

Assessing Employee Responses to Teamworking and Organisational Change

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Abstract: This paper surveys recent case study evidence addressing the implications of task-based teamworking for front-line employees. It refers primarily to three manufacturing companies in Britain. All three companies faced significant external challenges deriving from increased competition, and in each case teamworking was perceived as a key aspect of organisational restructuring. The paper illustrates the complexity of employee responses, arguing that there is no 'one best way' to implement teamworking, but at the same time suggesting what some of the necessary conditions might be for teamworking to be 'successful'.

Keywords: Competitiveness; Industrial relations; Partnership; Productivity; Teamworking; Work organisation

Introduction

The Green Paper "Partnership for a New Organisation of Work" places the organisation of work at the heart of a European approach to productivity and innovation, and specifies the central challenge as the development of a 'new paradigm' that can contribute to enhanced competitiveness, safeguard employment and at the same time improve 'quality of working life'.

This challenge is immense, and requires as a first step the rapid exchange of insights and experiences across the continent. This has been one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the European Work and Technology Consortium (Totterdill, this volume), which explicitly aims to identify means of promoting and sustaining new forms of work organisation within enterprises, through both dissemination and action research case study work.

Specifically, the Consortium is seeking to identify 'best practice' approaches to change, which includes the preparation of critical reviews in certain key areas, one of which is the area of teamworking in learning organisations. This paper aims to

contribute directly to this work by outlining what some of the necessary conditions might be for teamworking to be 'successful'.

If the objectives of the Green Paper are to be realised, there is an urgent need to move away from the top-down application of normative models and consultancy-style 'blueprints for change'. This is consistent with the arguments for development coalitions (as outlined by Gustavsen, this volume), which explicitly eschew the notion of a 'best pattern'. What is needed is convincing case study based evidence that highlights the conditions for the success or failure of particular organisational initiatives, combined with an awareness of the contingent nature of such developments. The nature and operation of teamworking, as with any other organisational innovation, is both complex and context-dependent. And whilst it may be possible to highlight certain generic conditions which appear to be conducive to more enlightened management practice, there remains no 'one best way' and no clearly visible route towards any 'new paradigm'. It is with these qualifications in mind that this paper is presented.

This journal has often been concerned with the analysis of computer supported co-operative working. This paper surveys research from somewhat different traditions of intellectual inquiry – those of organisational behaviour and industrial relations – but nevertheless focuses on a central aspect of co-operative working, namely task-based teamworking. This form of teamworking is indeed an appropriate focus in this context; as Gustavsen reminds us (this volume), the point of departure for the development of socio-technical systems theory was the discovery of what came to be called 'autonomous work groups', which were seen as representing an advance upon Tayloristic forms of work design. This paper thus seeks to further the dialogue between those academic communities concerned with the separate but overlapping debates on human networks, technology and work organisation (see Ennals, review article, this volume). It takes many of the wider European debates as read, and gets straight into assessing recent case study evidence. None of the research referred to was carried out with the explicit purpose of identifying cases of 'best practice', but it nevertheless suggests what might be some of the 'conditions for success' in innovative forms of work organisation.

Case Studies of Teamworking in Practice

A wide range of terminology pervades the discourse of teamworking and employee involvement. Much has been claimed about the effect of various advanced forms of teamworking upon worker commitment and business performance (Walton, 1985; Wickens, 1987). Indeed, the 1980s witnessed the development of a plethora of new production concepts, such as flexible specialisation, lean production and post-Fordism, which each posited a firm relationship between the use of advanced manufacturing techniques and the organization of workers into teams. An inherent assumption within these concepts is that employees will enjoy more autonomy and discretion through job enlargement and increased levels of participation at work.

A useful way of identifying the different forms of teamworking implied in these developments is provided by Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al. (1994), who distinguish between three types of team: (i) 'socio-technical systems', (ii) 'lean production'

teams, and (iii) 'off-line' teams. Socio-technical systems, widely utilised in Scandinavia, aim to integrate the requirements of social and technical systems through high levels of worker autonomy in decision making, the absence of front-line supervision, frequent job rotation and close attention to ergonomics and work environment; autonomous work groups are invariably a central feature. Lean production focuses more squarely on team-based operations, within which multi-skilled workers use highly flexible, automated machines to produce the necessary variety of products (cf. Womack et al., 1990). Off-line teams refers to team activity that occurs off line on a periodic basis, rather than to the reorganisation of daily operations around either 'lean' or 'on line' teams, what the author has elsewhere referred to as 'policy development', as opposed to 'task-based', teamworking (Rees, 1995); examples would include quality circles, employee involvement groups, task forces and labour-management committees. Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al. briefly summarise the implications of these three forms of teamworking for employee involvement as follows:

A lean system optimises flow-through manufacturing but reduces the amount of worker autonomy. A socio-technical system achieves work autonomy by optimizing the balance between social and technical sub-systems, but may do so at the expense of efficiency or operating costs. The off-line team optimises the application of problem-solving tools to specific issues, but does not address daily work operations. (1994: 58)

The cases of teamworking considered here are drawn from three recent studies. In the first of these, the author examined teamworking in the context of 'total quality management' (TQM) strategies at four organisations, two from the manufacturing sector and two from private services (Rees, 1996). The second, and related, study involved the author in a further six case studies of TQM organisations, spanning manufacturing, services and the public sector (Edwards, Collinson and Rees, 1998). In the third study, Wright and Edwards (1998) examined an advanced form of teamworking at a British manufacturing plant which is part of a large multinational company.

The paper refers primarily, but not exclusively, to evidence from three manufacturing companies (one drawn from each of the three studies). From the first study is 'Auto Components', a British subsidiary of an American company operating on a brownfield site in the English East Midlands, which manufactures a range of specialist parts for motor car engines, concentrating in particular on valve seat inserts. Following the introduction of statistical process control (SPC) in the mid-1980s, the company has more recently made a heavy capital investment in new plant, and a section of the workforce has been trained in quality control techniques and now operates in team-based cells with full flexibility between tasks. One of the organisations looked at in the second study was British Steel. Privatised in 1988, it manufactures a wide range of basic and semi-finished steel products. The Shotton Works, in North Wales, is the main plant producing coated steel strip and it has the world's widest range of coil coating facilities on a single site. A Total Quality Performance programme was introduced in 1993, embracing comprehensive training and the introduction of Quality Improvement Teams. The company analysed in the third study is a British aluminium smelter located at Lynemouth in the north-east of England, and is part of the large Canadian multinational, Alcan. At the Lynemouth site, alumina is reduced through the application of electric current, and the resulting aluminium is formed into ingots

in a casting centre. Direct supervision has been abolished at the plant, and teamworking using semi-autonomous groups with job rotation, multi-skilling and team briefings has been introduced.

All three of these companies have faced significant external challenges deriving from increased competition, and teamworking was in each case seen as a key aspect of the organisational response. We have already noted the range of different forms that teamworking can take, and it does indeed vary between each case. Overall, however, these are all British cases of teamworking at brownfield site locations, and even the most advanced instance (at Alcan) is not as advanced as the 'socio-technical systems' version described by Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al.. In terms of their three-fold categorisation of teams, it is arguably only the socio-technical systems version which entails any genuine 'team empowerment'. In the UK at least this more sophisticated form of teamwork is comparatively rare; Geary's review of the British evidence concludes that it is "largely confined to a small number of well-publicised organisations"(1995: 373). However, whilst the cases of teamworking considered here may not be as advanced as many of those frequently discussed in the pages of this journal, there is a certain benefit in examining cases that are not considered to be 'leading edge'. As the evidence will show, even in the constrained context of a UK brownfield site, teamworking can be a partial success.

Debates on the Implications of Teamworking for Employees

Teamworking is often discussed as a key aspect of broader change initiatives, such as lean production or total quality management. With regard to lean production, the most passionate advocates of lean systems argue that it is an unmixed blessing, whilst its critics argue that it is in effect a cosmetic cover for enhanced exploitation and control of employees at all levels. Against this polarised debate, more textured approaches highlight the importance of organisational context and demonstrate that lean production is never unambiguously 'good' or 'bad' (cf. Rees, Scarbrough and Terry, 1996). Similarly with respect to TQM, Wilkinson et al. (1997) have usefully categorised existing approaches into two: the proponents of TQM who offer 'bouquets', and the critics who provide 'brickbats'. The former simply assert that TQM brings empowerment, responsibility and commitment, and teamworking is generally considered to be a key factor in securing employee flexibility and generating organisational commitment (cf. Dale and Cooper, 1992; Waldman, 1994). The latter focus on issues of management control, arguing that the greater employee autonomy and discretion implied by teamworking is invariably accompanied by an intensification of work and increased surveillance (cf. McArdle et al. 1995; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992; Webb 1996).

The approach of this paper is to critically evaluate this latter perspective on teamworking, testing its validity through a consideration of detailed case study evidence. Before turning to this evidence, we need to briefly elaborate further the principal features of this 'intensification thesis'.

The central argument is that, although there appear to be benefits for employees from the increased involvement in problem-solving and decision-making that teamworking implies, corresponding changes to production technologies, for instance,

have also been accompanied by certain undesirable effects (Delbridge and Turnbull, 1992). The same consequences have also been documented as arising from teamworking in Japanese companies (Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992; Williamson, 1989), as well as from multi-skilling and teamworking in office work (O'Connell Davidson, 1990). Moreover, the greater employee involvement at the point of production or service delivery which is generally associated with teamworking does not usually replace traditional forms of control, but rather tends to co-exist alongside them. As an example, Nissan, a company which it is claimed has transformed the social relations of production by introducing teamworking (Wickens, 1987), nevertheless continues to maintain close forms of supervision (Storey, 1994).

Relatedly, it has also been found that if teamworking is introduced without changes to other aspects of a company's personnel management policy, then it is unlikely to be viewed favourably by employees. For instance, in a study of one of Lucas' plants in Birmingham, Elger and Fairbrother (1992) found that, while employees welcomed task-based teamworking, the lack of resources allocated to training prevented them from acquiring a wider repertoire of skills to rotate between work tasks within the manufacturing cell.

A typical example of the 'intensification' argument is that advanced by Delbridge and Turnbull (1992). They describe task-based teamworking as a form of 'management through compliance', whereby organising workers into teams and making these teams accountable for their own performance allows firms operating a just-in-time production system to impose a 'customer ethos' on the workforce, and harness the peer pressure of fellow team members to ensure compliance to company objectives. Parker and Slaughter (1993) similarly regard teamworking as part of an overall management package which they term 'management-by-stress'.

In assessing recent case study evidence, this paper is drawn to neither of the polarised views on teamworking, but rather towards a third, intermediate, set of arguments which have been gathering increasing support. The central point here is that the effects of teamworking, and wider strategies such as lean production or TQM, depend on the context within which they operate. Within this perspective, there is growing acceptance that they mean neither extreme empowerment nor straight intensification. Godfrey et al. (1996), Hill and Peccei (1996), Rees (1995) and Rosenthal et al. (1997) all argue from case study evidence that whilst employee involvement may be tightly constrained, there tends also to be an enlargement of employee discretion, and work effort is not necessarily intensified. Before elaborating on these points, it is necessary to present a balance sheet of the evidence to support both the 'intensification' and the 'empowerment' arguments.

Effort Levels and Stress – the Evidence

This section of the paper concentrates on one particular argument that is central to the 'intensification thesis', namely that teamworking and associated changes in work organisation are accompanied by an increase in effort levels for employees, and a consequent increase in stress. Other related issues (such as the surveillance and monitoring of work, the dynamics of the operation of teams, and the importance of 'peer pressure' are taken up in more depth in each of the cited studies).

It is accepted from several studies that increased work effort has been an important trend in many parts of the British economy (Elger, 1990; Winchester and Bach, 1995), and the results from the case studies are consistent with these findings. At Alcan workloads had clearly increased, with three-quarters of employees at the Lynemouth plant reporting that their work effort had increased in recent years. Similar responses were also evident at British Steel and at Auto Components.

It is arguable that this is not just a perception. Workers at Alcan were working more intensively, as illustrated by new arrangements for starting shifts, whereby it was formally agreed that, in place of the former practice of not beginning work until work stations were fully staffed, shifts would start with whatever labour is available. Job rotation also meant that workers would take on new jobs instead of simply sitting in rest rooms. At Auto Components, a large number of employees equated increasing effort levels with increases in production or in the amount of work they are required to do. Many pointed to the nature of the technology on the production line, which not only dictates the pace at which they can work, but also allows management to vary the pace of work according to production requirements.

Since it is often implied that increased work effort entails excessive stress and pressure on employees, in each of the cases some assessment was therefore made of how employees felt about their work effort. At Alcan only a small proportion (7%) thought their effort level "always too demanding". Fifty-one per cent of respondents thought their effort levels were "OK" or "generally OK, sometimes too intense". Much the most commonly cited reasons for working harder were "achieving targets" (79%) and the "pace of work" (62%). At British Steel too, a smaller proportion (28%) of employees reported feeling stress "constantly" or "very often", whilst the largest proportion (57%) reporting feeling stress either "often" or only "sometimes". At Auto Components, technology was referred to by 60% of respondents as dictating the pace of work, and most employees said that the intensity of each minute of their work had actually increased. Over three-quarters cited production or sales targets and deadlines as the primary influences on working hard, although relatively few felt that this was leading to high levels of stress.

In summary, it would appear that although there was some increase in work effort in each case, usually reflecting more demanding targets and production requirements, generally the increase was not felt to be extreme or oppressive. And it is also apparent from the case studies that many employees do not necessarily consider the implications of increasing effort levels to be wholly negative. This is evident from the fact that when they were asked a straight yes/no question as to whether they enjoyed working as hard as they do, the vast majority replied "yes". Many at Auto Components, for example, said they preferred having to work hard because it made the working day appear to pass more quickly. The vast majority of employees also felt it to be necessary to work as hard as they do, with many showing a keen commitment to meet production targets and deadlines. The study by Edwards, Collinson & Rees (1998) combines two sets of responses to indicate three types of worker: the 'committed', who are working harder and like doing so; the 'stable' (no change or less effort, and like this); and the 'pressured' (same or increased effort and dislike this level of intensity). The last category, which would be emphasised by the 'intensification thesis', comprised under 20% of the total sample from the six cases. At British Steel by far the largest proportion (54%) were categorised as 'committed'.

Of course, in discussing these findings it remains extremely difficult to isolate the effect of teamworking *per se*. In each case, measured productivity increases certainly reflected some increase in effort, but also the fact that, with training, workers were working 'smarter'. As Wright and Edwards point out,

changes in effort often go along with technical and organisational change. Productivity reflects a complex interplay of forces, and it would be unwise to try to attribute a certain component to individual factors. (1998)

With this qualification in mind, it is still possible to draw two broad conclusions. Firstly, the evidence lends support to the 'intensification thesis' insofar as work effort had clearly increased. Secondly, however, this clearly brought benefits to employees as well as costs. Some of these benefits are now explored in more detail.

Employee Autonomy and Control – the Evidence

Much of the previous case study evidence suggests that teamworking has little impact on employee involvement, commitment and performance. Rather, worker autonomy is shown to have discrete limits, with control being 're-organised' as opposed to devolved to work groups, within a structure of continuing management dominance (Geary, 1993; Pollert, 1996; Scott, 1994).

As indicated above, the evidence from the three organisations considered here confirms much of this picture, but also, significantly, finds a generally positive response to teamworking on the part of employees. At Alcan, the great majority of the interview sample (83%) thought their skill levels had increased, which is consistent with a degree of multi-skilling having taken place. Moreover, 23% of respondents thought they had a "great deal" of influence in day-to-day problem solving; fewer than a quarter thought they had "little" influence, with none recording no influence at all. At British Steel the questionnaire data revealed higher levels of worker interest and ability to take decisions, and improved relations within the work group. Enhanced worker discretion was evident on matters such as work scheduling, requesting maintenance assistance, and small items of budgeting. Job rotation and multi-skilling were taking place. And finally at Auto Components, most employees were strongly committed to the principle of task-based teamworking. Many said that it was their own choice to work in teams, and that they did so because they saw it as a progressive move in tune with the strategic direction of the company. A supportive atmosphere was said to exist within the teams, and many positive comments about teamworking were made on the questionnaire returns, such as: "just doing one job is totally boring – having a variety of jobs is a lot more interesting"; "being stuck on one machine all the time was heart breaking – being on different machines is much better"; "I've become more involved through teamworking, and management do ask you – in every job I had before you were just told what to do".

In each case, then, although stress and work pressure were felt to have become slightly worse, employees clearly saw benefits in teamworking, in terms of greater responsibility and generally higher job satisfaction. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret this as total autonomy, since in these cases workers had little 'craft autonomy' to lose; as Wright and Edwards point out in the case of Alcan,

their new independence should not be equated with a craft-like ability to shape the production process teamwork was seen as a practical response to specific conditions, and to hold it up against the benchmark of flexible specialisation would not be appropriate. (1998)

Moreover, it is important to note that the discretion and autonomy afforded to workers through task-based teamworking applied in all cases to a relatively narrow range of job specific tasks. As such it may also be an exaggeration to argue that a process of multi-skilling has taken place; as Thompson et al. remind us,

while skill variety is necessary to exploit arrangements such as JIT and modular production, variations or new responsibilities such as self-maintenance may be small and it is more accurate to speak of *multi-tasking*, that is an enlarged number of interchangeable tasks carried out by substitutable labour. (1995: 721)

Explaining Employee Responses

Despite the differences in context between the three cases, there was remarkable uniformity in workers' overall evaluations of teamworking. On the 'positive' side, there was a high degree of general employee support for teamworking, in so far as it allows for more input into problem-solving and decision-making, and generates significant co-operation and 'team spirit'. On the 'negative' side, it is also apparent that these developments have their limits. For example, there is scant evidence of the existence of autonomous work groups with discretion to decide who does what within the team. Rather, the discretion of teams tends to be limited to a fairly narrow range of job-specific tasks, whilst responsibility for key decisions remains at higher supervisory or managerial levels.

On balance, then, the evidence draws us towards a measured conclusion, and towards a position which Geary (1995) calls the 're-regulation of labour'. If employees are not 'empowered', then neither are they wholly dis-encharmed, and employee responses were complex. Essentially, task-based teamworking – and the wider initiatives of which it may be a part – tends to give employees more 'detailed control' over specific aspects of the work process and may as a consequence be broadly welcomed, and yet at the same time workers are not empowered in any developed sense, and management are simultaneously able to consolidate their more 'general control'.

Conditions Facilitating Support for Teamworking

There are many conditions specific to particular organisations that may promote or retard employee acceptance of, and support for, teamworking. This section of the paper briefly indicates the importance of four conditions which appear to be common to the three cases discussed here: (i) perceptions of job security, and their link with prior experience of job losses; (ii) awareness of external market pressures; (iii) management-union relationships; and (iv) the process of introducing and sustaining work reorganisation.

Just as employee views of participation schemes have been shown to be strongly dependent on feelings of job security (Marchington et al., 1994), so the same argument can be advanced with respect to teamworking. In the case of Alcan, for instance,

there had been a severe cut-back of production, and yet employees who had kept their jobs appeared to have reasonably high expectations of future employment; as Wright and Edwards put it, "the shock of job losses promoted awareness of a need for change, while subsequent stabilisation encouraged willingness to accept it" (1998). As for British Steel, employees at the plant studied were now also enjoying a period of stability, following a major re-organisation during the 1980s when, in common with much of the company, there had been massive job losses (the Shotton plant shed over 8,000 jobs). After privatisation, there was renewed investment, and between 1990 and 1995 employment levels were stable, with the new investment being widely perceived as giving the plant a secure future. And at Auto Components, employee acceptance of teamworking would again appear to be linked to previous experience of job cuts and to general support for management initiatives designed to secure the viability of the company. Here, many employees have been at the company for some years; they are well aware of how close the company came to closing during the recession of the early 1980s, and they have a respect for and loyalty towards senior management for having 'saved' them from this fate.

If job losses make workers more conscious of their employment status, they also appear to sharpen their awareness of the external competitive environment. Eighty-three per cent of respondents at Alcan felt that the extent of competition faced by the company was severe or very severe, and workers "became much more conscious of the relevance of product market circumstances to their future employment prospects" (Wright and Edwards, 1998). Similarly at Auto Components, employees were asked to state which factors they considered the future success of the company most depended upon; although 'methods of ensuring consistent quality' ranked highly, the highest proportion (80%) rated 'ability to compete on price' as the most significant issue.

In terms of the scope that managements have for generating employee support for work reorganisation, an important factor will be the nature of existing management/employee relations, and the role that representative structures have played in the development and implementation of previous changes. In the six unionised companies, including British Steel, examined by Edwards, Collinson and Rees (1998), the existence of strong co-operative relationships with relevant trade unions appeared to ease the acceptance of TQM. In two cases managers welcomed the role of the union and this helped develop relations of trust with the workforce, whilst in two others the absence of strong working relationships between management and unions made it harder to communicate the 'quality message'. In the case of British Steel, there was a co-operative relationship between the company and the union, which reflected the industry's long-established traditions; according to one manager at the Shotton plant, "if anything, it [union involvement] has helped oil the wheels of change", whilst another felt that "it is important for workers to have a voice through the union". Similarly at Auto Components, a unionised company where there is a constructive and open dialogue between shop stewards and managers, and a strong union identity on the shop-floor, management chose not to challenge the role of the union, but rather to 'use' the union as another dimension to its communication strategy. And Alcan provides a further illustration of the importance of working with and through the union; here, given the workers' strong collectivist sentiments, any attack on the union would have weakened their acceptance of change. In sum, where a workforce

is unionised, the success of work reorganisation often rests on continued co-operation with the union. This is not to suggest that a union is a necessary condition, but rather that where, as in the cases presented here, workers have strong union traditions, working with and not against the union helps to generate greater acceptance of teamworking and associated changes.

Whilst the factors discussed above may be significant, they certainly do not have determinate effects. In the case of trade unions, for example, work group solidarity and strong union organisation may, rather than facilitate change, serve to sustain opposition to management. Much therefore depends on the *process* by which teams are introduced. This was evident at Alcan, where the stress upon communication was critical to the introduction of change, and dovetailed well with a broader commitment which the company was publicly making to employee involvement. Similarly at Auto Components, management used a wide range of communication methods, many of which employees reported to find very useful. More importantly, managers communicated a strong and simple 'message' in a firm and coherent way, namely that product quality leads to customer satisfaction which in turn leads to enhanced job security. Thus one of the crucial factors influencing the extent of employee commitment to teamworking would appear to be the nature of the 'management ideology' and the way that this is communicated to employees. Likewise, the issue of training is one over which managements have a degree of strategic choice, and may be one of the key elements in the operational process of work reorganisation. In the four cases of TQM, including Auto Components, studied by the author (Rees, 1996), it was apparent that where management pay insufficient attention to training it is likely to play little part in contributing to feelings of commitment; in contrast, where there is greater attention given to relating training to specific 'quality' or 'team' issues, and where management promises are followed through in practice, then employee commitment may consequently be significantly enhanced.

Conclusion

This paper has summarised evidence from three recent pieces of case study-based research which have explored the operation of task-based teamworking. The aim has been to illustrate the complexity of employee responses to such organisational innovations, and at the same time to make suggestions as to what some of the necessary conditions might be for teamworking to be accepted and supported.

These suggestions are necessarily tentative, and given the theme of this special issue, it is important to highlight the potential dangers of generalising too widely from these findings. Just as the nature of teamworking and employee responses to it will vary according to differing organisational contexts, so too will the wider national context have a significant impact on shaping the form that work reorganisation takes and the degree of latitude that managers have to influence outcomes. These twin dimensions are emphasised by Thompson et al. (1995), who conclude that

a nation's social institutions co-ordinate and structure work relations, producing distinctive and stable organisational and employment patterns [The] shift towards new forms of team-based production will continue to be mediated by institutional factors, notably national industrial relations systems and labour markets, but also by firms themselves. (722, 723)

Regarding the distinctiveness of the UK 'national system', a number of features are relevant here. Firstly there is the relative short-termism of UK shareholders, and the often noted consequence that medium- and long-term planning tends to be subordinated to the interests of short-term profitability. This may well undermine the developmental aspects of teamworking, i.e. the management of the organisational and culture change which is seen as essential. Related to this is the unregulated nature of UK labour markets compared to other European countries, both in terms of the lack of collective workplace rights (as in, for example, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands) that may facilitate an independent employee input into the planning and implementation of work reorganisation and enhance perceptions of joint ownership, and in terms of the weakness of individual job protections that prevent or constrain unilateral dismissal, contractual and other changes by employers. The nature of the UK labour market may indeed have a direct knock-on effect upon competitive strategy, in terms of encouraging the pursuit of short-term cost-cutting as opposed to the longer-term aims of 'quality' and 'continuous improvement'.

From the case study evidence presented here, two other features are worth noting. The first relates to what we might call the 'technology of teamwork'. We have already seen that teamworking in the three case organisations did not conform to the 'socio-technical systems' (STS) view, and in none of the cases did teamworking entail the kind of new production concepts which have been much debated in Germany and Scandinavia. Rather, the basic technology and social organisation of work remained unchanged. Secondly, and relatedly, whilst demonstrating the positive role that constructive engagement between managements and trade unions can play in the implementation and operation of teamworking, none of the cases were illustrative of the developed 'social partnership' model in which the union plays an integral part in training, job design and health and safety. As Wright and Edwards observe in the case of Alcan,

there was no sustained union programme, such as those of some Scandinavian or German unions, to insist on quality of work life issues. The teamwork programme was a managerial development. (1998)

Despite these two key qualifications, the cases presented here remain significant. Firstly, they demonstrate how teamwork can be used on UK 'brownfield' sites, without major technical change, and within the limiting context of the British system of industrial relations, and still be a partial success. Secondly, they indicate that direct employee participation through task-based teamworking can be successfully integrated with collective representation through effective and co-operative relationships with trade unions in order to smooth the process of work reorganisation. And this, I would suggest, is where the most important implications lie for the agenda of the Green Paper. This calls for a shift in emphasis in the organisation of work, and an orientation towards the 'social partnership' model, with ongoing participative dialogue in the workplace as well as at other levels. Partnership implies a diminution in adversarial relations, and a recognition of shared interests and objectives. In the UK, the need to develop a new culture of partnership is seen by the Trades Union Congress as an essential element of the so-called 'new unionism' (TUC, 1996). In light of the findings presented here, these principles should remain key aims of the European Work and Technology Consortium. As one of the keynote speakers at the most recent Consortium conference reminded us, what is needed are

institutions that bring *representation* and *participation* together in a *reciprocal relationship* [This] requires new social structures at the workplace level [and] a need to cultivate these emerging trends as a tool for change. (Garibaldo, 1997)

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