

## **Biting the hand that feeds: Social identity and resistance in restaurant teams**

James Richards

School of Management & Languages, Heriot-Watt University  
Edinburgh, EH14 4AS, United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 1314513043

Email: j.richards@hw.ac.uk

Abigail Marks

School of Management & Languages, Heriot-Watt University  
Edinburgh, EH14 4AS, United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 1314513610

Email: a.marks@hw.ac.uk

### ***Abstract***

The aim of this paper is to engage with, and develop the literature on teamwork and employee resistance by examining the use of teamwork as a means of work organisation and as a distinctive forum for employee resistance. We emphasise how employees, at times of heightened conflict, first of all re-evaluate their group memberships and group loyalties (including membership of teams and other competing groups and sub-groups), and second, take action in line with the groups most suitable to helping them attain beneficial outcomes. Drawing on an ethnographical mode of inquiry, we explored what turned out to be an incompatible application of teamworking to counter the typically busy and chaotic nature of front-line hotel restaurant employment. The resistance that emerged varied from individual forms of resistance and misbehaviour to overt collective forms involving the joined up efforts of team members and team leaders. Subsequent analysis confirmed the value of using a social identity approach as a means to explain workplace behaviour. However, additional work is required in considering a broader range of research methods and team-related variables in order to verify these insights and develop knowledge on teams and resistance.

**Keywords:** social identity approach, labour process, resistance, teamwork, ethnography, hotel and catering

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Groups and teams have been a major focal point of psychological and sociological theory and research. An understanding of groups is necessary for almost every analysis of social behaviour, including, leadership, majority-minority relations, status, role differentiation and socialisation (Levine and Moreland, 1998). Furthermore, small groups provide important contexts within which other behaviour occurs e.g. attraction, aggression and altruism (Geen 1998; Batson 1998). At a functional level, people spend much of their lives in collectives of some kind; e.g. families, school classes and sports teams, and these groups provide members with vital material and psychological resources.

Yet, the formal use of teams within organisations is a relatively recent phenomenon. Traditional work arrangements attempted to remove the power of the informal team and preferred a more individualised form of work organisation. Indeed, Cohen, Ledford and Spreitzer (1996) reported that nearly half of US organisations used self-managed work teams for at least some proportion of their workforce. Similarly, within the UK, the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) indicates that 65 per cent of workplaces report that they use some form of teamwork (Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix, 1999) and a review undertaken by the Institute of Work Psychology found team based working operating within 70 per cent of the organisations examined (Waterson, Clegg and Axtell, 1997).

The expansion in interest in teamwork has been seen as a response to increased competitive pressures, specifically as a mechanism for improving flexibility, responsiveness and quality (Lloyd and Newell 2000). Groups and teams have been at the core of programmes to reform routine work within manufacturing – partly as a response to Human Relations theory in the 1930s, sociotechnical systems theory in the 1950s and Japanization and lean production in the 1980s. Indeed, managerialist and psychological accounts view teamwork as the answer to all organisational ills, as it not only enhances productivity, flexibility and efficiency, but also improves employee satisfaction, motivation and commitment to the organisation (e.g. Jackson, Sprigg and Parker, 2000; Wall and Jackson, 1995). Moreover, organisations such as call centres, where the work is organised in a manner that would not logically adapt to teamwork are, nevertheless adopting teams and teamwork (van den Broek, Callaghan and Thompson, 2004). This has in part led to more critical writers viewing teamworking as the latest in a succession of management fads or as covert mechanism by which management intensify their control over labour (e.g. Barker, 1993; Sinclair, 1992).

Accordingly, one of the mainstays of the labour process debate, the countering of managerial control by resistance behaviour (Edwards, 1986) has only been given limited analysis at a team level (e.g. Bacon and Blyton, 2005; Barker, 1993; McKinlay and Taylor, 1996a and 1996b). The very nature of the team system, which cultivates patterns of commonality and mutual support, provides the ideal domain for employees to contextualised and reinterpret managerial interventions. In one sense the team is providing employees with organisational resources that can be used to develop resistance behaviour (Vallas, 2003).

We suggest that in order to further detail resistance within teams it is of value to take account of, at least some of the principles of the social identity approach (Haslam, 2004). Social identity theory (SIT) purposely examines the methods by which collections of individuals interpret and behave towards their own group and other important groups (Tyler and Blader, 2001; Turner and Oakes, 1997; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000). Importantly, SIT not only recognises that dimensions of identity derive from self-enhancement strategies, but also from the groups that we belong to and the significance that we place on those groups. Indeed, the emphasis of SIT is on the processes through which groups chose to what extent they wish to share beliefs regarding their self-definitions, i.e. SIT is likely to aid our understating on how the relationship within the group and between the group and the organisation or management body will impact on resistance behaviour.

As such, the main aim of this article is to demonstrate that by using a social identity approach we can begin to explain how the processes within teams and between the team and the organisation lead to resistance behaviour. We draw on empirical evidence from a detailed ethnographic study of the restaurant in Hotelcorp – a branch of a large hotel chain, to illustrate and further explain the relationships between team identity and resistance. We start by looking at some of the existing work on resistance and specifically resistance within teams. Our following discussion concerns the social identity approach. However, the social identity approach is considerable (see Haslam, 2004 for a review) and only some dimensions are relevant to the current discussion. Following a summary of the social identity approach, we present our research methods and then examine the interplay between identity and resistance for the teams within our sample. We conclude this paper with a more detailed

evaluation of how this work contributes to existing theorising within the area and make suggestions for further study.

## **2 TEAMWORK AND EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE**

Edwards and Scullion (1982) refer to resistance as overt action taken to express recognition of conflict. As such, resistance equates first and foremost with attempts to subvert management demands. The basis for understanding resistance, however, is far more contentious. Despite having some noteworthy strengths and many supporters at both management and governmental level; both a unitary and a pluralist approach are viewed as being inadequate analyses for the basis of industrial conflict (Edwards, 1986). Moreover, whilst the Marxist perspective emphasises the central importance of the division between those who own the means of production and those who merely have their labour to sell, many Marxist concepts have often proven to be somewhat blunt instruments for analysts seeking to understand the nature of employment relations within different work contexts (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). Indeed, a further dilemma is put forward by Foucauldian writers (e.g. Jermier, Knights and Nord, 1994) who believe that the most prevalent way of analysing resistance - a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives by other agents - is associated with an overly simplistic view of who resists and how and why they do so. This is despite the fact that actual accounts of resistance can rarely be found in such studies (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

This work is not for the purpose of taking sides in the orthodox versus Foucauldian labour process debate – in particular, the rather adversarial debates over ‘subjectivity’ or ‘self-identity’. In actuality, we are responding to an inherent problem in labour process theory outlined by Thompson (1989). That is the limited focus within existing work on the role of individual and social identity within the conceptual structure for explaining the labour process. Following Thompson (1989) and Thompson and McHugh (2002), we make the case for (and ultimately wish to demonstrate) the use of a critical psychology to inform our understandings of the labour process. Namely, how resistance is engendered as much by the indeterminate social identity of employees as it is by the subjectivity associated with dominating forms of work organisation.

However, for this particular analysis of team-related resistance, we correspond with the materialist approach advocated by Edwards (1986). This is because an analysis based on Edward’s position, where an omnipresent ‘structured antagonism’ leads to the subjection of workers to the authority of management and the need to plan production with the needs of a capitalist market, is likely to be accepted in principle by people committed to the capitalist system, yet at the same time allow us to develop genuinely objective concepts of resistance.

Indeed, many of the first accounts of teams as a potential source of resistance centred very much on Edward’s materialist approach and established that resistance could actually flourish in what many believed to be inhospitable circumstances. For example, McKinlay and Taylor (1996a and 1996b) gave detailed accounts of informal team-based peer review processes and how tacit trading of scoring team members were said to nullify its disciplinary content. There were also chronicles of other ways in which teams gradually withdrew from their disciplinary role, ‘silent strikes’, and, a three-week go-slow. Moreover, Palmer (1996) reported on young employees who turned out to be far less malleable than initially imagined to be by management. This was evidenced in poor attendance and high turnover that persisted despite threats of disciplinary action. As a result, management was forced into making formal and informal concessions to their lowest level and least skilled workers. However, not all reports of team activity pointed towards spirited expressions of conflict and unplanned management accommodation. For instance, Delbridge (1995) suggested that whilst worker resistance and ‘misbehaviour’ may persist in such circumstances, it would be in ways that are increasingly fragmentary and marginal. Similarly, Knights and McCabe (1998 and 2000) outlined arguably weak and typically individual forms of team-based resistance. These included call operatives ‘mouthing words’ as a means to have a rest and engaging in fiddles to avoid being disciplined.

Other research on team based resistance has focused on more detailed accounts of the process. For instance, Griffiths (1998) suggest that team-based resistance (mostly in the form of humour) can be attributed to leadership styles. More specifically, humour allowed team members to put pressure on the team leader to listen more carefully to their concerns. What is more, a series of articles lead by Kirkman (i.e. Kirkman and Shapiro, 1997; Kirkman, Jones and Shapiro, 2000; Kirkman and Shapiro, 2001) suggested ‘cultural values’ were a problematic reality when implementing teams as a new form of work organisation. In effect, enduring cultural values were said to seriously conflict with the main objectives of self-managed work teams - setting goals, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reward and

self-punishment. It was also suggested that low levels of trust, low tolerance of change, or even a disdain for making sacrifices for others were key determinates in team-based resistance.

Recent work has started to move towards more detailed explanations of the micro-social processes that lead to resistance in teams, or at least points to why this level of analysis is necessary. For example, Vallas (2003) outlines why teams could be said to be a particularly suitable forum for resistance. Despite his admission that teamworking clearly heightened lateral tensions between team members, he argued that 'team systems' fostered new ways of resistance by providing workers with a rhetorical framework that enables them to negotiate boundaries of managerial authority. Teams are also said to enable workers to contest or recast managerial initiatives. Teams provide workers with organisational resources that can be used to claim discretionary powers that may have been previously been denied, the contradictions of control and reality of teams (essentially a re-engineered) authoritarian practices rekindled oppositional consciousness amongst workers, and, team systems essentially encourage collectivism in an environment where unions may fail to do so. However, Vallas point to a need for further research to disentangle the micro-social processes involved in team systems, yet other than the apparently paradoxical features of teamworking philosophies and teamworking realities, what are the more explicit or localised conditions that cause team members to bite the hand that feeds?

### **3 APPLYING A SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH**

This section is essentially guided by what we view as being the most appropriate method or theoretical framework for unravelling the micro-social processes implicated in team level resistance. Whilst a labour process perspective (e.g. Bain and Taylor, 2000) provides a sophisticated socio-economic explanation of the structural causes of resistance, it fails to 'get to grips' with the actual phenomenon that occurs in terms of the interactions within a group that lead to and promote resistance behaviour. On the other hand, by adopting a traditional psychological approach to team resistance (e.g. Kirkman and Shapiro, 1997; Kirkman, Jones and Shapiro, 2000), the focus on the minutiae of variations in personality profiles, team size and diversity perversely ignores any impact of structure or broader context on the resistance process. In effect, we are rejecting what is commonly referred to as 'methodological individualism' (Jenkins, 1999) For these reasons, there needs to be a focus on the social psychological processes that not only explain the course of resistance within the team, but also what triggers the responses that lead to that resistance occurring.

Hence, it is proposed that by adopting a social identity approach (Tajfel, 1978; Haslam, 2004), it is possible to start to explain and refine understandings of the experience of team level resistance. Indeed, SIT has been described as being a concept that lies at the intersection of social psychology, sociology and political science, and is rapidly gaining prominence within all these fields (Sanchez-Mazas and Klein, 2003). Although SIT (e.g. Turner, 1978) was established as a distinct theory as opposed to a theoretical perspective or paradigm, it has been argued by Haslam (2001: 26) that SIT can 'lay the foundation for an alternative way of approaching' the study of behaviour within organisations, in that the psychology of the individual can not be separated from the psychological and social reality of the groups. Social identity therefore affords a mechanism for examining behaviour at both an individual and group level.

An examination of identity enables the understanding of how social interaction is bound up with individuals' social identities, i.e. their definition of themselves in terms of group memberships, as opposed to just studying individuals as individual (Haslam, 2001). Specifically, this perspective not only recognises how dimensions of the self and identity derive from individual self-enhancement strategies, but also from membership of groups and the relationship between these groups and other groups. The weight that social identity theory puts on the process by which team members acquire shared beliefs, assist in the understanding of why some groups will resist organisational control, whilst other groups subscribe to the company's ideology.

Importantly, we need to understand the interplay between social identity processes and organisational control mechanisms and how this leads to a collective notion of resistance within a team. Let us start with the knowledge that even when placed within a team, individuals do not always operate as a collective. This is accepted within the social identity approach in terms of opposite poles of social behaviour (Tajfel, 1974). At one extreme can be found interactions that are wholly determined by interpersonal relations and individual characteristics and not by the groups and categories to which they belong (Deschamps and Devos, 1998). At the opposite pole are interactions between groups of individuals that are entirely determined by their respective membership of different groups and are not affected by inter individual relations among the relevant persons (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

These extremes of behaviour are in practice hypothetical, as membership of a social group or social category always plays some role in shaping interaction. Tajfel (1974) alleged that social identity processes start to be performed; the further behaviour is defined at the intergroup extreme of this continuum. Namely, individuals define themselves in terms of their group membership when the context in which they find themselves is defined along group-based lines. For instance, if two departments within an organisation merge, each employee is more likely to define themselves in terms of one department or the other rather than as an individual.

Consequently, Tajfel (1978) developed an important premise, that the more that behaviour becomes defined in intergroup terms, the more that members of the group would react in a similar way to members of the outgroup. A number of other writers have supported this premise, specifically that heightened group salience is associated with an increase in perceptions that of homogeneity of the group and heterogeneity of the outgroup (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty and Reynolds, 1998). David and Turner (1999) found the extreme ingroup members were more likely to influence more moderate group members in an intergroup situation as opposed to an intragroup situation. Similarly, Abrams, Marques, Brown and Henson (2000), suggested that intergroup context is an important mechanism for conveying that the ingroup is distinct from the outgroup. Other group members evaluate group members that deviate from the group norm more negatively. This premise concurs precisely with traditional psychological theory, that individuals are attracted to people who hold similar views and beliefs (Horowitz and Bordens, 1995). Moreover, recent research has found that teams where members perceive themselves as 'being similar', have highly salient social identities regardless of whether there is the perception of the existence of an outgroup or not (Marks, 2005).

However, from an organisational perspective, there is one factor missing from the ingroup/outgroup equation. There is an assumption from SIT that by making the ingroup/outgroup comparison that there is some congruity in terms of size and structure between the two groups (Haslam, 2004). That is the ingroup and outgroup are two departments within the same organisation or two teams working within the same plant. The reality however, could be very different. The organisation itself could be viewed as the outgroup and the team the ingroup. Moreover, if this is the case, there is evidence from some writers that a highly salient team social identity is not always the product of viewing the outgroup as fundamentally different to the ingroup, it may also be a product of viewing the outgroup as similar to the team or ingroup. Jenkins (2000) argues that if an external body, such as an organisation is viewed as being legitimate in the eyes of a group, that this implies some shared beliefs and understandings of authority. As such, there will be a strong identification with both the organisation and the team. That is, if the role of the team is seen as being legitimate and team members accept the structures of control within the organisation the team will have a highly salient identity as a team or members of a team. However, Jenkins (2000) also argues that if the definition as a team results from an imposition of power or that the form of control that the organisation has or uses is not seen as legitimate the members of the team (or in Jenkins' terms the categorised) will resist.

Yet, this resistance and striving for autonomy of self-identification may in itself lead to an internalisation of the notion of the team and paradoxically, in this case, we may also find a highly salient team social identity. This notion is compatible with the work of Bacon and Blyton (2005), who explore how workers respond to teamworking and look at employee attributions of management motives for teamworking. Bacon and Blyton classify employee views of management by four main types: economic, political, institutional and cultural. What this reveals is not so much directly related to resistance strategies, it relates to the idea that workers are very much attuned with management motives for teamworking. Crucially, the evidence from this research suggests that these workers were able to distinguish both unfavourable and beneficial aspects of new methods of organising work and at the same time scrutinise every motive management had in implementing them. As such they make informed decisions as to whether they accept teamwork both in terms of their day to day work activities and the control mechanisms associated with it.

However, as per the norm, the story is not that straightforward. It is important to understand why a highly salient team identity will embrace group members into resisting a team rather than exiting from a situation that they feel dissatisfied with. Tajfel (1975), believed that one of the fundamental components of the social identity perspective, are an individual's belief structures which also lie on a continuum from a philosophy of social mobility on the one hand to social change on the other. As long as membership of a group enhances one's self-esteem, one will remain a member of that group. But, Tajfel argues (1978), if the group fails to satisfy this requirement, the individual may try to change the structure of the group (social change); seek a new way of comparison which would favour his/her group, and hence, reinforce his/her social identity (social creativity); or leave/abandon the group with the desire to join the 'better' one (social mobility). For those with high social change beliefs, and hence high social identity salience, there is the belief that the only way to improve negative conditions lies in

group action. Within an organisation, this may relate to forms of collective action such as through trade union membership, which actively presses forward for the cause of the ingroup. Hence, strong identity salience is underpinned by a supposition that that is not possible to escape one's group for self-advancement (in part due to the benefits of team membership to individual's self-esteem). In this case we are likely to see collective examples of resistance as a means of improving unfavourable conditions. On the other hand, social mobility beliefs are likely to result in individual action as individual team members sense they are free to move between groups in order to improve or maintain their social standing. In short, we argue that in a situation where a team could be said to have a strong social identity, we are likely to witness social change beliefs as the key to explaining resistance strategies. In the absence of a strong social identity salience, it is doubtful whether resistance will take a collective form.

#### 4 METHODS

Hotelrest was the subject of 12 weeks of intensive data collection. The methodologies used are essentially ethnographic by nature and supplemented by recognition of company documentation. Unobtrusive participant observation was considered to be the most appropriate method of investigating this form of organisational behaviour (Analoui, 1995; Analoui and Kakabadse, 1989). The data collection was undertaken by the lead author who accessed Hotelcorp by gaining paid employment and assuming the dual role of employee and research data collector.

This method of data collection has been undertaken by many other researchers (e.g. Roy, 1952; Bradney, 1957; Analoui and Kakabadse, 1989; Graham, 1995; Calvey, 2000) and helps overcome the unwillingness of management to let academics research the phenomenon as well as the reluctance of employees to divulge information regarding the trend under investigation. Observations are efficient because it reveals behaviour that people usually prefer not to report and the researcher has greater opportunity to identify manifestations without attempts to conceal or distort them. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may reveal causal relationships. Other than documentary information in the form of corporate literature, the vast majority of data was collected in the form of daily journal entries based on observed activities, guided discussions and regular reflective accounts of emerging patterns in team activity. To demonstrate this point and commitment to the research method, the final diary of events at Hotelrest was comprised of over 30,000 words.

The daily journal entries and company data were then analysed for keywords and phrases and themes. Both authors coded data independently. They then conferred before determining final categories and codes. This is a form of content analysis, a technique social psychologists have traditionally used to deal with qualitative data (Holsti, 1968; Babbie, 2001). Although the generation of categories and themes implicit in content analysis may not be ideal for understanding some of the subtleties of the discourse in the interviews, for analysing diary data the method provides an effective portrayal of the broader culture and work structures in the organisation. Descriptions of the work process are based on the report and experience of the researcher, who only worked the day shift. Extracts from the diary are inserted when appropriate.

Unsurprisingly, the method chosen to research the reality of teamworking in the hospitality industry comes with a range of limitations and ethical issues. For instance, commenting on unobtrusive participation observation Analoui and Kakabadse (1989) believe such methods can be a 'long, laborious and often dangerous process, with the danger of "getting sacked", one's cover "being blown" or being made "redundant" ever present' (1989, p. 13). Beyond the practicalities, however, lies a range of procedural obstacles. Indeed, it is believed that the nature of being "hidden" increases the chances of the researcher becoming passive to what is going on around him or herself (Riecken, 1967) and being (hypothetically) less free than an overt observer decreases the chances of access to wider social interaction (Dean, Eichhorn and Dean, 1967). What is more, a further consideration is of knowing when to withdraw from the research site (Viditch, 1969).

Whilst it is necessary to point out that covert data collection is a surprisingly common and efficient research method (Reynolds, 1979), we cannot ignore the lack of informed consent that comes with unobtrusive methods (Bulmer, 1982). Indeed, as the *British Sociological Association* (2004) points out, covert methods should only be considered, 'where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data' (2004, p. 5). We believe the nature of what is being researched – the reality of social interaction in a busy and highly conflictual environment combined with management unlikely to grant full access to an outsider in such situations – does not allow the use of open methods of collecting data. More importantly though, we also believe no other method is likely to allow the researcher to gain acceptance from both co-workers and management (Hodson and Sullivan, 1990).

## **5 HOTELREST AND HOTELCORP**

Hotelrest is the catering facility of a Hotel which is part of the Hotelcorp chain. Hotelcorp describes itself as a 'global hotel' and employs over 10,000 people in the UK alone. Its most recent management initiative is the introduction of '[Service] Standards', or in Hotelcorp's own words: 'maintaining corporate standards through brand identity, brand position supported by behaviour, attitude, product consistency and performance'. Service Standards involve the regulation and routinisation of all dimensions of work which are clearly documented and disseminated to employees through formal documentation, team meetings and training sessions.

At the research site, Hotelcorp employs around 250 employees. The hotel's restaurant takes up to 230 'covers' a day. However, there are significant retention problems for the 60 employees that work in Hotelrest. The aggregate turnover at Hotelrest is over 50 per cent despite Hotelcorp's strategy of compulsory training and development programme focusing on 'Job-related Skills' (anonymised and JRS for short). The JRS programme has a strong emphasis on teamwork. Completing JRS training can, supposedly, be up-dated to a nationally recognised vocational qualification (NVQ level II for waiting staff and level III for supervisory staff). Moreover, completion of training entitles each employee to what Hotelcorp promotes as being a lucrative hotel-related package of benefits. This includes greatly reduced admission to the adjacent health club and highly discounted room rates throughout Hotelcorp's chain of hotels. However, JRS was not viewed as particularly effective at either engendering loyalty or retaining employees. One full time member of the waiting staff, James, explained how it had taken nearly a year to complete the JRS training and nearly two years later he was still awaiting his health club membership. Some members of staff had been with the company over a month and had, to date, received no JRS training. At team meetings employees frequently complained about waiting for their card entitling them to the benefits package. Although one employee, when commenting on the discounted room rates noted, 'you get the smallest and smelliest room that they probably couldn't sell anyway.'

Hotelrest serving staff work in groups of approximately 10 employees. The composition of the shift varies day to day dependant on scheduling. Each shift team is frequently augmented with agency workers. As well as the serving staff there are about 10 individuals working in the kitchen as chefs and kitchen porters. The hotel classifies both serving and kitchen staff as members of the Hotelrest team, however there is a clear separation between the waiting and kitchen staff. Importantly, as the fieldwork was carried out in the restaurant rather than the kitchen this is the main focus of the research.

The Hotelrest serving staff are an even mixture of waiters and waitresses, the rest are supervisors, 'hosts' or team leaders (six), two assistant managers, and one restaurant manager. All supervisory staff and assistant managers have been promoted from within; quite rapidly in some cases. However, the restaurant manager was recruited from outwith the company. There is also a dedicated trainer who works approximately 25-30 hours per week. Pay for waiting is low with those aged 22 and over receiving an hourly rate on a par with the national minimum wage (NMW). Waiters and waitresses aged 21 years or below (the majority of the waiting group) earn less than their older counterparts, but higher than the NMW for this category. Supervisors earn about ten per cent over the NMW.

## **6 HOTELREST AND TEAMWORKING**

Hotelcorp presents the face of an organisation with a generous commitment to teamwork. This commitment is most acute for those who are front-line staff in the restaurant. For instance, potential Hotelrest employees are subjected to a mock team-based selling exercise during the selection procedure. During the day-long induction, new recruits are provided with an induction handbook with significant reference to the principles of teamworking. The most explicit representation to the devotion to teamworking is the compulsory and lengthy monthly team meeting. Furthermore, the upholding of Service Standards included in JRS training are based on teamworking and team communication processes, a typical eight-hour shift involves a minimum of three team briefings - immediately before serving starts, after serving ends and before re-organising restaurant for next setting, and prior to start of second period of service. As a final point, indiscipline is often confronted with team-based chastisements such as widely broadcast humiliations, e.g. team leaders regularly admonish front-line employees for neglecting their team-based loyalties and responsibilities. The lengths that Hotelrest go to in attempting to infuse a teamworking attitude amongst waiters and waitresses are epitomised during the monthly team meeting. The first team meeting during the research period lasted for just over three hours and included a presentation on teamworking as means of increasing sales.

Superficially at least, Hotelcorp looked as if its policy on the promotion of team based work was functioning effectively. When the hotel was closed or during quiet periods, and when the number of

waiting staff exceeded the requirement of the number of guests dining, employees appeared to co-operate with one another and with team leaders. During these periods, this co-operation was interjected by relatively open, yet playful acts of what Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) call misbehaviour or irresponsible autonomy. These acts included waiting staff engaging in a variety of horseplay, flirting rituals and playful humour. Nevertheless, this did not tend to be at the expense of the achievement of allocated work to an acceptable standard.

Yet, the reality of teamwork for most employees was inconsistent with the rhetoric presented by the organisation. Teamwork was only really implemented as a managerial ideology aimed at tightly controlling and determining a wide range of employee behaviour and activity. Despite a clear rationale by management for teamwork - as a mechanism to implement good customer service in the guise of Service Standards - the Taylorised nature of Service Standards made the performance of any teamwork behaviour, especially under stressful conditions, impracticable. Whilst the catering group were defined as a team for the undertaking of work, there was no joint nature to the technical division of work and no collective responsibility or indeed flexibility in terms of work organisation. This is demonstrated clearly in the following sections.

## **7 TEAMS, COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL RESISTANCE STRATEGIES**

As with the current work, other research on teams in the service sector found tight control, high commitment management and low value incentives (e.g. Kinnie, Hutchinson and Purcell, 2000). We also found teamwork to be unworkable due to the size and nature of supervision of the team. Teams were so poorly defined that this form of work organisation ultimately caused great conflict between groups of employees rather than harmony. The size and structure of the teams fashioned a situation which was entirely in opposition to the unitarist ideology espoused by the firm. Even the weak or diluted form of teamwork identified by other researchers failed to materialise (e.g. Batt, 1999; van den Broek, Callaghan, Thompson, 2004). There was no indication of collective learning or problem solving (apart from the odd example of employee resistance) and the only true function of teamwork appeared to be as a structure of control over employees and Service Standards.

Any authority with the objectives of teamwork was really only apparent in times of calm when employees had a high degree of control over their work. Consent broke down under a number of specific circumstances; work intensification, mobilisation of friendship groups and endorsement of individualised strategies of resistance by management.

The diary entries detailed below demonstrate the emergence of chaos and the collapse of teamworking initiatives and other formal working policies and practices, when work conditions suddenly intensify.

The shift itself was a bit of a disaster, i.e. from the views of the customer and the employees. For example, the use of Service Standards broke down with tables used and not re-set, remains of meals were left on tables, long queues developed, and few if any guests got their orders on time. The team suddenly appeared to lack a will to co-operate and waiters and waitresses just looked after their own immediate concerns. This was despite the close presence of two assistant managers who were themselves put under enormous strain at this particular time of the working day. It was also apparent that Hotelcorp-employed waiters made even less effort to help the agency staff brought into deal with staff shortages (Field notes, 18 September).

Today was a living nightmare. We were stretched well beyond our limits with over 370 guests for breakfast in a restaurant that has a capacity of 230, and therefore requires around 140 resets. The support I had at the beginning of the shift soon dissipated as the queue lengthened by the minute and the disquiet amongst the queuing customers increased (Field notes, 14 October).

With no holds barred, consent and compliance with team-based values and Service Standards collapsed the moment the pace of work intensified. An increase in pace triggered a widespread inability to cope with the pressures of carrying work out in a strict and arguably unsustainable style, which occurred on an almost daily basis, but always at the weekend when customer levels were nearly always close to or at hotel capacity. It also transpired when staffing levels dropped due to unauthorised absence and high turnover of labour. When consent broke down the behaviour that ensued varied quite dramatically. Some waiters and waitresses worked on regardless and did whatever they could to satisfy the typically understanding and tolerant customers, whilst an equal number of waiters and waitresses avoided work to some degree as a result of these pressures. Importantly, under times of work pressure,



friendship groups began to mobilise and perform collective forms of resistance. For outgroup members – those not included in friendship cliques – there was an almost automatic default to individualistic forms of resistance strategies.

Field notes suggested that many individual acts of resistance were, in fact, undertaken with the tacit support of the team (these included pilfering of food, unsolicited smoking breaks, stretching the time for room service request, disposal or deliberate damage of company materials such as crockery or cutlery, and unauthorised absenteeism). In contrast, far more overt examples of collective resistance included waiters and waitresses making their fellow team members aware that they suspect a mystery guest had arrived on the premises. Waiters and waitresses increasingly shunned agency staff sent to ‘help’ them, and there was evidence of an organised slow down once customers left the restaurant or the next shift was imminent. Further examples of this order included a broad-based boycott of the new incentive scheme introduced at the beginning of the research, and waiting staff stopping work at their official finishing time even when offered discretionary incentives, the chance to be praised at the next team briefing or even team meeting or threatened with disciplinary action.

Informal teams or friendship groups – sub-sections of a larger team – were largely often difficult for management to identify, although the use of teamworking was certainly applied as a measure to divide these informal loyalties. Mostly as a result of the ignorance of informal activity *and* potent commercial and operational pressures, management could only make superficial attempts to unmake these collectives. In the example below, management made an explicit attempt to counteract the ‘subversive’ potential of friendship groups.

Michelle [assistant manager] was setting up for the event. She had used the £40 or so tips from the last coach trippers to pay for large amounts of sweets, crisps, soft drinks, and some wine, etc. The meeting was in the McDonald suite and was set out with tables around the outside. The refreshments were in a small room to the side. From a quick head count there were about 25 waiters and six supervisors or management staff. As people came in, whether they were on duty or not, they sat with their friends. The supervisory staff sat on a table at the front of the room and looked like a panel. Dismayed that the room had been split up into cliques, Peter [one of the restaurant’s ‘hosts’] re-organised the waiters and waitresses in a random fashion in preparation for team activities (Field notes, 16 September).

On the other hand, many of the explicitly individualised examples of resistance were undertaken by established members of the organisation and were at least tacitly endorsed by management. For example, long tenure waiters or waitresses were allowed to ‘opt out’ of specific team roles or obligations, such as specialising in one favourable aspect of restaurant work when form rules disallowed this. There was also open collusion or authorisation over activities that clearly breached Service Standards.

## **8 CONTRADICTIONS IN PRACTICE**

We would argue that the discussion above, in part, demonstrates cynicism towards the principles of teamwork. Although Hotelrest placed a strong emphasis on the team and the notion of teamwork, the nature of the work (highly individualised) and the nature of the teams (composed of core and peripheral members) contradict the principles of teamwork and this was picked up by team members, not only in terms of behaviour, but in the way that they reacted to the formal team briefing and team training sessions. Examples of this are provided in the two diary extracts below:

After the final presentation and the room began to quiet down Jeanette [trainer] asked the team as a whole what they thought the task was *really* about. No one responded to this. However, Jeanette ignored the silence and went on talk about how it was a ‘way of expressing yourself...exchanging ideas...working together...to give you more confidence...so you can pull together as a team’. She also asked the question ‘do you think you could have done the task on your own?’ In reply, a few tamely said no. Jeanette finished on the words ‘we can’t do it on our own’, which is a phrase that I had already become increasingly familiar with (Field notes, 16 September).

The feedback session was by far the most interesting section and lasted for approximately one hour and forty minutes. I have no doubt it would have gone on much longer as after 100 minutes we had only heard from about a third of the group as other waiters and waitresses kept interjecting and upsetting the round-the-table process. Of particular note was how the session started with most staff remaining silent or failing to say much if they were asked their opinion. However, when Susan [waitress on a working

holiday from Australia] began to speak out the tone of the event quickly changed. Specifically, most waiters and waitresses had clearly felt restrained until that point. Furthermore, her comments not only provoked others into action, the issues then on became increasingly critical of and specific to management (Field notes, 16 September).

It would seem that despite a high profile commitment to incorporating teamworking into the Hotelcorp's business and human resource strategy, the management at Hotelrest clearly has problems convincing the majority of restaurant employees of its merits. This was certainly the case when management arranged the opportunity for team-based feedback, i.e. the situation quickly turned from being a team bonding exercise into a forum for a range of responses that included passive silence and participation to a barrage of criticism.

However, this contradiction was unbearable for many and compelled many employees to leave Hotelcorp, in terms of the practice of what Thompson (2003) labels the externalisation of resistance. In other words, the high turnover of team members appears to be in part a result of the length that team members are prepared to tolerate both work intensification and incongruity in practice and policy. Whilst long term team members were less inclined to undertake informal resistance behaviour and sought solitude in favourable terms and conditions afforded by management, the behaviour was different for lower tenure employees. In the absence of robust forms of collectivism either in terms of the formal team or trade union representation, Hotelrest was typified by 'micro-collectivism' or cliques that were capable of transcending formal group boundaries and formal group hierarchies.

Teare, Ingram, Scheuing and Armistead (1997) noted that teams in the hospitality industry are characterised by inter-group conflict. This was confirmed by the findings of the current study. Not only were there tensions between young and old (the older members of staff thought that the younger employees were lazy), but also between the kitchen and the restaurant staff. On the 7<sup>th</sup> September the diary entry noted how there was a break time discussion about inter-group rivalry. One member of the waiting staff said 'chefs don't like us but we don't like them either'. This is a theme that was common in the field notes. Tensions arose when kitchen staff thought that waiting staff were not clearing up after themselves and therefore creating more work for the kitchen.

This division was re-enforced by kitchen staff not being invited to team meetings. Indeed, team meetings provided an arena for many other tensions in the group to be played out. This is illustrated in a diary entry dated 2<sup>nd</sup> of October:

It is becoming obvious that the ideas of teamwork in the restaurant do not bring cohesion between waiters and supervisors/managers. What's more, it is clear and fair to say that the 'team' is in fact at least two groups (if not more), with teamworking limited to manageable tasks performed under ideal circumstances that are not typical to restaurant work. Where such occupational groups come together as a team appears to be on the basis of resisting higher-level commands and not concerning what the team *should* be doing (Fieldnotes, 2 October).

The disloyalty to the team, however, is not surprising as during the three months of research in the restaurant there was only one explicit attempt at a teambuilding exercise and even this was focused on customer relations and sales. Employees were placed into groups in a team meeting and asked to sell a number of items to other members of the meeting – these items included a high chair, a soup bowl, a toast rack, tomato juice and salt and pepper sachets. No one in the room appeared to take the exercise seriously apart from management.

Yet, despite very modest training activities and supervisors being on hand to reinforce team ideals, employees complained bitterly in the wider work setting that they never received help from other team members and one noted that 'it's not my problem' or 'I've not been told to do that' were phrases that were commonly heard on the shopfloor. Indeed, further conflicts between employees were mentioned in the diary on a daily basis. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, one employee threatened to 'kick the butt' of another team member over the issue of re-using dirty dishes and cutlery. The more experienced of the two then started to quote teamworking propaganda to his colleague. His tirade was based on the ideas presented in the JRS handbook – focusing on the notion of 'letting other team members down' when an employee does not pull their weight. Despite being indoctrinated with teamwork principles and ideals, normative values of being a team player and cultural on cohesion were rarely put into practice. On the 17<sup>th</sup> October, one employee even stated, 'teamworking is really every man for himself'.

In a wider sense, it was not only teamworking that made employees cynical. For instance, most employees appeared unhappy with their work, as shown in this diary entry from 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

I spoke to a woman who started at the same time as I did. She came out of her way to say hello and asked me what I thought of the job so far. I asked her and she said 'I'd rather be stacking shelves in Tesco' (Field notes, 23 September).

Comments such as this were common. However, there were a few employees who appeared a little happier with the work. This was often based on the advantage of the benefits package to them. A couple of female employees liked to travel round the country so made good use of the reduced rate hotel rooms. Another employee (28<sup>th</sup> October) spent a great deal of time explaining how pleased she was with her reward club membership. Although one of her colleagues stated, 'I see you are now a fully paid up member of the brainwashed club'.

## **9 A RE-EVALUATION OF TEAM RESISTANCE USING A SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH**

Taking a very superficial analysis of events, it would appear that our findings concur with the basic premise of SIT, that by merely placing individuals within a collective that they will identify with the group (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel, 1979). The waiting staff, in times of quiet, demonstrated communality in their work and compliance to the guiding principles of teamwork as presented by the organisation. However, when work intensified, in the terms of the labour process debate, this compliance, or in the terms of SIT, this identification with the team, dissipated, and led to a clear division in terms of both collective and resistance behaviour. This follows Jenkins' (2000) argument that suggests that if power and control mechanisms are not seen as legitimate, this may facilitate identity work. That is an individual response to pressure, which involves coping strategies that tend to be instrumentally derived tactics and accommodation to the dominant culture as well as different types of resistance (Thompson and McHugh, 2002). Instead of necessarily being controlled by the organisation, individuals are viewed as managing in the best fashion that they can, in the given circumstances and the 'form of response being determined in subjective terms by available scripts and what appears to work' (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 346).

In this case, it was frequently at the point where work built up to potentially unmanageable levels that we started to observe the interplay in terms of behaviour between resistance and identity strategies. What is more, employees quickly sensed what was required was unreasonable, lacked legitimacy and went on to engage in behaviour to manage this situation. A social identity approach would suggest that the group as a whole would engage in behaviour to either resist or cope with the pressure. However, in the case of Hotelrest, behaviour was not that straightforward. Instead of employees' behaving in terms of the organisationally imposed idea of the team, any collective behaviour focused on illicit inter-occupational coalitions, friendship groups and cliques. Members of the team that were not part of the friendship group either failed to engage in any resistance behaviour and continued with their work or used highly individualised methods of coping. Except to continue working in an individualistic fashion made the team less efficient and likely to make committed team members cynical of teamworking. The friendship groups, in a classical correspondence with theories of group attractiveness and SIT (e.g. Horowitz and Bordens, 1995; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) resisted collectively.

Yet, contrary to the work of David and Tumer (1999), who suggest that core group members define the behaviour of the entire group, these friendship groups or extreme ingroup members did not affect the behaviour of other group members. Hence, not only was there an ingroup-outgroup separation between managers and ingroup members on formal functional duties, there was a separation within the group between the cliques or friendship groups who resisted collectively and the other team members who resisted individually. Perceptions of homogeneity or attraction caused an identity affect but not throughout teams as a whole.

These group members or cliques who had a highly salient group identity when dissatisfied with the existing situation undertook resistance or misbehaviour as a group. Being a member of a subgroup or an alternative team-nurtured group served a valuable purpose in terms of self-esteem and getting work done. As such, having multiple group memberships allows in one sense alternative paths to being capable of coping with work and retaining a sense of dignity, but in another, highlights the crucial trigger for employees who in this instance are constantly faced with being members of an inferior and substandard group – that is, the team. Whereas the other members of the team, took what Tajfel (1978) would classify as a combination of a social creativity and social mobility response, that is appear to abandon the group (possibly the organisation as well) but also adapt the existing situation to a point which favours the individual. It is believed that the adopted research approach allowed such acute nuances to be observed and relayed to non-organisational members.

Although on the face of it this case demonstrates that the imposition of teamworking can lead to team-based forms of resistance, this is a highly simplified picture. As we have demonstrated there are some serious limitations or generalisations from the social identity approach, in the assumption that by labelling people as a group that they will behave collectively. However, one compensatory factor has been to promote and *not* neglect the deep-seated significance of asymmetrical employment relations in forming the basis of formal and informal group activity. Moreover, this study provides further insight into a recent trend of introducing teamworking initiatives to organisations where work at an even superficial level, is in reality highly individualised.

We moved beyond an analysis that focuses on the inappropriateness of the label and the transposition of teamwork to individualised work (e.g. van den Broek, Callaghan and Thompson, 2004). We have focused on the impact that this label the label of 'team' has had on the groups with Hotelrest. We believe that, in part, the organisation created a situation that has presented little benefit in terms of motivation or productivity but may have led to team based resistance for subgroups or cliques. For these subgroups, teamworking nurtures tacit counter collectivism, despite the fact that employees themselves were also fully aware of the contradictions that they were faced within in terms of the forced commitment to teamworking without the real opportunity to practice as a team. This conflict between ideology and practice and the reaction to it by employees was expressed most clearly within the forum of the monthly team meeting.

It could be argued that the scenarios of team based resistance within manufacturing settings which have a clearer infrastructure for collective behaviour would provide more simplified and lucid accounts of the relationship between the identity process and group level resistance (e.g. McKinlay and Taylor, 1996a and 1996b; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). However, the benefits of the teamwork paradox observed in this study, are that they allow for a more complex understanding of why teams fail to function as planned and why identity and resistance behaviour may grow or persist on such introductions. Moreover, further benefits of this particular case study (and methods) are that they allowed observation of behaviour that may not manifest so obviously or quickly elsewhere - that is, if the intolerable conditions at Hotelrest were apparent in a highly unionised context we may expect to see serious formal industrial action, on a regular basis, and the same time less informal resistance or group behaviour.

We suggest that this work needs to be interpreted in the context in which the data was collected. Hence, it is essential to account for, if only briefly, the strengths and weaknesses of the current study. Importantly, the work reported in this study is a single organisational case study, and as such the generalisability to other organisations maybe limited. Furthermore, one researcher using a single method collected the majority of the data. Although the method was highly rigorous and detailed there is still the potential for bias. Nevertheless, there were many interesting dynamics that have emerged from this analysis and support the propositions made earlier in the paper. This work develops existing studies and theorising regarding both SIT and resistance.

Further research is required to incorporate a greater variety of team structures, team sizes, and management approach to teams. Moreover, future research into team-related resistance must cater for unionisation, professional or occupational affiliation, or any other salient identities that are prone to manifestation in the context of the workplace. It should be acknowledged at this point, that most research on workplace identity looks at employees where occupation forms a core element of an individual's identity (e.g. Marks and Lockyer's 2005 study on software developers). It is unlikely that waiting staff embrace their occupation as a strong element of their identity, which is why friendship groups were of such importance and resistance strategies so overt. If the occupation in itself, rather than the social group in the workplace, had had a greater impact on identity we may have seen less resistance behaviour. Similarly, although we can look at tensions between formal requirements and the informal group, any examination of multiple workplace identities (e.g. the organisation and the profession) are problematic due to the weak ties with work based entities. Finally, additional work using a wider array and combinations of research methods is likely to shed further light on such strategies.

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