceryco and Homeco. Financial services were also offered by the two supermarkets. Superco was again ahead of Groceryco with the introduction of this additional service for customers, starting its financial service in 1996, compared to 1997 for Groceryco. This highlights the extent to which Superco was the 'first mover' in many strategic aspects in the multiple store retailing sector, with the other case study companies using copying tactics to react to Superco's innovations.

Managers in the case study stores were subject to corporate strategies that focused on a simultaneous programme of cost reduction and quality enhancement, particularly at Superco and Groceryco. This trend in retail competitive strategy has been previously outlined in the literature (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Sparks 1992c). While the aim of strategy in retailing has been outlined as the need to differentiate a company from its competitors (Walker 1992), this was subject to difficulties, as highlighted by these research findings. The case companies formulated strategy to enable their attainment of a competitive advantage. It was therefore ironic that all three were pursuing such similar strategies, albeit to varying degrees. This might be likely to negate any competitive advantage that could be gained.

The ease with which competitors can replicate strategy in the retail industry has been well documented (Christopherson 1996; Doogan 1992; Freathy and Sparks 1996; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Walker 1992). Consequently, the benefits of 'first mover advantage' are often minimal in retail, as shown by this research. While Superco was often innovative in its approach to the formation of corporate strategy, its competitors often just simply copied those initiatives. This was apparent with Groceryco introducing strategies of 'QueueBusters', loyalty cards, cost reductions, and financial services, within a year of Superco doing so. As a result the services, prices, and opening hours offered by the companies were of such similar nature there was little distinction between them, thus eventually invalidating the strategic advantage of being 'first mover' in the sector. This could be termed as a 'strategic vicious circle', whereby innovative retailers' strategies would inevitably be replicated by competitors.

However, competitors would suffer competitively if they did not at deploy these replication tactics by falling behind other retailers in their service to customer. This made it essential to at least try to maintain pace with the ‘first mover’ in the industry, which contributed to the competitive pressures on retailers and demanded ever more innovative strategies to try and break the ‘strategic vicious circle’.

It is suggested that the main strategic focus of the case study companies was a reduction in costs combined with a corresponding improvement in the quality of customer service. This contradicts Porter’s (1985) theory that companies can only successfully pursue one strategic direction at any one time. This research subsequently supports Murray’s (1988) proposition that generic strategies are not always mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, these apparently contradictory strategies were in operation in the case companies. The three case study organisations could therefore be termed ‘schizophrenic’ because their strategies were motivated by the contradictory and conflicting principles of quality enhancement and cost reduction. These strategies amounted to demands for higher quality service and longer opening hours, but with the provision of fewer resources. The emphasis clearly rested on the notion of ‘more for less’, supporting Sisson’s (1994: 15) conclusion that even where strategic rhetoric emphasises customer service, the reality is more one of “market forces supreme”. This had implications for local employee resourcing, as the ‘more for less’ focus impacted on the decision-making process for store level employee resourcing (see section 11.3).

11.2 THE CONTEXT OF RETAIL MANAGEMENT

The context of the retail industry and structure of multiple store retail companies influenced the nature and role of management at store level. As Child (1984) noted, geographical dispersion is a contingent factor, which sets up pressures for delegation. All three companies were organised on a regional basis, with a large span of control for Regional Managers. It was management at head office who formulated strategy, which was then translated into policy and communicated to store level managers, often via the regional office. These policies were accompanied by demands in the form of budgets and performance targets. Therefore head office could be described as the 'strategic level' (Child 1984), 'strategic apex' (Mintzberg 1979), or the 'corporate group' (Beetham 1987) in all three case study organisations. For the purpose of this research study the term 'strategic level' will be adopted to describe head office senior management formulating corporate strategy.

The size and geographical dispersion of stores meant that managers based at head office were both physically, and operationally, remote from the branches. They relied on a degree of formalisation as a means of controlling store operations, particularly in Superco and Groceryco. Consequently, head office managers relied heavily on feedback information provided by stores, as a basis on which to make further strategic decisions. This relates to Mintzberg's (1999) 'controlling role', whereby senior management use information in a directive way to develop systems, design structures, and impose directives. This led them to rely heavily on information, or 'superficial knowledge' (Mintzberg 1989: 354), to formulate strategies and policies.

Few attempts were made by managers at head office to become closely involved in store operations, beyond periodic 'royal' visits to selected stores. As a result a gulf between head office and store level managers was clearly discernible in all three case study companies. This confirms previous research findings regarding the lack of understanding that often exists between staff at head office and the operational level (Tamkin et al 1997; Truss et al 1997; Watson and Harris 1999). Consequently the strategic level in all three retail organisations was far removed from the reality of store operations. Conversely, store level managers were heavily involved in the operational aspects of retail management, but were very distant and uninvolved in the strategic decisions of the company.

These research findings identify managers at head office as symptomatic of Mintzberg's (1989) 'thin', or Duncan's (1975) 'philosophical' managers. Even where head office managers at Homeco were visibly attempting to become involved in local management through frequently visiting stores, the existence of 'thin' management at head office level remained. This accords with Mintzberg's (1989) conclusion that "when organisations become large, complex and diversified.....they are precluded from managing in thick ways" (p.254). Ironically at Homeco, despite numerous visits to stores by the strategic level, there appeared to be a greater division between head office and store management than in either Groceryco, or Superco. This could be attributed to the dominance of the informal organisation at Homeco, poor communication between Head office and stores, a lack of co-ordinating mechanisms (Mintzberg 1989), and the extent to which strategies of independence were deployed by store level managers (see section 11.4).

Conversely, managers at store level displayed characteristics of Mintzberg's (1989) 'thick', or Duncan's (1975) 'art' management styles. In all three companies local managers were heavily involved in day-to-day operations, and responsible for implementing policies developed by 'thin' managers at head office. While assuming seniority within a store in terms of the branch management hierarchy, within the wider organisational structure this level could be described as middle management. They were located between senior management at regional and head office level, and junior managers and shop-floor employees at local level. These managers had to constantly juggle the needs of head office with those of junior managers "to make other people's policies work" (Watson and Harris 1999: 178). They worked within increasing constraints playing the role of "man in the middle" (Roethlisberger 1945). As Sayles (1999) described, middle managers often become the players who facilitate necessary trade-offs to make systems work. This was evident in the case study organisations where store level managers were involved to some extent in strategies of independence.

The dichotomy and tensions between store and head office management were clear in all three case study companies. Senior management at Superco's head office even acknowledged this circumstance, but attributed it to the nature of the industry, and so did little to address the issue. With these differences there were effectively "two worlds" in operation in each organisation. The first 'world' existed at the strategic level, while a very different 'world' operated in the stores. This was exacerbated by the employment of graduates in an attempt to professionalise the management role (Freathy and Sparks 2000; Hendry and Pettigrew 1987). At Homeco and Groceryco,

graduates were more likely to be employed at head office, with relatively little experience of store operations. Meanwhile at Superco, where they were employed at store level it was only at senior management level, and not at as Section Managers. This contributed to the dichotomy between managers at head office and store level. The absence of interaction and operational communication between head office and store level managers meant a lack of understanding of the other's role. This widened the dichotomy between the two organisational levels, contributing to the existence of 'thin' and 'thick' management (Mintzberg 1989).

In addition to the disparity between head office and store level managers there also appeared to be a divergence between management levels within the stores themselves. There was a greater similarity between head office and store managers' perspectives and opinions at the senior levels of the store, than at junior level. Previous research findings have found that the higher a manager in the organisational hierarchy, the higher their level of commitment to that organisation (Brager 1969; Cummings and Elsalami 1968; Mintzberg 1983). These research findings concur with this theory, as junior managers demonstrated a lower level of loyalty to, and empathy with, the strategic level. They experienced at first-hand the problems of juggling the realities of increasing demands and constraints with fewer resources. As previous research has found, junior management represents two organisational families (see section 3.4). This level of management related more closely to shop floor staff than to senior store or head office management, particularly at Superco, with differences between senior store managers and junior managers being more marked. As previously discussed, graduates in this organisation were recruited to senior store management positions,

which may have created a social and educational gap between senior and lower level managers. Additionally the dichotomy between management levels at operational level in Superco could also be attributed to the size of managers' span of control because it was far higher than in either Groceryco or Homeco. The ratio of staff to managers varied from 22:1 at Superco, 13:1 at Groceryco, and 11:1 at Homeco. As Mintzberg (1989) concluded, the larger the span of control, the less likely managers of that unit are able to adopt a 'thick' management approach because "there is simply too much to do and too much to know" (p.354). This research supports Rawson's (1997) observations that tensions appear to exist between all levels of management, throughout the organisational structure, from the strategic level to the most junior management.

As previous commentators have noted, the role of the junior manager has been a largely neglected aspect of the literature, particularly in the management of human resources (Kinnie 1989; Lowe 1992). Yet it was at this level in the case study companies where the realities of implementing corporate strategy were most acutely felt. Junior managers had to successfully transact head office strategy and policies into day-to-day operations. Their efforts were devoted to everyday operational work, juggling the realities of head office's increasing demands within a context of escalating constraints.

To summarise, the dichotomy between head office and the operational level was clearly visible during this research study. It could be attributed to a number of reasons, which varied for each company, but included the regional structure of the firms, the

recruitment of graduates to head office, the strength of the informal organisation, poor communication between management levels, and the superficiality with which head office managers were involved in store operations. At Superco this dichotomy was also apparent between the management levels within the stores themselves. Possible explanations for this could be their wider spans of control, and the recruitment of graduates to senior store management positions. As a result Mintzberg's (1989) 'thick' and 'thin' management characteristics were clearly in operation, which contributed to the existence of two very distinct, and different 'worlds' in operation at head office and stores. This resulted in managers being very familiar with their own 'world', whether it be at head office or operational level, but had very little experience or understanding of the 'world' at the opposing organisational level.

11.3 THE CHOICES AND CONSTRAINTS OF STORE LEVEL

MANAGERS

As previously outlined by Freathy and Sparks (1996), retail head offices commonly develop strategies and systems to which store level managers must adhere. In the three case study companies, in order to deliver shareholder and customer promises, head office needed to ensure consistency in both its delivery of customer service, and efforts to attain cost savings. As Stewart (1991) outlined, retail chains usually exercise control of stores through the standardisation of outputs to ensure that each branch delivers the same 'shopping experience' to customers. This was particularly apparent in the two food retailers of Superco and Groceryco, where greater efforts to assimilate stores were made, compared to Homeco where fewer 'co-ordinating mechanisms' (Mintzberg 1989) existed.

11.3.1 The Constraints Of Store Level Management

The degree of centralisation versus decentralisation varied across all three case study companies, although there were some similarities relating to the level of head office control over the operational decision-making process. There was evidence in all three companies that efforts were being made to increasingly centralise what in the past had been store level managers' decision making powers. These included stock management and pricing, store opening hours, and the formal organisational structure. The major enabling mechanism for this increased head office control was technology. The literature outlines how retailers have utilised technology to standardise the retail process and make efficiency savings (Child 1984; Houlton and Thomas 1990; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Lloyd and Rawlinson 1992; Ogbonna 1992; Smith 1988; Tordjman 1994; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This has often been achieved through technology assuming many of the tasks previously undertaken by lower level managers and staff (Freathy and Sparks 1994). In the case study companies there was clear evidence of this, with computerised stock management, and pilot schemes of computerised staff scheduling taking place. Even at Homeco, where head office control was minimal and erratic, there were attempts being made (albeit unsuccessful), which aimed to increase head office control of store operations, and further standardise the decision-making process. Mintzberg (1989) claimed that such an obsession with control is a major factor that drives organisations towards a machine bureaucracy.

As found by Armstrong (1989) and Kinnie (1989) the main control system exerted by head office, in all three case study companies, was financial. Keeping within budgets was vital for local managers. As suggested by Mullins (1999), and Mintzberg (1983;

1989), bureaucratic organisations often make use of accounting control systems, and hence these three retailers can be seen as conforming to Goold and Campbell's (1987) financial mode of management. In doing so, it enabled head office to monitor cost reduction policies to ensure the savings promised to shareholders and customers were delivered. As Mintzberg (1989) stressed, managers concerned with efficiency will always favour tangible benefits, because "he or she can measure them and attribute them to his or her efforts" (p. 333). This budgetary control publicly determined the boundaries within which store level managers operated, by defining their latitude of decision-making (Mintzberg 1983; 1989; Stewart 1991; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This was even apparent in Homeco, although staff shortages reduced the budgetary pressures on employee resourcing. As portrayed in the literature, budgetary control is often viewed as imposing restrictions on managers' autonomy (Mullins 1999; Prior 1984; Stewart 1999; Walters and Hanrahan 2000). This was evident in all three case companies, particularly the two food retailers, where cost reduction policies were more pervasive, severely impeding the financial self-determination of store level managers. These restrictions were in turn resented by local managers.

As part of the budgetary control systems present in all three case study companies, head office maintained control of all quantifiable aspects of human resources. This meant stores were subject to labour budget constraints. The method of budgetary control varied between the three companies, with closer monitoring of staffing budgets evident in the two food retailers. Here, a more sophisticated model of labour budget determination was in operation, with labour productivity rates determined by head office and set at departmental level. Compliance with these rates was monitored by

analysts at head office, which further constrained the resourcing abilities of store level managers. These analysts are part of Mintzberg's (1983) 'technostructure', which he described as "favouring economic efficiency, expressed as tangible goals, and deployed through increasing bureaucratisation" (p. 130). At Homeco the staffing budget was determined using sales figures. Consistent staff shortages made it difficult for head office to identify stores that were running above or below their staffing budget, as store level managers seemed very knowledgeable of this more simplistic control system and its capacity for manipulation. This gave greater flexibility, in terms of employee resourcing, to store level managers because their budgets were not so closely monitored by head office. This allowed them to circumvent head office policy to satisfy local conditions. As a consequence, the use of premium rate overtime, the employment of a predominately full time workforce at the Oxford store, and the recruitment of expensive agency staff at the West Thurrock store, without detection by head office was found. These findings accord with Piper's (1980) conclusions that a greater emphasis is placed on more elaborate and specific accounting controls in the retail industry, when an organisation is under greater competitive pressures. Store level managers at Superco and Groceryco appeared to be under more rigorous and limiting budgetary controls than those at Homeco, whose competitive pressures seemed to be lower.

Compounded by the physical and operational distance between head office and stores, the focus for control and co-ordination of store operations became the management and monitoring of outputs, rather than processes (Merchant 1985; Mintzberg 1983, 1989; Stewart 1991). As Child (1984:160) stated, output control makes use of formal



structural mechanisms to preserve managerial control without having to rely on close personal supervision, considered impractical in large multiple store retailing organisations. In the case study companies, where store activities could be directly centralised (such as stock management), the technology was exploited to achieve this. In other functions, where the assumption of store level tasks by technology was less feasible, head office quantified these functions where possible by setting stores performance targets to achieve. The quantification of customer service standards (such as Superco's 'One-In-Front' promise), combined with improved technology, meant that head office could measure individual store and employee achievements of these targets. This quantification of customer service values was advocated by Walters and Hanrahan (2000), so as to give clear performance parameters for each element of service. As Ogbonna (1992) found, increased centralisation in the retail industry has been the consequence of improved technology. Such advancements facilitated the closer monitoring of store performance, particularly in the area of customer service and employee performance. However, the consequence of this increased centralisation and head office control was an emphasis on the measurable, often at the expense of more intangible functions such as 'soft' HRM practices.

While the focus of head office management control was on budgets and targets through the standardisation and monitoring of outputs, there were additional constraints for store level managers. These emanated both from within the organisation itself, and through the external environment. As Mintzberg (1980) suggested "all management jobs are constraining" (p.112). These constraints included internal factors such as company policies and procedures (for example, equal

opportunities), the use of technology, and trade unions (where recognised). External factors that constrained store level managers' decision-making powers included legislation, the economic environment, customer demands, and the supply of local labour. This was demonstrated at Homeco's Oxford store where the full time composition of the store's workforce was attributed to the external supply of labour, rather than any internal company constraints to the recruitment and selection process.

It was clear from this research that head office in all three case study companies increasingly centralised store operations, where it was possible to do so. These attempts to control store operations conform to Mintzberg's 'machine' configuration, with rationalising often becoming the solution to organisational problems and external pressures. This was particularly evident in the two food retailers, where increasing competitive pressures had led to strategies focusing on 'more for less'. There was less evidence of this at Homeco, where competition was weaker and the company had successfully maintained its market leadership for over a decade. Instead a cost reduction strategy was in place to address the shortfall in profits caused by the recession of the early 1990s. The demands placed on store level managers with the accompanying constraints led to a focus on tangible targets, often at the expense of intangible benefits (this will be discussed further in Chapter 12).

11.3.2 Store level Managers' Autonomy

Whilst store level managers were experiencing an increasing centralisation of their tasks, together with a close monitoring and co-ordination of their remaining tasks, there was also an element of formal discretion granted to them by head office. As

previously discussed, and described by Child (1984) and Mullins (1999), the geographical dispersion of stores, and size of the case study organisations, meant an element of decentralisation was necessary. Together with the 'thinness' of head office management and a focus on output management, a less prescriptive approach to some store processes was subsequently adopted.

While head office exercised control by monitoring stores' achievement of tangible activities, there was a delegation of tasks judged by head office as impractical to be executed from the centre. Those elements of store operations difficult for head office to quantify and measure, were the aspects of decision making decentralised to store level. In all three companies, this largely equated to local HRM, particularly employee resourcing, as also found in previous research (Neathey and Hurstfield 1995; Tomlinson et al 1997). While head office devised equal opportunity, and health and safety policies (i.e. those elements of HRM subject to explicit legislation), the deployment and management of labour was largely dealt with at store level, albeit within budgets and targets imposed by head office. Consequently, much of the responsibility for local HRM and employee resourcing was subject to minimal control by head office. Store level managers in all six case stores had some degree of involvement in, and responsibility for, local employee resourcing. This included recruitment and selection, on-the-job training, staff scheduling, and the day-to-day management of staff, including the delegation of tasks. There were some aspects of local HRM that were 'action controlled' (Merchant 1985:4), in that the procedures required were more specified. These included the setting of labour budgets, the prescribing of an equal opportunities policy, an induction training programme, and the

recruitment and selection process in Groceryco and Superco. At Homeco local managers were afforded the greatest autonomy due to a lack of head office co-ordinating mechanisms, particularly HR policies. In the two food retail organisations, the degree of autonomy for store level managers was more constrained, and head office monitored the management of human resources to a greater extent. This was enabled by improved technology, and a tighter control of financial budgets. It can be concluded that in the two supermarket chains, a move towards “results control” (Merchant 1985:4) of human resources was apparent, as new technology enabled some quantification of outcomes.

These research findings support Sparks’s (2000b) observations that the main functional responsibility remaining for store level managers is the management of their employees. This illustrates the extent to which the responsibility for the management of human resources was delegated to local level. Therefore, it is argued that the case study organisations support the model of HRM which prescribes the delegation of HR responsibility to line managers, and previous research which has found this facet of HRM model to be practised in organisations (Armstrong 1989; Bevan and Hayday 1994; Guest 1992; Hill and Pickering 1986; Hutchinson 1995; Kinnie 1989; Maund 2001; Sisson and Scullion 1985; Tamkin et al 1997; Tyson and Fell 1986) . The findings of this research study suggest that local managers in the retail industry have significant HR responsibility. However, as Section 11.4 outlines, managers do not necessarily exercise their autonomy in accordance with organisational policy.

11.4 STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE

While a degree of formal management discretion was officially delegated to store level, this was augmented by the activities of store level managers that extended beyond their official discretionary powers. As described in the literature (for example, Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Berry et al 1995; Child 1984; Hales 1993; Mintzberg 1980,1983, 1989; Mullins 1999; Sayles 1999; Stewart 1999), the interests and actions of employees are not necessarily the same as those of their employing companies. This was evident, to varying degrees, in all three case study companies. There were signs that store level managers developed ‘strategies of independence’, which circumvented company policy and control systems. These included recruitment freezes, an informal store structure, the manipulation of technology to meet performance targets, the contravention of equal opportunity policy, the mis-employment of customer service designated staff, and stage-managing store operations during visits from head office managers.

It was evident from this research study that the increasing demands and centralisation of store operations had an inauspicious impact on store level management. As Child (1984) noted, increased centralisation and formalisation is susceptible to employee resistance, as it is often “seen as an attempt to reduce discretion” (p.153). The findings of this research study show that store level managers responded to increased head office control by developing strategies of independence. Hence, the case study companies were demonstrating characteristics of Mintzberg’s (1989) diversified organisation with store level managers attempting to ‘balkanise’ the structure to resist head office control and maintain their autonomy.

Where feasible, various attempts were made to override centralisation to different magnitudes across the three case study companies. Compared to Groceryco where fewer strategies of independence were found, more elaborate tactics were evident at Superco and Homeco. This could be attributed to the control systems at Superco being in place for longer than at Groceryco. Strategic change at Superco, similar to 'Groceryco 2000', had been operational since 1991. This could account for store level managers at Superco having a greater awareness of the control systems, and as a result had learnt how to 'make out' (Roy 1974) against the system. Conversely, at Groceryco the changes were very recent, and together with demoralised local managers may have contributed to a lower propensity to 'make out' against the control systems. As such there was greater conformity between head office and store levels at Groceryco than the other two case companies and there appeared to be fewer strategies of independence in operation.

At Homeco, the laissez faire approach of head office, and the resulting lack of policies, meant there was little system to 'make out' against. Nevertheless, the practice of strategies of independence was still evident, particularly at the Oxford store. This branch had been subject to re-structuring and was under greater head office surveillance than the West Thurrock store, due to its 'Renewal' status. The large divergence between the strategic level and local managers at Homeco meant that head office was very ignorant of store operations. Together with a lack of formal policies to follow, store level managers had to act as 'executives', taking decisions appropriate to the individual store, which resulted in stores being very unlike each other. The 'thinness' of head office management in all three case study companies, and their

remoteness from store operations, meant these strategies of independence went seemingly undetected, despite on occasion contravening corporate policy. While such behaviour has been previously identified in the literature (see Berry et al 1995; Sayles 1999; Stewart 1999), little research to date has been conducted from a management perspective, and not within the retail industry.

Strategies of independence operated within the informal part of the organisation, which provided managers with greater opportunities to use their own initiative and creativity, developing mechanisms to circumvent formal organisational control systems (Mullins 1999). The strength of the informal organisation at Homeco meant that store level managers retained a high degree of choice in their role. This enabled them to exploit the informal organisation through the use of strategies of independence. As Stewart (1999) found, where formal policies are not clearly devised, this can lead to confusion for lower level managers about what exactly is the organisational policy. Retail companies might develop good strategies which subsequently fail because the organisation has poor control systems. This was clearly evident at Homeco where ambitious strategies were devised at head office, but with an accompanying inability to implement these ideas and communicate them effectively to store level.

The rationale for the existence of strategies of independence were numerous, and varied between the three case study companies. As commentators have previously observed there is not always a precise correspondence between employees' interests and those of their employing organisation (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Berry et al 1995; Heller 1997; Mintzberg 1989). Added to this is the suggestion that inventive

human minds will always manipulate systems designed to control them (Berry et al 1995). Using Mintzberg's 'thick' and 'thin' management typology, 'thick' store level managers considered that within the operational context, head office policies and demands were impractical to implement. As Hales (1993) commented, workers at the operational level may consider corporate policies "as being inappropriate and out of touch with operational realities" (p.104). Local managers had to juggle the contradictory demands of 'schizophrenic' corporate strategies, which demanded improved store performance on fewer resources. The reality of this was a manipulation of company policies, to enable store level managers to deliver on the 'demands' of their jobs, within the constraints imposed upon them. Managers at store level could be said to be acting largely as 'disturbance handlers' (Mintzberg 1989: 20), involuntarily responding to the demands of the strategic level. The organisational changes were often beyond their control, instead instigated by managers at head office, very distant from the reality of store operations. As Berry et al (1995) noted, there is often a tension in retail companies between centralised control and delegating decisions to stores. This tension in the case companies was between store level managers' knowledge of what was feasible, and what head office management considered to be desirable.

Store level managers assumed the role of 'man in the middle' (Roethlisberger 1945) acting between head office managers and the shop floor workers; responsible for implementing policies and decisions taken by head office (see section 11.2). Watson and Harris (1999) spoke of the notion of 'dual control' whereby whatever managers "think of the policies they have to implement, they have to find ways of getting others

to comply, to achieve the necessary results” (p.178). Having detailed knowledge of the operational level through their ‘thick’ management approach, store level managers conjectured that some head office strategies were untenable. Instead they ‘rejigged’ (Sayles 1999) company policies and procedures to accommodate the constraints and demands of the operational level, executing their role as ‘disturbance handlers’ (Mintzberg 1989). Where fewer prescriptive procedures existed, i.e. in the management of human resources, store level managers had a wider scope to deploy strategies of independence, undetected by head office, to satisfy the demands of their role.

As the head office in all three case study companies was so remote from store operations, strategic level decisions relied heavily on data from stores via information management systems. As Hales (1993) and Stewart (1999) observed, this upwards form of communication can be subject to incorrect or incomplete information. Senior managers are more liable to receive a simplified, edited, or wholly inaccurate account of store operations. As illustrated by this research, store level managers often took decisions they considered optimal for branch operations, despite sometimes contradicting or undermining company policy and procedure. Berry et al (1995) considered this outcome to be the main disadvantage of a divisionalised structure. In the three case study companies, strategies of independence were most frequently deployed at the points where the ‘two worlds’ of head office and store converged. This encompassed management information systems, formal meetings, and head office visits to stores. Store level managers would temporarily adopt the persona of head office ideology and provide an imagery that conformed to head office expectations.

They ‘played the game’ to ensure store operations gave the impression of meeting head office demands. As suggested in the literature (Jackal 1988; Pettigrew 1973; Watson 1977, 1995), such managerial politics often exist in organisations.

Increasing demands within a context of escalating constraints led store level managers to focus on the specific demands of their job, in order to be seen by head office to be achieving their quantified performance targets. This was particularly evident in the two food retailers where demands on store level managers appeared to be more onerous. The remoteness of head office led to a focus on performance targets that were measurable. Head office closely monitored tangible goals on which store level management performance and ability was largely assessed. As a result, intangible functions, such as human resources, were largely left to store level managers’ discretion. This focus on tangible goals led to a situation where store level managers were biased towards the measurable. This led to a distortion in objectives at store level, as predicted by Mintzberg (1983), when he argued that if objectives are incomplete lower management efforts tend to be directed towards favouring the goals which get operationalised as objectives. Hence, store level managers concentrated on achieving tangible performance targets, often circumventing policies and procedures that were not closely monitored and measured by head office. A consequence of this was a neglect of the intangible. This sometimes resulted in the sacrifice of ‘soft’ HRM policies, due to the priority assigned to more tangible management activities.

An additional motivation for store level managers to instigate strategies of independence was to enhance their promotional opportunities. The career progression

of senior store level managers in all three case study companies, was largely based on their ability to execute head office performance targets. In delivering head office demands, senior store level managers hoped to improve their promotional prospects. This became more critical after the delayering exercise which diminished managers' promotional opportunities. Therefore, the strategies of independence employed by senior store managers could be attributed to their need to maintain credibility and job security, while improving their career prospects, as also found by Legge (2000). Hales (1993) noted that those who "play the careerist game" can develop a preoccupation with politicking concentrating on "the things which are rewarded rather than what needs to be done" (p.105).

It was evident that store level managers 'played the game' by conforming to head office expectations hoping to improve their credibility for promotion with those in control of their career progression at the centre. Consequently, a store level manager could not risk disclosing the reality of store operations. This was even more apparent as store managers became greater rivals for career advancement in the newly created de-layered structures (Watson and Harris 1999). With peers in other stores also 'playing the game' managers felt they had little choice but to conform to head office expectations to preserve their career prospects. The impact of peer pressure on performance levels and subsequent strategies of independence was witnessed in the Bank Wiring Room of the Hawthorne experiments, and supported by Mintzberg (1983). As Argyris (1985 in Berry et al) found, organisational defensive routines soon become "patterns of behaviour deployed by people in an organisation to protect themselves from embarrassment or anxiety" (p.132). This often results in an

undisclosed game of pretence in which all participate (Watson and Harris 1999). As seen in this research study, strategies of independence would continue to exist until store level managers revealed the reality of store operations to head office. However, such a divulgence provided a potential risk to store level managers' career development, and so local managers across the branch network appeared to indulge in the pretence, thus perpetuating the deployment of strategies of independence.

Further rationale for the existence of strategies of independence was the potential evasion from head office control that they offered. By employing these tactics store level managers produced a facade of effective management capabilities to their superiors, which while improving their career prospects, could also help to preserve their independence from head office. The pursuit of autonomy is said to be central to organisational misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999, Hales 1993). As previous research has found (Cummings and Elsalami 1968; Rosell 1971), line managers tend to exhibit needs for autonomy and achievement, favouring growth, survival, and balkanisation. Store level managers in the case study organisations were keen to bypass head office control and resist the increased centralisation of their tasks. Thus, strategies of independence satisfied managers' intrinsic need for autonomy (Mintzberg 1983), particularly in a context of increasing centralisation of their responsibilities.

This research shows little support for Sayles' (1999) proposition that middle managers now take risks and disagree with their superiors in order to 'fix' inadequate systems.

The store level managers in this research more closely resemble the type of middle manager Sayles (1999) described as 'old-fashioned', who manage by results, massage

data, and devote their attention to looking good and pleasing their superiors. The consequences of this in all three case study companies was a belief at head office that the company's strategic goals and supporting control systems were successful. This would probably ensure that the 'schizophrenic' corporate strategies of multiple store retailers would continue into the foreseeable future. These findings illustrate how store level managers inadvertently supported inapt systems through deploying strategies of independence, and not challenging the increasing demands of the strategic level.

This chapter has discussed the findings of the empirical research by outlining the similarities and differences of the three case study organisations. Throughout the discussion references have been made to relevant literature, which was reviewed in chapters two to five.

This research study has demonstrated how the choices and constraints of store level managers emanate from the corporate strategy of their organisation. The increasing centralisation of store level managers' tasks was confronted with the deployment of strategies of independence. This increased the divergence between head office and store level management, enhancing the practice of 'thin' management techniques at head office, compared to 'thick' management practices at store level. This contributed to a disparity between the rhetoric and reality of corporate strategy. While store level managers 'played the system' and orchestrated store operations accordingly, head office management appeared unconscious of the realities of the true 'world' that existed at store level. The largest divergence between policy and actual procedure was

witnessed in the management of human resources. Store level managers were given greatest discretionary powers over local HRM, which amounted to a manipulation of employee resourcing to ensure head office demands were met within operational constraints.

The following chapter will conclude this thesis by outlining the implications of the key findings of the empirical research, before outlining the contribution of this work to existing knowledge.

Chapter 12

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will examine the implications of the empirical findings for the study of employee resourcing in the retail industry. It will present a model that outlines the choices and constraints of management, with specific application to local management in multiple store retailing. It will then describe the contribution of this work to current knowledge, and the ramifications for future research.

12.1 KEY FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

This research study aimed to identify the role of local managers in the management of human resources, and to assess how their choices and constraints impact on the employee resourcing decision-making process in multiple store retailing. This incorporated an examination of the extent and influence of head office, compared to store level management, in the local employee resourcing process.

12.1.1 Management Choices and Constraints

The companies used for this research were large, geographically structured retailers operating in the multiple store superstore sector. All three organisations existed within very competitive markets, although the two food retailers appeared to be under greater competitive pressures than Homeco. This led to corporate strategies developed along the lines of cost minimisation and quality enhancement, two apparently contradictory strategic directions. The twin focus of these strategic goals motivated the application

of the term 'schizophrenic' to be used to describe the case study organisations in this research, particularly applicable to Superco and Groceryco.

The empirical research found that store level managers' autonomy and discretion was being increasingly curtailed by head office efforts to centralise store functions in order to achieve economic efficiency. Increased head office control and tightening of constraints, in terms of budgets and targets was taking place in all three case study companies, but was most discernible at Groceryco and Superco. The increased use of budgets and technology to centralise, and thus control operations is well documented in the literature (Armstrong 1989; Deery & Mahoney 1994; Economist 1999; Freathy & Sparks 1994; Goold & Campbell 1987; Huczynski & Buchanan 2001; Kinnie 1989; Lloyd & Rawlinson 1992; Marginson et al 1993; Ogbonna 1992; Retail Business 1990; Smith 1988; Sparks 1987; Stewart 1991; Tomlinson et al 1997; Walters & Hanrahan 2000). Technology, particularly in the food retailing sector, also enabled the imposition of more sophisticated labour budgeting control systems, and the setting of performance targets, with a corresponding higher level of surveillance, as witnessed at Superco and Groceryco.

The management of outputs set the boundaries for autonomy within which store level managers operated (Stewart 1999). This focus, with a corresponding emphasis on efficiency, is typical of Mintzberg's (1989) machine configuration. Control was vested with head office who devised strategies and policies imposing the requisite budgets and targets onto stores. The responsibility for meeting those targets within the budgets remained with store level managers (Berry et al 1995; Freathy and Sparks 1996), and

constituted the **demands** of store level managers' jobs. Head office monitored these budgets and targets to varying degrees between the three case study companies.

Nevertheless, store level managers in all three case study companies had to adhere to these **demands**, because it would be obvious to head office if they did not. These '**demands**' of the job are similar to those outlined by Stewart (1982) in her 'Choices for Managers' model. For the purpose of this research study **demands** will be defined as '**what managers must do**'.

Meanwhile, other constraints further reduced the discretionary powers of store level managers. These exuded from both within the organisation, as well as from the external environment. These can be termed the **constraints** of store level management, as they restricted a manager's scope of discretionary power. These **constraints** can be defined as '**the internal or external factors that limit what a manager can do**'. There is a subtle, but important difference in emphasis between the constraints and demands of a manager's job. Demands must be adhered to in order to avoid retribution from superiors. As a result they constitute the priority for managers in the execution of their role. However, managers have to be mindful of the constraints under which they operate. These include labour supply, legislation, trade unions, economic conditions, customer demands, use of technology, and accompanying company policies and procedures (see also Mintzberg 1980).

All three case study companies operated on a diversified basis, their geographical structure and large size necessitating some decentralisation of tasks to store level responsibility. Decentralisation of decision-making was formally recognised by head

office, and formed the discretionary powers of store level management. Local employee resourcing was the main component of HRM that remained under store level managers formal control and discretion. This functional area was subject to fewer tangible measurements, and therefore less closely controlled and monitored by head office. Local management control in all three companies was maintained over recruitment and selection, on-the-job training, staff scheduling, and the delegation of tasks. At Homeco, the strength of the informal organisation, together with poor communication between head office and store management prevailed. This led to little conformity between stores themselves in their approach to the management of human resources. Both Superco and Groceryco had greater conformity in their approach to managing staff due to tighter control by head office. The **discretion**, formally divested by head office, can be defined as ‘**the official delegation of responsibilities**’. This element of formal **discretion** in the case study companies largely equated to local employee resourcing - a function difficult to ascribe quantitative measurements to, and thus be controlled by the strategic level.

To satisfy head office demands store level managers focused on tangible elements of their role. While store level managers juggled the conflicting demands of their ‘schizophrenic’ organisations, this led to a number of consequences and outcomes for local employee resourcing decision-making. Managers in the case study stores were primarily concerned with meeting the **demands** of their jobs, which amounted to tangible targets set by head office. This was despite having the knowledge that many of these **demands** were unrealistic, and difficult to implement within the operational context. As a result store level managers deployed **strategies of independence** to

ensure they satisfied the demands of their jobs. These **strategies of independence** were manifest in the areas of formal management discretion, where processes were less closely scrutinised by head office managers. In manipulating their main area of **formal discretion**, namely employee resourcing, store level managers could ensure they met the demands of their role within increasing constraints and with minimal detection by head office. This ensured they retained a reputable image of management ability while hoping to ensure they maintained some of their autonomy. These **strategies of independence** can be defined as **‘the informal conduct of managers that circumvents the formal organisation’**.

This research has outlined the nature of choices and constraints for store level managers in the retail industry. This in-depth empirical work and subsequent analysis requires a modification of Stewart’s (1982) ‘Choices for Managers’ model (see section 5.2) to more realistically reflect the complex nature of management. In its existing form, Stewart’s model largely ignores the concept of management discretion and the prevalence of strategies of independence. This research study has consequently advanced our understanding of the role and nature of management. Figure four details Stewart’s model of ‘Choices for Managers’ to facilitate a comparison between this and the subsequent revision of Stewart’s work developed from the findings of this research study in figures five and six.

Figure 4: 'Choices for managers' Stewart (1982)

DEMANDS	CONSTRAINTS	CHOICES
<p>What anyone in the job has to do.</p> <p>For example, meeting minimum criteria of performance, complying with bureaucratic procedures which cannot be avoided.</p>	<p>Internal or external factors which limit what a manager can do.</p> <p>For example, legal, trade unions, technology, physical location, organisational constraints, attitudes of other people.</p>	<p>Activities which the manager is free to do, but does not have to do. They are opportunities for one job-holder to undertake work from another, or to do work in a different way.</p> <p>For example, what work is done in a defined area, to change the area of work, the sharing of work, and participation in organisational or public activities.</p>

Figure five tabulates the discussion to date. It modifies Stewart's model and defines the limitations and choices of managers, according to the empirical findings of this research study. Despite using the retail industry as a basis for the model, it could be applied to all management roles in a variety of sectors in this generic form.

Figure 5: The limitations and choices of managers

LIMITATIONS		CHOICES	
DEMANDS	CONSTRAINTS	FORMAL DISCRETION	STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE
What managers MUST do	The internal or external factors that LIMIT what a manager can do	Official DELEGATION of responsibilities	The INFORMAL conduct of managers that circumvents the formal organisation

The following figure (figure six) applies the model directly to the retail industry, as per the empirical findings of this thesis. This demonstrates its adaptability to enable the model to be applied to different levels of management, and a variety of industries.

Figure 6: The limitations and choices of retail store level managers

LIMITATIONS		CHOICES	
DEMANDS	CONSTRAINTS	FORMAL DISCRETION	STRATEGIES OF INDEPENDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance targets • budget control systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • company policies and procedures • technology • labour supply • employment legislation • trade unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full-time: part-time ratio of staff • recruitment and selection • on-the-job training • staff scheduling • delegation of tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment freezes • unofficial appointments (re-layering) • manipulating technology • using premium rate overtime • resisting staff scheduling deadlines and policies • ‘stage-managing’ store operations during head office visits

12.1.2 Strategies Of Independence

As previously discussed, various strategies of independence were deployed by store level managers, and for a multitude of reasons. Acknowledgement of the existence of these strategies of independence is important, as it advances our understanding of the processes of organisational behaviour. However, it is salient that the impact of these

strategies of independence are also considered to assess their importance to the academic study of management. This thesis has taken the impact on employee resourcing as its focus of study. This section will attempt to outline the implications of strategies of independence for the management of employee resourcing, in the three case study companies under research, before developing a model to illustrate this phenomenon.

Where store level functions were difficult to measure and monitor, there was evidence of practices that contravened company policy. This was apparent in all three case study companies and their six stores. The greatest dichotomy between company policy and practice was found in the management of human resources. Local employee resourcing was the predominant area where the rhetoric and reality of company policy was most divergent because store level managers had greatest discretion over local employee resourcing. This led to a gap between corporate policy, and the reality of store operations in all three case study companies (as outlined in section 11.4).

The ‘schizophrenic’ strategies of all three case study retailers inadvertently fostered the existence of store level strategies of independence. This was particularly evident in the two food retailers where conflicting strategic goals, of quality enhancement and cost minimisation, were being most vehemently pursued. As a consequence, inconsistencies arose in customer service provision. The promises made to customers and the expectations of head office were often unfulfilled at store level. Only where components of customer service were measurable, and thus monitored by head office, was some conformity to company policy observed. However, there were indications

that even where customer service targets were quantified, store level managers found methods to manipulate the data provided to head office, such as with Superco's 'One-in-Front' promise. In terms of employee resourcing, the working hours of sales assistants were altered in both Superco and Groceryco, to accommodate customer service demands. This illustrates the priority placed on achieving customer service goals over the quality of working life for employees.

A large disparity existed between company policy and operational reality in the execution of equal opportunities. All three companies were publicly committed to equal opportunities, with both Groceryco and Homeco founder members of 'Opportunity 2000'. As previous research has also found (for example, Bradley 1989; Broadbridge 1995; Craig and Wilkinson 1985; Dawson et al 1987; Freathy 1993; MacEwan Scott 1994; Sparks 1991; Tomlinson et al 1997), both horizontal and vertical occupational gender segregation was prevalent in all six case study stores. Store level managers, particularly junior managers, perpetuated the segmentation of the labour market, according to their own frames of reference. As previous research has revealed, managers' individual personalities and their ingrained assumptions about employees can be problematic and influence human resource decisions that are followed (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Bradley and Hill 1983; Burchell and Rubery 1990, 1994; Flecker et al 1998; Horrell and Rubery 1991; Hunter and MacInnes 1991; MacEwan Scott 1994; Marchington 1995b). Despite these stereotypes being developed through personal attitudes and experience, they were highly uniform in all the case companies. Store level managers' perceptions often contravened equal

opportunity policy and highlighted the difference between the rhetoric and reality of employee resourcing in operation, compared to company policy.

The standardisation of outputs as a method of controlling store operations was consistent across all three case study companies. The constraining mechanisms of budgets and performance targets, combined with increased surveillance via technology, formed the basis of organisational control systems in all three companies. As Berry et al (1995) noted, a focus on tangible measurements results in managerial behaviour geared towards the achievement of reported results. In trying to deliver head office demands store level managers manipulated their discretion in the area of employee resourcing. This transcended to budget-driven management techniques, which in turn influenced their employee resourcing decisions.

To meet financial budgets and cost reductions store level managers generally increased their employment of part timers. The only exception to the increased employment of part timers was seen at Homeco's Oxford store, where the high proportion of full time employees was attributed to characteristics of the external local labour market, outside the remit of management control and influence. Elsewhere, store level managers claimed they had little choice but to employ a high ratio of part time staff. With the exception of Homeco's Oxford store, all stores attributed their high use of part time employment to the constraints of budgets set by head office. They maintained that the employment of full timers was too expensive and would make it impossible to satisfy head office budgets. This accords with previous research findings, which has found that non-standard labour is often viewed by employers as a cheaper option to full-time,

permanent employment, citing cost savings as the main reason for their employment (Brewster et al 1993; Blyton & Morris 1992; Freathy & Sparks 1996; Gregory 1991; Hunter et al 1993; Marginson et al 1993; Neathey & Hurstfield 1995; O'Reilly 1994). This was evident at Homeco where attempts were being made at the strategic level to increase the numerical flexibility of its workforce to reduce costs and alleviate recruitment problems.

Other strategies of independence, deployed to meet tight budgets and performance targets included an increase in the numerical flexibility demanded of sales assistants, mainly those on part time contracts. This was particularly noticeable at Superco's Surrey Quays's store, where a local recruitment freeze was operated on occasions to ensure budgetary targets were met. This was driven by store level managers' expectation that part timers would offer numerical flexibility to cover vacancies while the recruitment freeze was in operation. This numerical flexibility included changing shift patterns and working above contracted weekly hours. As part timers did not attract a premium rate (as noted by Dickens 1995) for working above their contracted weekly hours, they were considered a more viable and attractive option by many junior managers who were ultimately responsible for the efficient management of human resources. At Homeco the same situation occurred, but for different reasons. Here labour budget constraints were not so onerous, but both stores suffered from staffing shortages. An inability to recruit sufficient numbers of staff to the store, particularly at West Thurrock, meant that part-timers were often required to increase their working hours to cover these shortages. The minimal level of head office monitoring of budget expenditure also meant full timers often worked overtime, despite this contravening

head office policy. This was evident at the Oxford store where a high full time complement of staff necessitated the use of premium rate overtime. Ironically, this was most often used to 'stage-manage' head office visits to the store to ensure the full range of services was provided - another strategy of independence deployed by local managers.

The increasing demands, particularly in terms of efficiency savings, also impacted on the recruitment and selection choices made by store level managers. There was a move towards employing students as part time workers, in preference to working mothers and older workers - the traditional source of supply for part time jobs.

Students were perceived as more numerically flexible and therefore more readily able to change their shifts and increase their weekly hours. Dex and McCulloch (1995) suggested that because women's part time employment linked to family formation appears to be at a peak, employers are increasingly turning to student workers to maximise flexibility. This research argues that retail employers are increasingly turning to student workers, to satisfy their heightened demand for numerical flexibility, and not because of a fall in supply of part time working mothers. With many store level managers perceiving working mothers as very inflexible, this led them to prefer to recruit from the increasing supply of new, and more 'flexible' labour, in the form of students. The findings of this research study suggests that the recruitment of students in multiple store retailing will continue to increase.

An outline of the impact of store level managers' strategies of independence on the management of human resources and employee resourcing has been presented in this

thesis. As Huczynski and Buchanan (2001:286) observed it is the unstructured decisions that tend to be more open to 'politicking'. A focus on the standardisation of outputs left processes, such as employee resourcing, less closely monitored, as predicted by Mintzberg (1983). In order to manage the conflicting demands of head office, strategies of independence were deployed to circumvent policies and procedures that store level managers believed to be impractical. Their efforts were concentrated on those policies that were subject to a lower level of head office scrutiny. Therefore employee resourcing was often their focus of attention and an area of flexibility for store level managers to manipulate to ensure budgets and targets were met.

Throughout the interviews store level managers cited that the 'needs of the business' took precedence over the 'needs of employees'. This inevitably led to a hard 'HRM' approach to employee resourcing at store level. The intangible, or 'softer', facets of HRM, were of less importance to store level managers in the case study organisations, because their performance in these areas was not as strictly monitored by head office. This concurs with Marginson et al's (1993) findings that lower level managers place less of a priority on those management activities not measured by head office. This meant 'soft' HRM practises were more subject to neglect by store level managers than tangible targets, or 'hard' HRM practices. Consequently, store level managers tended to emphasis a 'hard' HRM approach to managing their workforce, regardless of any 'soft' HR company policies that might have existed. As a result, the delegation of employee resourcing responsibilities to line managers weakened corporate attempts to

introduce ‘soft’ HRM techniques, thus undermining the value of any corporate HR policies.

12.1.3 Summary

As discussed in Section 11.4, local managers in the case study companies deployed strategies of independence to ensure they met the demands of head office. These demands largely equated to management through a standardisation of outputs using budgets and performance targets as the main tools of control. These emanated from organisational corporate strategy which focused on the dual goals of improvements to customer service and a simultaneous reduction in costs. These led to an increasing centralisation of store activities with increased demands and constraints placed on local managers. The schizophrenic nature of these strategic goals led store level managers to deploy strategies of independence in their efforts to meet head office demands within this context of increasing constraints.

With organisational control systems focusing on output control, this left the more unstructured store level decision-making processes open to ‘politicking’ (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001:286). This amounted to local employee resourcing, where the intangible nature of the HR function left employee resourcing less closely monitored by head office, and less subject to the centralisation witnessed in other store activities. As a result it was in the area of local HRM, namely employee resourcing, where strategies of independence were most conspicuous. By manipulating local labour resources through a variety of methods, store level managers were able to meet head office demands. This invariably led to a focus on ‘hard’ HRM techniques, because of the

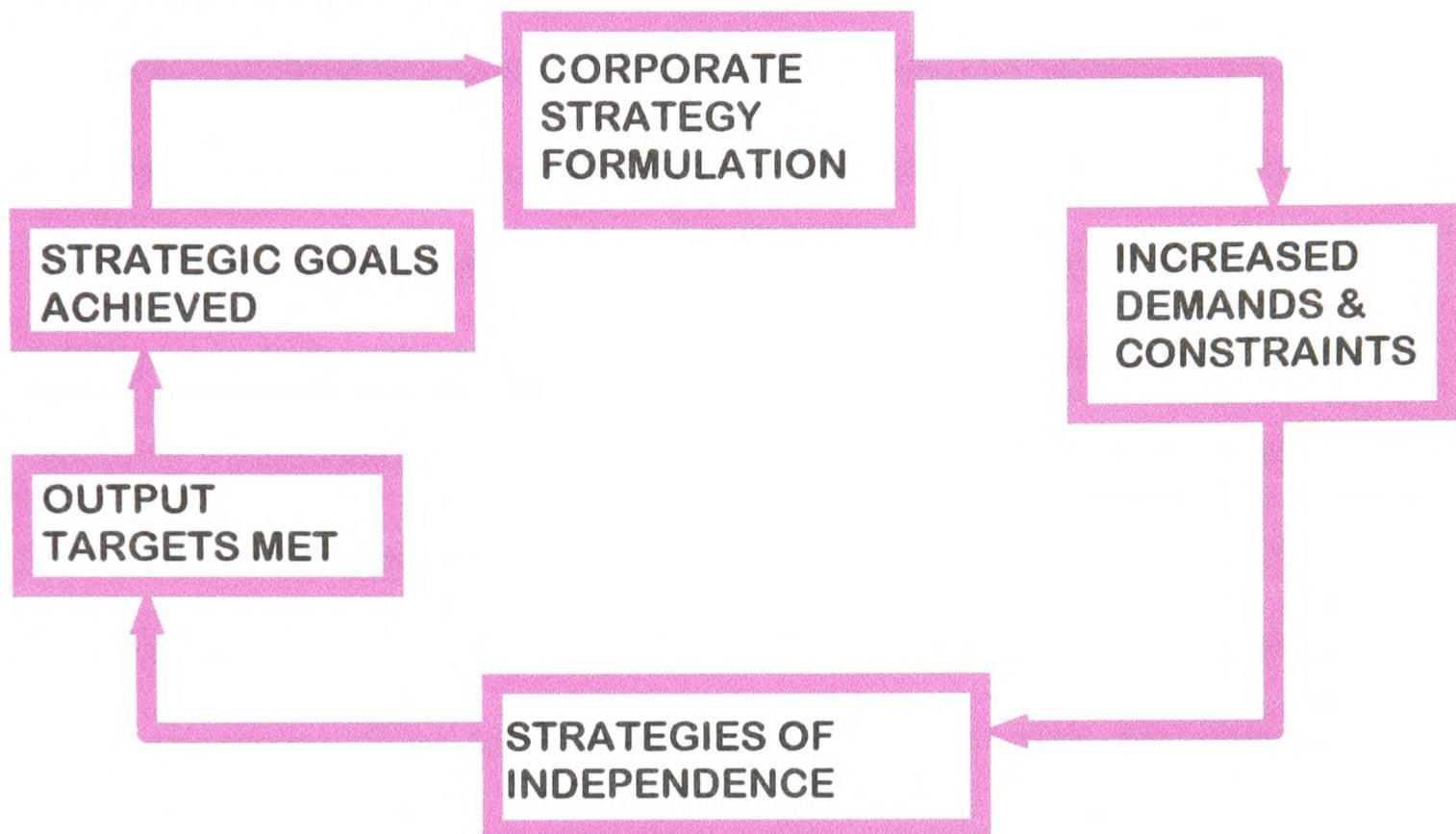
emphasis placed on head office tangible measurement of results. This had the concomitant effect of managers at the strategic level believing their strategic goals had been achieved, thus confirming the success of their corporate strategy.

It can be concluded that the head offices of all three case study companies will continue to develop schizophrenic corporate strategies, and make increasing demands on local managers, with the provision of fewer resources. From the empirical findings of this research it can be predicted that local managers will have to develop more sophisticated strategies of independence if they are to continue meeting these ever intensifying demands. This leads to a 'vicious circle' of organisational behaviour, whereby local managers inadvertently support the perpetually increasing demands of the strategic level, as illustrated in Figure seven. This model works along similar lines to Crozier's (1964) bureaucratic vicious circle. As local managers develop strategies of independence in response to increasing limitations, they achieve the output targets set by the strategic level. This leads to the formulation of strategy with the same or more demanding goals, leading to increasing constraints for local managers, who must then devise more sophisticated strategies of independence to meet the output targets, and so forth.

With employee resourcing the remaining area of local management autonomy in the three case study companies, it can be predicted that an increasing emphasis will be placed on 'hard' HRM to the detriment of 'soft' HRM. Even where organisational policy and the strategic level demands a focus on 'soft' HRM practices, local managers

are likely to continue with a focus on the tangible i.e. 'hard' HRM to meet the increasing demands of their role.

Figure 7: The Organisational Vicious Circle



12.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS WORK

The purpose of this research study was to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge. A review of the literature (see chapters two to five) identified gaps in existing knowledge, to which this study aimed to contribute.

This thesis goes some way to addressing the lack of research conducted into the employment implications of organisational change in multiple store retailing (see Dawson et al 1987; Doogan 1992; Shackleton 1998; Sparks 1983, 1987, 1991). The empirical research adopted an organisational-wide perspective through the hierarchical structure in an attempt to develop theory which is true to organisational reality. This

was strengthened by the inductive approach to data analysis that was adopted. This addresses Marchington's (1995a) criticism that existing research on HRM in retailing has taken a very narrow perspective, limiting the ability to develop an holistic theory. He argued that a broad theory should be capable of analysing employer strategies and practices, employee strategies and practices, the relationship between employers and employees, as well as the interaction between managers, employees and the political, social and economic context within which organisations operate. This research attempted to look at the variety of influences on the role of store level management, adopting a methodology that encompassed a variety of management levels within the case study companies. This provided a richer source of data, with perspectives from different levels of management. Added to the long-standing nature of the empirical work, this thesis satisfies Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) claim that longitudinal studies offer "the best chance of picking up what is happening on the ground" (p.161).

In adopting a cross-section research methodology through the management hierarchy, this thesis addresses the difficulties previous research has found in differentiating between the formulation of strategy and its implementation (Child 1984; Marchington and Parker 1990; Mintzberg 1983). By investigating local management implementation of strategy, this research study depicts how even the best conceived corporate policies and efforts to formalise control can be thwarted by the actions of line managers. This was evident when comparing the rhetoric with the reality of corporate strategy, particularly the execution of employee resourcing policies. It also questions the overly rational view of management, and the assumption that managers

at operational level will reveal their problems in relation to complying with head office policy - concealment and subterfuge appear to be more likely responses.

Research has previously identified some of the issues relating to management including the 'man-in-the-middle' syndrome (Roethlisberger 1945); the divorce between the responsibilities and authority assigned to lower level managers (Child and Partridge 1982; Patten 1968); and the disparity between junior managers and their superiors (Child and Partridge 1982). However, many commentators have tended to overlook the role of junior managers, or supervisors, in the management of human resources (Lowe 1992). Given this neglect, the empirical work of this research aimed to examine the influence of store level managers on employee resourcing at store level, by examining the role of management choices and constraints. The findings illustrate how corporate strategies and actual practice can significantly differ, and highlights the role of lower and middle managers in this divergence. As a result, this exposes the reality of employee resourcing in the retail industry as being very complex, combining a myriad of issues. As previous research on HRM in the retail industry has been typically based on only one perspective of organisational life, and often at head office, the full picture of employer and employee strategies and practices has never before been fully revealed.

Another gap in the literature, which this thesis addresses is the neglect of management as an important retail labour issue (Freathy and Sparks 1996), particularly the absence of junior management and their HR responsibilities in more generic management literature (Kinnie 1989; Lowe 1992). This research found that junior managers in

multiple store retailing play a pivotal role in the execution of employee resourcing in the retail industry. The majority of employee resourcing decisions were not taken by HR specialists, but instead by line managers. Therefore their ability to influence employee resourcing policy and practice was relatively substantial. As Purcell and Ahlstrand (1994) argued, what determines HR policies and practises, is in part the ability of local managers to follow through goals in the context of specific environmental conditions. This research has shown that many retail managers are essentially poor HR managers. They tend to neglect 'softer' HRM practices, in favour of pursuing tangible goals. This research therefore supports Hill and Pickering's (1986) and Armstrong's (1989) assertion that the view of HRM as strategic is too naive because it ignores the fact that decision-making on HR issues often takes place at a level considerably subordinate to budgetary planning and control. As Armstrong (1989) stressed, the line manager acting as a simultaneous HR manager and budget holder, means that the management of human resources can simply turn into an instrument for the achievement of short-run accounting targets. Combined with the evidence from these research findings, that retail line managers are not necessarily very effective HR managers, this gives cause for concern about the future execution and viability of 'good practice' employee resourcing.

The focus of this research study on store level managers revealed that these managers were involved in deliberate, relatively complex, sophisticated strategies of independence, which circumvented the formal organisation. As outlined by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), the subject matter of traditional organisational behaviour has largely overlooked misbehaviour and yet they point out (1999) that "people in

organisations actually get up to all sorts of tricks” (p.8). Some of these ‘tricks’ have been disclosed in this thesis and termed as strategies of independence. This also helps to address the difficulty previous research has had in differentiating between the formulation of strategy, its implementation, and the impact of employee resistance.

This thesis also addresses the neglect of previous research, in considering management resistance to corporate strategy and organisational control systems. While this resistance to authority and control has been previously noted in some of the literature, much of the focus has been on a mass employee approach, with little empirical evidence from a management perspective. Even those authors who have concentrated on dissenting behaviour in organisations have tended to ignore management. In Ackroyd and Thompson’s (1999) recent book ‘Organisational Misbehaviour’ the focus remained on the mass employee, with scant mention of management. This was attributed to a reluctance in the field of organisational behaviour, to acknowledge any resistance by managers to corporate policies. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) expressed:

“what managers do defines what behaviour should be, so that it is difficult to envisage what they do as involving malfeasance.” (p.2)

This is despite their acknowledgement that “managers have greater resources to misbehave” (p.4). As a result much of the literature has largely ignored managers’ strategies of independence, or where discovered, has only hinted at their existence. This research supports Ackroyd and Thompson’s (1999) claim that organisational misbehaviour needs to be considered as an inherent part of any study of organisational behaviour. However this thesis has clearly demonstrated that organisational misbehaviour needs to be considered at all levels of an organisation, not just at lower

ends from a mass employee perspective. As has been borne out through these case studies, the informal organisation and managers 'making out' (Roy 1974) against control systems plays a pivotal role in the reality of organisational life, with subsequent repercussions for the management of human resources.

This thesis has provided a rare insight into the informal processes of the management of human resources, which much of the current literature fails to do. The strategies of independence deployed by store level managers were in response to the limitations of their roles. As their main functional area of discretion was the local management of human resources, mainly employee resourcing, this became the focus of their strategies of independence. Consequently human resources were manipulated accordingly to satisfy local management limitations. This thesis has exposed the realities of HRM and employee resourcing at the store level of multiple store retailing. It demonstrates a focus on 'hard' HRM, regardless of head office rhetoric and organisational HR policies. The empirical findings of this research suggest that the delegation of responsibility for HRM to local management negates the practice of 'soft' HRM due to a preoccupation with the achievement of tangible targets.

As a result of this thesis, Stewart's 'Choices For Managers' (Figure four) model has been modified to illustrate the realities of management choices and constraints more accurately (see section 12.1.1). This thesis has also presented a model called 'The Organisational Vicious Circle' (Figure seven). With HR the main area of opportunity for manipulation at operational level in the case study companies it became clear that the rhetoric of HRM, both from its theoretical perspective, and at the organisational

strategic level, is very different from the reality of its execution by local managers.

This calls for a re-examination of HRM theory to ensure it more accurately reflects the reality of management practice.

12.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has offered a rare insight into the informal organisation in three multiple store retail organisations. By looking at a cross-section of organisational structure it can be concluded that the extent to which corporate strategy becomes reality at operational level can be minimal. This is particularly important for the management of human resources, where local managers held greater responsibility, and so were able to deploy strategies of independence undetected by senior management in the case companies.

This thesis casts a new light on the model of HRM and the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers. In a context of increasing competitive pressures for many organisations, and the perennial difficulty of quantifying desired human resource outcomes, further research needs to be conducted to establish the impact of delegating of employee resourcing responsibilities to line managers. If HRM becomes the main discretionary area for all line managers, will 'soft' HRM practices be forfeited through managers' strategies of independence, in the drive to fulfil tangible targets set by senior management? The empirical findings of this research study suggest that the delegation of HRM to line managers weakens 'soft' HRM policies in organisations. Further research, beyond the remit of this thesis needs to be conducted to enable this conclusion to be generalisable. Nevertheless, the 'The Organisational Vicious Circle'

applied to the three case study organisations in this research study, would suggest that 'soft' HR practices will continue to diminish for the foreseeable future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter requesting research access to organisations

Appendix 2: Second letter requesting research access to organisations

Appendix 3: Table to illustrate initial contact meetings with original five multiple superstore retailers

Appendix 4: Negotiation Process for each of the case study organisations

Appendix 5: Schedule of interviews conducted

Appendix 6: Interview structure for Head Office management

Appendix 7: Interview structure for Store Managers/ Gatekeepers to the case study stores

Appendix 8: Interview structure for store level management

Appendix 9: Organisational Store Structures

Appendix 1: Letter requesting research access to organisations

[Insert name]
Personnel Director
[insert company address]

[insert date]

Dear [insert name]

I am a PhD student with the University of Greenwich based in the Faculty of Business in the School of Marketing and Management. My research centres around employment issues in the retail industry and I am interested in using your company as a case study. As you will be aware patterns of employment are changing and the subject continues to one of the most widely discussed issues in labour market studies. I am specifically looking at the importance of factors which may affect employment practices in retail companies.

I would like to learn from your company's experiences of employing part-time and temporary workers by talking to a cross-section of your managers. This will involve interviews through the managerial hierarchy in order to gain a company-wide view of the employment issues relevant to the retail industry and flexible employment.

I understand that you are a busy person, but I would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further. I am very happy to present the research request to interested organisational managers as I feel this could be a valuable exercise for both you company and your employees as well as my research.

I will call you within the following couple of weeks with regard to a date to meet to discuss the research proposal further. If you have any queries in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me on telephone number 0181-310-9427.

Thanking you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Lynch (Miss)

Appendix 2: Second letter requesting research access to organisations

[Insert name]
Personnel Director
[insert company address]

[insert date]

Dear [insert name]

I am a PhD student with the University of Greenwich based in the Faculty of Business in the School of Marketing and Management. My research centres around employment issues in the retail industry and I am interested in using your company as a case study. As you will be aware patterns of employment are changing and the subject continues to be one of the most widely discussed issues in labour market studies. I am specifically looking at the importance of factors which may affect employment practices in retail companies.

I would like to learn from your company's experiences of employing part-time and temporary workers, in particular, by talking to a cross-section of your staff. This will involve interviews from managerial level down to shop-floor staff in order to gain a company-wide view of the employment issues relevant to the retail industry and flexible employment.

I understand that you are a busy person, but I would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further. Please find enclosed a brief outline of my research proposal. I would be very happy to present the research request to interested organisational managers as I feel this could be a valuable exercise for both your company and your employees, as well as my research.

I will call you within the following couple of weeks with regard to a date to meet to discuss the research proposal further. If you have any queries in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me on telephone number 0181-310-9427.

Thanking you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Lynch (Miss)

PhD RESEARCH PROPOSAL

**SAMANTHA LYNCH
SCHOOL OF MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH**

Background Information

I am a PhD student at the University of Greenwich, based at the Woolwich campus in South East London. I am conducting my research under the auspices of the School of Marketing and Management within the Faculty of Business.

My background is in the field of personnel and as a result I have undertaken a PhD and chosen flexible working patterns as my area of research. The subject of flexibility has been the source of considerable comment and some controversy over recent years, but of very little in-depth case study based research, particularly in the service industry.

I hope to gain a thorough understanding of 'flexible working' in the retail industry by learning from the companies themselves. Ideally this would involve interviews with managerial staff at different levels in order to gain a company-wide view of the relevant employment issues, but would be concentrated at store level.

The Research Project

The research project is now in its second year - the first years of which has been spent gathering secondary evidence and preparing for the case study. As previously

outlined, the research centres around ‘flexible’ forms of employment in the retail industry, with the official title of the project being:

“An investigation into the importance of factors affecting numerical flexibility practices in multiple retail companies and their relationship with business strategy.”

The research aims to achieve the following:

1. Ascertain the changes that have occurred in the nature of employment over the past few years within the case study organisation.
2. Investigate how the organisation makes decisions regarding labour usage and the relationship of this to their business strategy.
3. Learn about what influences the organisation labour use strategies and determined the level of part time and temporary employment within retail stores.

The Case Study Approach

In using a case study approach I hope to gain an insight into flexible forms of employment through seeking the experiences of the organisation and its employees. In doing so it will help me to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisation and an appreciation of its employment issues.

The case study approach requires a close relationship between the organisation and researcher, but not necessarily an obtrusive one. The proposals with regard to my research are outlined below:

- availability of employment data and statistics to satisfy the first aim of the research and understand the history of the organisation in order to build up an appropriate profile.

- The opportunity to gain an insight into the organisation's strategic policies, both corporate and employment strategy.
- The case study research will require interviews with:
 - senior personnel management at head office
 - regional management
 - store management
 - access to a store for a 9-12 month period.

Guarantees

- I guarantee regular communication with head office in the form of reports and meetings as required.
- I can assure your organisation of complete confidentiality throughout the entirety of the research project, including its final write-up.
- The fieldwork need not encroach into employees' working time - I will always accommodate the organisation's needs.

Point of Contact**Name:** Samantha Lynch**Organisation:** University of Greenwich**Address:** School of Marketing and Management
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Riverside House
Beresford Street
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London
SE18 6BU**Work telephone:** 0181-331-9000**Mobile telephone:****Fax number:** 0181-331-9005

* * *

Supervisor of PhD Celia Stanworth**Organisation:** University of Greenwich**Telephone:** 0181-331-9019

Appendix 3

Table to illustrate initial contact meetings with original five multiple superstore retailers

COMPANY	SECTOR	JOB TITLE	LEVEL
A (Superco)	Grocery	Retail Development Manager	Regional Office
B (Groceryco)	Grocery	Regional Personnel Manager	Regional Office
C (Homeco)	Home Improvement & Gardening	Personnel Manager (Renewals - Retail)	Head Office
D (Electrico)	Electrical	Human Resource Manager - Operations	Head Office
E	Grocery	Personnel Manager	Head Office

**Appendix 4: Negotiation Process for each of the case study organisations:
Superco**

DATE	CONTACT PERSON	METHOD	COMMENTS
16/11/95	Personnel Director, Head Office	Letter sent	Initial request for access made
01/12/95	Secretary to Personnel Director (Retail), Head Office	Telephone call received	Request for access had been passed down onto the Regional Manager
04/01/96	Personnel Director (Retail), Head Office	Letter & research proposal sent	Re-requesting initial access
15/01/96	Regional Development Manager	Letter received	Arrange a meeting date for further discussion
29/01/96	Regional Development Manager	Meeting	Agreement to access
19/02/96	Regional Development Manager	Letter received	Surrey Quays and Lewisham stores confirmed as the stores to provide access. Contact details of General Managers given.
20/02/96	Regional Development Manager	Letter sent	Outline of my research plan and to express appreciation for organising store access.
21/02/96	General Manager, Lewisham General Manager, Surrey Quays	Telephone call made	To arrange meeting to discuss the research plan
05/03/96	General Manager, Lewisham	Meeting	Initial meeting to conduct initial data gathering about the store context and the General Manager designated as the gatekeeper for arranging interviews.
07/03/96	General Manager, Surrey Quays	Meeting	Initial meeting to conduct initial data gathering about the store context and the store's Personnel Manager designated as the gatekeeper for arranging interviews.

Groceryco

DATE	CONTACT PERSON	METHOD	COMMENTS
14/11/95	Personnel Director, Head Office	Letter sent	Initial request for access made, but no response received
01/12/95	Secretary to Personnel Director, Head Office	Telephone call made	Was given the name Retail Personnel Director who might be more responsive
13/12/95	Retail Personnel Director, Head Office	Letter sent	No response
03/01/96	Retail Personnel Director, Head Office	Letter & research proposal sent	Re-requesting initial access
22/01/96	Employee Relations Manager	Letter received	Informing me that my research proposal had been sent onto the relevant department for consideration
14/02/96	Recruitment and Deployment Manager, Regional Office	Letter received	Arrange a meeting date for further discussion
26/02/96	Recruitment and Deployment Manager, Regional Office	Telephone call made	To agree a meeting date
06/03/96	Recruitment and Deployment Manager, Regional Office	Meeting	Agreement to access
22/03/96	Recruitment and Deployment Manager, Regional Office	Letter received	Camden and Blackfen stores confirmed as the stores to provide access. Contact details of HR Managers given.
01/04/96	HR Manager, Blackfen	Telephone call made	To arrange meeting to discuss the research plan
03/04/96	HR Manager, Camden	Telephone call made	To arrange meeting to discuss the research plan
16/04/96	HR Manager, Camden	Meeting	Initial meeting to conduct initial data gathering about the store context and HR Manager designated as the gatekeeper for arranging interviews.
18/04/96	HR Manager, Blackfen	Meeting	Initial meeting to conduct initial data gathering about the store context and the HR Manager designated as the gatekeeper for arranging interviews.

Homeco

DATE	CONTACT PERSON	METHOD	COMMENTS
18/11/95	Personnel Manager (Head Office)	Letter sent	Initial request for access made, but no response received
18/01/96	Personnel Manager (Head Office)	Letter sent	A second request for initial access.
25/01/96	Personnel and Training Controller, Head Office	Letter received	Informing me of their interest in the research and that the Personnel Manager for Renewals stores would be in touch shortly
26/01/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Letter received	Request a telephone call to arrange a meeting
27/01/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Telephone call made	A meeting arranged for 12/02/96
12/02/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Meeting at Homeco's Head Office	A two hour meeting regarding the project.
21/02/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Letter received	Officially granting research access and to arrange for a second meeting
04/03/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Telephone call made	A meeting date arranged for 12/03/96 (10.30 a.m.)
06/03/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals), Head Office	Fax sent	To outline the key points of my research project for the Personnel Manager to present to the rest of the flexibility project team.
07/03/96	Operations Controller & Personnel Manager (Renewals)	Meeting at Homeco's Head Office	To discuss the project in more detail and confirm access to two stores
25/03/96	Graduate Trainee	Letter received	To advise that she would be my point of contact throughout the project and to provide the contact names and details of the stores that would be used for the research.
01/04/96	Store Manager (Fareham)	Fax	A fax had to be sent as the contact number provided by Graduate Trainee had been a fax number. A request to meet was put in this fax.

DATE	CONTACT PERSON	METHOD	COMMENTS
02/04/96	Store Manager (Fareham)	Telephone call made	After getting no response from the fax, I rang Directory Enquiries for the store's telephone number. The fax number I had been given by the Graduate Trainee had also been incorrect. Spoke with Store Manager and arranged a meeting.
02/04/96	Store Manager (West Thurrock)	Telephone call made	Although the Store Manager knew nothing of the project or my research request he agreed to a meeting.
11/04/96	Store Manager (Fareham)	First meeting and interview	Also attended by the Graduate Trainee
19/04/96	Store Manager (West Thurrock)	Telephone call received	Meeting to be re-arranged.
29/05/96	Store Manager (West Thurrock)	First meeting and interview	Schedule of interviews with managers agreed.
03/06/96	Store Manager (Fareham)	Letter received	Informing me that he was no longer the store manager at Fareham due to company secondment and so could not continue with the research.
03/06/96 - 05/06/96	Personnel Manager (Renewals) & Graduate Trainee	Telephone calls made	Attempting to discuss new arrangements after Mark Dove's secondment.
06/06/96	Graduate Trainee	Meeting at Head Office	Agreed to continue with the Fareham store using the Assistant Managers as gatekeepers. Request by Operations Manager to give a presentation on progress to date.
10/06/96	Graduate Trainee	Letter received	Names of Assistant Managers at the Fareham stores provided - confirmation of presentation date.
11/06/96	Assistant Managers of Fareham store	Letter sent	Requesting their participation in the research project
25/06/96	Assistant Managers of Fareham store	Letter sent	A second request for their participation as gatekeepers after no response from previous letter and subsequent telephone messages
17/07/96	Flexibility project team	Presentation made	A presentation was made to the team, who agreed that the findings of the research were useful, and to continue providing research access.

DATE	CONTACT PERSON	METHOD	COMMENTS
30/07/96	Graduate Trainee	Letter received	Informing me that the Fareham store would no longer be used as a case study, and providing details of Oxford as an alternative store and the contact details.
02/08/96	Store Manager, Oxford	Letter sent	Requesting initial meeting and interview.
10/08/96	Store Manager, Oxford	Telephone call made	To follow up on the previous letter after no response was received. A meeting was arranged
28/08/96	Store Manager, Oxford	First meeting and interview	Schedule of interviews with managers agreed.

Appendix 5: Schedule of interviews conducted

Superco

DATE	INTERVIEWEE	LOCATION
29.01.96	Regional Development Manager	Regional Office
05.03.96	General Manager	Lewisham
07.03.96	General Manager	Surrey Quays
12.04.96	Trading Manager (Fresh Foods) Customer Services Manager Trading Manager (Ambient) Personnel Manager	Lewisham
19.04.96	Personnel Manager Trading Manager (Fresh Foods) Trading Manager (Ambient)	Surrey Quays
30.04.96	Personnel and Training Director Employee Relations Manager	Head Office
23.05.96	Section Manager (Ambient) Section Manager (Stock Control)	Lewisham
28.05.96	Customer Services Manager Section Manager (Produce) Section Manager (Ambient)	Surrey Quays
27.06.96	Systems Manager Training Manager	Surrey Quays
01.08.96	Training Manager	Lewisham
28.08.96	Section Manager (Provisions) Section Manager (Bakery) Section Manager (Checkouts)	Surrey Quays
16.09.96	Section Manager (Provisions) Section Manager (Produce) Section Manager (Fresh Foods)	Lewisham
14.10.96	Express Store Manager	Express Store, Lewisham
15.10.96	Section Manager (Checkouts)	Lewisham

Groceryco

DATE	INTERVIEWEE	LOCATION
06.03.96	Recruitment and Deployment Manager	Regional Office
16.04.96	Human Resources (HR) Manager	Camden
18.04.96	HR Manager	Blackfen
25.04.96	HR Director	Regional Office
03.06.96	Replenishment Manager	Blackfen
05.06.96	Support Services Manager	Blackfen
11.06.96	Customer Services Manager	Blackfen
29.06.96	Support Services Manager Customer Services Manager	Camden
22.07.96	Controller (Checkouts)	Blackfen
13.08.96	Replenishment Manager	Camden
20.09.96	Controller (Ambient) Controller (Fresh Foods)	Blackfen
22.09.96	Controller (Checkouts) Controller (Fresh Foods) Controller (Administration)	Camden
28.10.96	Controller (Stock Management) Controller (Administration)	Blackfen
02.11.96	Controller (Bakery/Delicatessen) Controller (Stock Management) Controller (Ambient)	Camden

Homeco

DATE	INTERVIEWEE	LOCATION
12.02.96	Personnel Manager (Renewals)	Head Office
11.04.96	Store Manager	Fareham
29.04.96	Store Manager	West Thurrock
23.07.96	Department Manager (Hardside) Department Manager (Softside)	West Thurrock
25.07.96	Assistant Manager	West Thurrock
06.09.96	Personnel Administrator	Head Office
17.09.96	Assistant Manager	West Thurrock
28.08.96	Store Manager	Oxford
01.09.96	Operations Manager (Retail)	Head Office
10.09.96	Department Manager (Administration)	West Thurrock
07.10.96	Assistant Manager	Oxford
11.11.96	Team Leader (Softside) Team Leader (Gardening)	Oxford
02.12.96	Team Leader (Administration)	Oxford

Appendix 6: Interview structure for Head Office management

Background Information

1. How many years have you been working for [insert organisation]?
2. What does your role as [insert job title] involve?
3. How did you come to be [insert job title]?
4. How many stores does [insert organisation] have?
5. How is [insert organisation] structured?
6. Is there a company standard for store structure?
7. Is this a relatively new organisational structure, or has [insert organisation] undergone restructuring in recent years?
 - If yes, when and why?
8. How many employees work for [insert organisation]?
9. What is the ratio of
 - male: female workers
 - full time: part time workers
 - permanent: temporary workers
10. How are individual store's labour hours allowance determined?
11. Is the EPOS system used for staff scheduling purposes?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not and what is EPOS used for?
12. How much involvement do you have with store level managers?

Corporate Strategy

1. Is there a company-wide corporate strategy? If yes, what is it? Do you have any supporting documentation?
2. At what level in the organisation is strategy formulated? How and why?
3. Is there a separate HR strategy? What is it?
 - If yes, who devises HR strategy?
4. Is there an effort to link HR strategy with corporate strategy?
 - If yes, how?
5. How are new strategies/ policies communication down to employees in the stores?
6. How has [insert organisation]'s strategic direction changed/ developed over recent years?
7. Has HR and/or corporate strategy driven any increase in numerical flexibility? Is pressure placed on store level managers to make greater use of part timers, temporary workers, or zero hour contracts (if they exist)?
8. To what extent do your competitors' strategies impact on [insert organisation]'s HR strategy and its deployment of labour?
9. Has [insert organisation] made any attempt in recent years to make the workforce more flexible and cost efficient?
 - If yes, has this been successful and why?
10. How much of the store level HR decision-making process is centralised? Which HR responsibilities are decentralised and why?
11. To what extent do you leave HR decision-making to store level managers' discretion? Which responsibilities and why?

The retail industry and competitors

1. To what extent has the use of non-standard labour always been a feature of [insert organisation]'s labour use policies?
2. Have you ever considered alternative methods of deploying labour (e.g. shiftworking, annual hours etc.)?
3. Is the high use of part timers in the retail industry a response to
 - a) increased competition
 - b) a cost control measure
 - c) increased opening hours
 - d) labour supply and demand issues?

Working Hours

1. Have you increased the opening hours of your stores in recent years?
2. If yes, by how much and why?
3. How did [insert organisation] resource these increased opening hours in terms of labour?

Appendix 7: Interview structure for Store Managers/ Gatekeepers to the case study stores

Background Information

1. How long has this store been open?
2. How long have been the [insert job title] of this store?
3. What does your role as [insert job title] involve?
4. How did you come to be [insert job title] of the [insert store name] store?
5. How many years have you worked for [insert organisation]?
6. What work experience/ education did you have before joining [insert organisation]?
7. Have you noticed any major changes/ trends in [insert organisation] in recent years?

Company Strategy

1. How would you describe [insert organisation]'s strategic goals?
2. Have you noticed any changes/trends in the company's strategic approach in the last five years?
3. Has the company made any attempt in the last five years to change its approach to HRM, particularly the deployment of labour?
4. Is there a company and/or store preference for one type of contract over another (full time vs part time; permanent vs. temporary)?
5. Has the company made any attempt in the last five years to make the workforce more cost efficient and productive? Why do you think this might be?
6. What direction do you feel [insert organisation] will take in the future in respect of employment issues?

Store Structure

1. How many employees are employed in this store?
2. Are all of these under the management control of the Store Manager?
⇒ If not which employees are not, and why?
3. What is the ratio of part time to full time staff?
4. What is the ratio of temporary to permanent staff?
5. What is the ratio of male to female staff?
6. How many of your part time staff are male?
7. Do you employ students? In what capacity and why? Do you know the proportion of students you employ?
8. How is the store structured e.g number of assistant/ senior managers; number and identity of departments; number of department managers; number of supervisors etc.?
9. What is the role of other managers in the hierarchy?
10. What involvement do you have with your senior managers at (a) Regional Office; (b) Head Office?
11. Does the store use EPOS?
⇒ If yes, for how long?
⇒ Is it used for staff scheduling purposes? How?
⇒ What other purposes at store level does EPOS serve?

Working Hours

1. What are the store's opening hours?
2. Have you seen any increase in opening hours in recent years?
⇒ If yes, what are these and why the increase?

3. How is your staffing allowance determined?
4. How much autonomy do you have in the deployment of labour e.g. full time to part time ratio of staff?
5. How far in advance are staff schedules produced? Is this company policy?
6. What training did you/ or your managers receive from [insert organisation] to write the staff schedules and have the most effective deployment of labour?
7. On what basis are the staffing schedules determined?
8. Have you ever had to change an employee's working hours?
⇒ If yes, why? How much advance notice was given?
9. Have you ever altered working hours in order to satisfy employee demands?
10. Have customer demands changed in recent years? What effect has this had on staff scheduling?
11. Are you happy with the part time:full time ratio in your department?
 - Do you have the autonomy to change the ratio?
 - If yes, how would you change it (if at all)?

HR processes and management at store level

1. Has there been any changes in the store's structure in recent years?
 - If yes, how did the changes impact on your department and management control?
2. How much autonomy do you have in managing your department?
3. How involved are you in managing your employees?
4. How involved are head office in the management of your department and its employees?
 - Has this changed over the past five years? How? Why do you think that is?

5. Who decides the breakdown of contracts (e.g. part time: full time; permanent: temporary) in the store? Why?
6. To what extent has the use of part time employees always been a feature of [insert organisation]'s HR policy?
 - Has their use increased over the past five years?
 - Why do you think this is?
7. Do any HR policies decisions come from Head Office e.g. are centralised?
⇒ If yes, which ones and why?
8. What is the recruitment process in your store? Is this company policy?
9. Do you request specific working shifts when recruiting or do you demand flexibility?
10. Who conducts the recruitment process?
11. Who makes the final decision regarding who to recruit?
12. What level of training do employees receive once they are appointed?

Appendix 8: Interview structure for store level management

Background Information

1. How many years have you been working for [insert organisation]?
2. What does your role as [insert job title] involve?
3. How did you come to be [insert job title]?
4. What education and work experience did you have before working for [insert organisation]?
5. How would you describe the culture of [insert organisation]?
6. Have you worked for more than one store during your employment with [insert organisation]?
 - If yes, have you noticed any differences between the stores in which you have worked?
 - If yes, in what ways have they differed?

Store Structure

1. Which sections are included in your department/ are under your management control?
2. Is there a standard department structure you have to adhere to?
3. How are your employees managed in your department?
4. Has there been any changes in the store's structure in recent years?
 - If yes, how did the changes impact on your department and management control?
5. How much autonomy do you have in managing your department?
6. How involved are you in managing your employees?
7. How involved are head office in the management of your department and its employees?
 - Has this changed over the past five years? How? Why do you think that is?

Workforce

1. How many employees are employed within your department/are under your responsibility?
2. What is the breakdown of female and male employees in your department?
3. What is the breakdown of part time and full time employees in your department?
4. Are the majority of part timers women? Why do you think this might be so?
5. Do you employ students to work part time?

Company Strategy

1. How would you describe [insert organisation]'s strategic goals?
2. Have you noticed any changes/trends in the company's strategic approach in the last five years?
3. Has the company made any attempt in the last five years to change its approach to HRM, particularly the deployment of labour?
4. Has the company made any attempt in the last five years to make the workforce more cost efficient and productive? Why do you think this might be?
5. What direction do you feel [insert organisation] will take in the future in respect of employment issues?

Staff Scheduling

1. Whose working hours are you responsible for scheduling?
2. Do all your employees work fixed hours?
3. How often do you review the staffing schedules?
4. On what basis might you review staffing schedules?

5. For how long have you been responsible for staff scheduling?
6. What training did you received to help you devise staff scheduling?
7. Have you ever had to change an employee's working hours? Why and what happened?
8. Does [insert organisation] make any allowances for employees who want to change their working hours?
9. Has your store increased its opening hours over the past five years?
 - If yes, how have you resourced these additional opening hours in terms of human resources?
10. Do you make use of overtime to meet customer demand?
11. What is the company policy regarding the use of overtime?
12. When are you most likely to use overtime?
13. Which employees are most frequently asked to work overtime?
14. Are full timers ever required to work overtime?
 - If yes, why and when?
15. Do you make use of temporary contracts?
 - If yes, when and why?
 - Do they fulfil the needs of the store/department?

Employee Resourcing

1. How is the ratio of part time:full time employees in your department determined?
2. To what extent has the use of part time employees always been a feature of [insert organisation]'s HR policy?
 - Has their use increased over the past five years?

- Why do you think this is?
3. Are you happy with the part time:full time ratio in your department?
 - Do you have the autonomy to change the ratio?
 - If yes, how would you change it (if at all)?
 4. Has the company made any attempts over the past five years to make the workforce more flexible?
 - If yes, how and why?
 5. Is there a company and/or store preference for one type of contract over another (full time vs part time; permanent vs. temporary)?
 6. Has your store increased its opening hours over the past five years?
 - If yes, how have you resourced these additional opening hours in terms of human resources?
 7. Do you make use of overtime to meet customer demand?
 8. What is the company policy regarding the use of overtime?
 9. When are you most likely to use overtime?
 10. Which employees are most frequently asked to work overtime?
 11. Are full timers ever required to work overtime?
 - If yes, why and when?
 12. Do you make use of temporary contracts?
 - If yes, when and why?
 - Do they fulfil the needs of the store/department?

HR Responsibilities

1. What HR duties/responsibilities do you carry out as a manager?

2. Are you involved in the recruitment of employees?
3. Who decides whether to recruit a full timer; part timer; temporary or permanent employees?
 - How is this decision reached?
4. Who makes the final decision with regard to selecting a candidate for a vacancy?
5. What training did you receive to carry out recruitment and selection responsibilities?
6. What training do employees receive once they have been recruited?
7. Who is responsible for conducting this training? Have they themselves been trained to carry out these tasks?

Technology and HR/The Labour Process

1. What technology do you have at your disposal as a manager which has been developed over the past five years?
2. What impact did the introduction of EPOS have on (a) your department; (b) the skills of your employees; (c) your role as a manager?
3. Are there plans to develop technology further? How? What do you think of this?
4. Do you use technology to write the staff schedules?

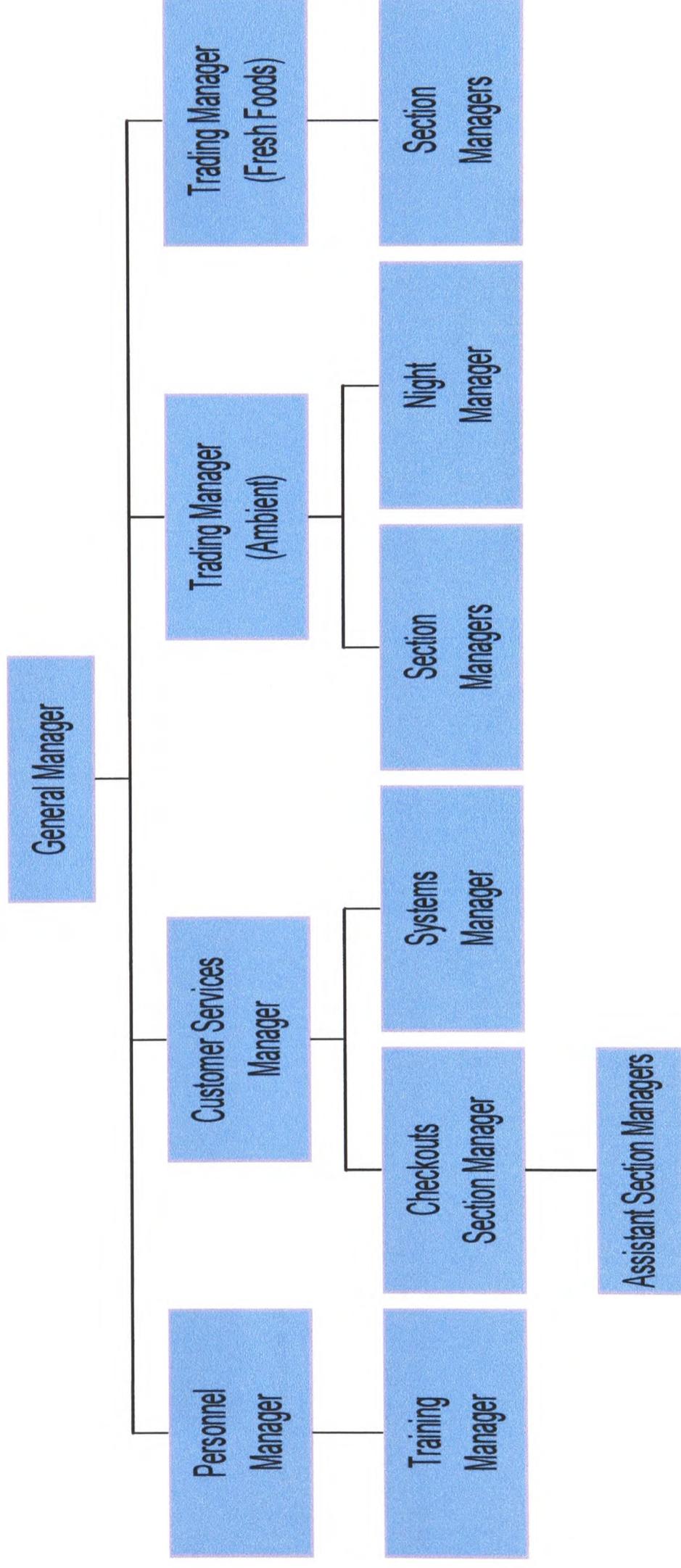
Personal Opinions

1. What level of commitment/reliability/productivity/quality do you get from part timers compared to full timers?
2. Do you find that any one group of employees are more flexible/willing to change their hours and/or work overtime?
3. What are the benefits to your department of part time employees/ full time employees?

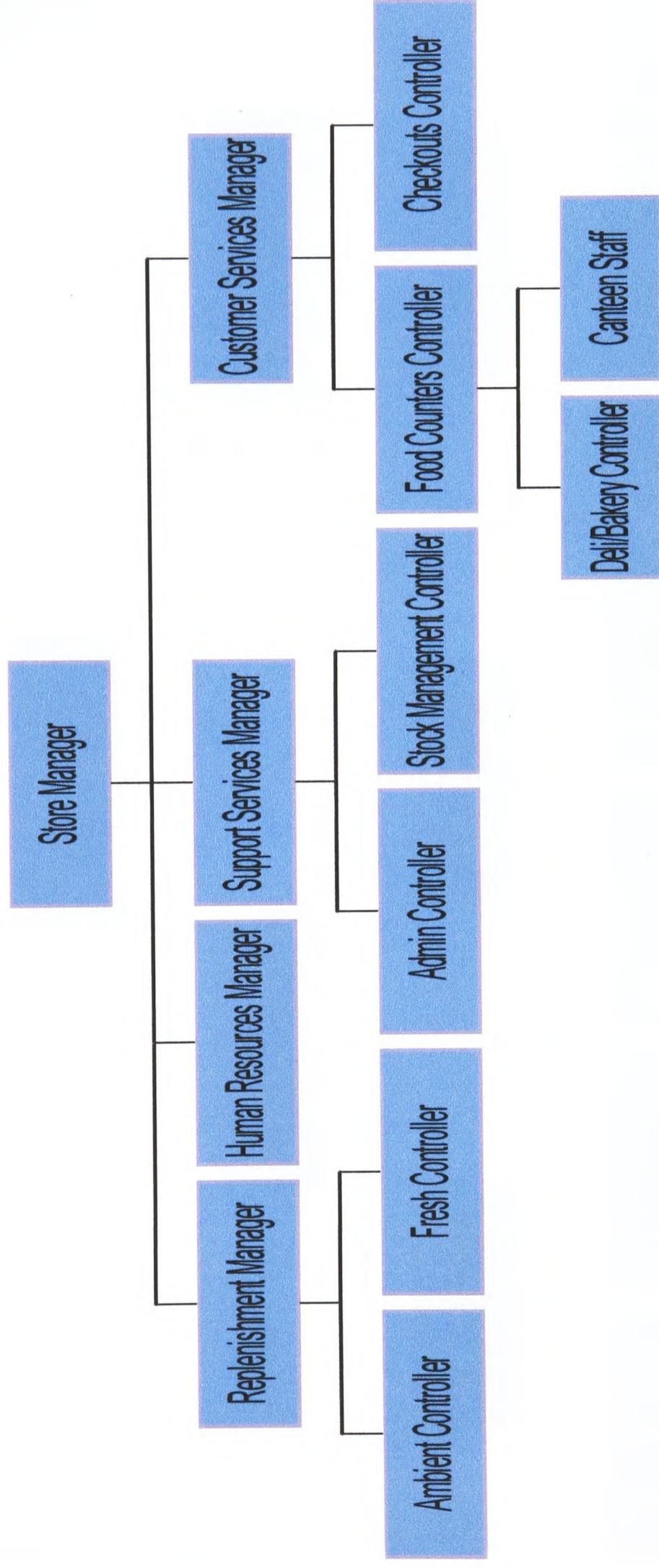
4. What are the disadvantages to your department of part time employees/ full time employees?
5. Do you think part timers are more difficult to manage than full timers due to their reduced hours?
6. Do you think employment flexibility is the key to [insert organisation]'s future success?

Appendix 9: Organisational Store Structures

Store Organisation Structure: Superco



Store Organisation Structure: Groceryco



Store Organisation Structure: Homeco

