Opening 'Pandora's Box'?

Workplace Community Relations (WCR) Strategies in Northern Ireland: An Examination of Three Case Study District Councils.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Gary Brown

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Gary Brown

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Abstract

This thesis examines workplace community relations (WCR) policy in three case study District Councils (GDC, TDC and SDC) in Northern Ireland (NI). It analyses under-researched attempts in the workplace to enhance relationships between Catholics and Protestants by evaluating the purpose and effectiveness of WCR strategies. The approach to WCR in existing legislation (Northern Ireland Act 1998; Fair Employment and Treatment NI Order 1998) and the 2005 *Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework* compels organisations, especially public authorities, to implement constructive strategies for improving relationships between employees in the hope that this will augment relationship-building efforts in wider society. These initiatives encourage organisations to move from a purely 'neutral' stance on WCR characteristic of the late 1980s and 1990s to developing and promoting 'good and harmonious work environments'.

Empirical material gathered during eleven research visits over a two-year period indicates that despite a high level of support and significant changes in policy following the Good Friday Agreement 1998, problems remain. One reason why problems remain is that there are gaps in policy design and implementation that reduce the effectiveness of WCR policies. The findings also show that tacit norms informed by Protestant and Catholic historical differences influence some participants' viewpoints on, and practical responses to, these initiatives. Because of the gaps in policy and extant community differences, participants use three informal strategies when managing WCR issues at work: avoidance, resistance, and humour.

My analysis of the empirical material identifies six typologies of respondent: Enthusiasts, Pragmatists, Relativists, Optimistic Historians, Cynical Historicists, and Humorists. The typology shows that perceptions of WCR initiatives, attitudes to colleagues from different community backgrounds and responses to WCR vary markedly. It also demonstrates that while historic ethno-national narratives for Catholics and Protestants continue to inform perspectives on WCR, how employees and managers receive policy strategies and initiatives is dependent upon their experiences of them in the case study councils.

The research adds to a small but growing literature on community relations in the workplace (Dickson and Hargie, 1999, 2002; Dickson et al, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Hargie et al, 2003, 2005, 2008). The conclusions are policy relevant because they reveal areas of weakness in, and barriers to, existing initiatives. The thesis is also innovative in that it draws from arguments in social psychology, social policy and organisation/management theory to investigate the issues and interpret the findings. Although a vast array of academic and policy literature has considered the reasons for, and consequences of, ethno-national conflict in NI, only rarely has it been based on an in-depth investigation of WCR initiatives from the perspective of employees, trade unionists, managers and representatives of social enterprises. Indeed, no other known research study explores these issues in this way with a comparator group of case study District Councils.

For Anna and Niamh

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Page

List of Abbreviations

CRO	Community Relations Officer
CRU	Community Relations Unit
DCCRP	District Council Community Relations Project
ECNI	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
FEA	Fair Employment Agency
FEC	Fair Employment Commission
FETO	Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998
GDC	Gateway District Council
GFA	Good Friday Agreement 1998
GRF	Good Relations Forum
GRO	Good Relations Officer
GRSP	Good Relations Steering Panel
GRWG	Good Relations Working Group
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trades Unions
IRA	Irish Republican Army
LGD	Local Government District
LGSC	Local Government Staffing Commission
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NIA	Northern Ireland Act 1998
NICRC	Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
NISACHR	Northern Ireland Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights
NWE	Neutral Work Environment
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PAFT	Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RPA	Review of Public Administration
SDC	Spectrum District Council
SE	Social Enterprise
SIPTU	Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union
TDC	Trade District Council

TGWU Transport and General Workers Union

TSN   Targeting Social Need

UVF   Ulster Volunteer Force

WCR   Workplace Community Relations

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

The past ten years have seen the introduction of revised legal and government policy frameworks to drive the community relations and equality agenda in Northern Ireland (NI). These frameworks emphasise the key strategic role of public authorities in delivering policy aims. One element of this policy has seen the 'contact hypothesis' (Amir, 1969) or 'contact model' (Hughes and Knox, 1997) previously reserved for reconciliation efforts in other social contexts advocated for use in District Council workplaces. The contact hypothesis stipulates that increased interaction between Catholics and Protestants will enhance mutual understanding and help build positive relationships (Hughes and Knox, 1997). Policy-makers view District Councils' workplaces as particularly constructive contexts where Catholics and Protestants can learn more about one another thus enhancing the likelihood of reconciliation between them. However, a recent review of community relations (Harbison, 2002) highlighted some shortcomings in policy.

The introduction is comprised of seven sections that briefly summarise the main issues addressed and the thesis structure. The first section sets out the thesis objectives indicating how the thesis explores aspects of existing academic literature. An overview of workplace community relations (WCR) policy is provided in section two where I explain why District Councils implemented community relations initiatives and what legal and policy frameworks have been introduced. The reasons why NI is a 'contested society' and the explanations for conflict are highlighted in section three. Section four explains a) the motivation for undertaking the current study and b) the terminology used. The fifth section describes the research methods and case study organisations and, in the sixth section, I outline the key findings and arguments. The final section sketches out the thesis structure.

1.1 Thesis Objectives

Historic differences that affect contemporary society have produced and reinforced ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland (cf. McGarry and O'Leary, 1995; Ruane and Todd, 1996; Coulter, 1999a). Policy-makers have since the 1970s implemented a

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number of legal and policy initiatives to address these issues at workplace level (Osborne and Cormack, 1989; Osborne, 1996, 2003). Dickson and Hargie (1999) undertook the first sustained analysis of how community relations issues affect the workplace drawing from aspects of social identity theory. They explored in this and follow-up studies how employees and managers respond at a local level to policy initiatives (Dickson *et al*, 2002), the effectiveness of community relations policy (ibid, Dickson *et al*, 2008a and 2009), and why relationships between Catholics and Protestants sometimes break down (Dickson *et al*, 2002, 2008a). The thesis examines many similar issues and has two over-arching objectives. First, it investigates the purpose of WCR initiatives and their intended role in addressing ethno-national conflict at work. Second, it evaluates the impact of these initiatives on the case studies.

In addressing the first objective, I identify where the idea emerged that District Council workplaces are key contexts for improving community relations, how it developed, and why it received widespread support among policy-makers. Before examining the specific aspects of policy, I attend to the causes and consequences of ethno-national conflict in NI, and why reconciling identity differences remains a difficult task. Political, religious, constitutional and cultural dissimilarities between Catholics and Protestants have resulted in a history of enmity. Ethno-national division (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995), material disadvantage (Coulter, 1999a) and religious doctrine (Brewer and Higgins, 1999a and b; Mitchell, 2003, 2004, 2006) have produced a 'system of relationships' (Ruane and Todd, 1996) that subjectively shape individual, group and societal developments and contributing to segregation in housing, education and employment (Hughes et al, 2007). I show how conflict manifests in the workplace, affecting employees in their day-to-day lives. Intimidation and harassment (Jarman, 2004, 2005; Shirlow and McGovern, 1996), workforce segregation (Sheehan and Tomlinson, 1998; Osborne, 2003; Shirlow, 2006; Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006; Donnan, 2007), and accusations of political and religious discrimination (Fay *et al*, 1999; Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004; Shuttleworth and Lavery, 2004) continue to occur.

The thesis also identifies the main agencies involved in the WCR agenda and describes the role they play in overseeing District Councils' policy obligations. I

summarise council's statutory duties arising from legal and policy initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (NIA), Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO) and 2005 Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework (Shared Future framework hereafter). Government policy on community relations has concentrated in three areas (Gallagher, 1995): increased contact for Protestants and Catholics, improving cultural awareness and tolerance, and equal opportunities. The 'consociational' (O'Leary, 1999) political structures put in place after the GFA shifted the emphasis from policy compliance to a more proactive 'good relations' ethos (Graham and Nash, 2006) and public authorities were cited as key organisations (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003).

To deal with the second primary objective, the thesis examines why, how and to what extent the case study organisations adopted WCR initiatives and whether they have achieved their intended aims. This gives rise to three interrelated research questions. (i) Why did the case study councils implement WCR initiatives? (ii) How did they address their policy obligations? (iii) Have the councils achieved their intended objectives? Whether the latest agenda and associated initiatives have succeeded in enhancing relationships across the community divides is still open to debate (Dickson et al, 2002, 2008a, 2009; Hughes et al, 2007). Available evidence suggests that increased contact between Catholic and Protestants at work may 'act as a vehicle for helping to move forward the process of peace and reconciliation (Dickson et al, 2009: p49). There are, however, gaps and barriers to WCR policy implementation (Dickson and Hargie, 1999) that contribute to a lack of depth of understanding and confusion in organisations (Dickson et al, 2002).

Dickson et al, (2008a, 2009) also show that employees invariably engage in informal processes for managing cross-community relationship at work suggesting that policy is at local level less influential than may be anticipated. Graham and Nash (2006) point to 'definitional illusiveness' in policy arguing that this makes it difficult to enhance reconciliation. This thesis identifies some of the successes and limitations of WCR initiatives. Although policy frameworks and legal measures define minimum expectations and identify aspects of good practice for councils, there is considerable variation in the strategies adopted by the case studies, in how participants receive and support WCR initiatives, and in the level of success experienced. A further four

research questions were defined to examine these issues. (i) What effects do good cross-community relationships have on reconciliation beyond the workplace? (ii) To what extent is WCR policy responsible for positive relationships? (iii) What are the gaps in and barriers to WCR policy? (iv) How do employees informally manage WCR issues when they arise?

The empirical research provided insights into how ethno-national identity continues to affect relationships at work and how policy initiatives were sometimes resisted because, like other *organisational* change processes, they were interpreted as a potential threat to 'identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126). Much existing community relations literature, however, analyses identity as a 'monolithic, single identity' (Hargie *et al*, 2008) ignoring or downplaying the social context in which identity processes are subjectively played out (Bloomer and Weinreich, 2004; Muldoon et al, 2007). Two final research questions were formulated to explore these issues. (i) What role does ethno-national identity play in how participants subjectively perceive and respond to WCR? (ii) What does the empirical research tell us about the prevalence of identity, the workplace context and responses to WCR?

1.2 WCR Policy

Community relations legal and policy frameworks have undergone significant changes in the last three decades, and the workplace is now identified as a key context for reconciling differences between the Protestants and Catholics (Dickson *et al*, 2002). Because of the detrimental effects of ethno-national discrimination and violence in the workplace, there were increasing calls from civil rights groups and the major trade unions, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for improved rights and protections for employees (Osborne, 1996). By the mid-1970s, the Direct Rule government had introduced the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976 to reduce direct discrimination on religious and political grounds. Over time, it was accepted that further improvements were needed and a revised Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 was introduced (Osborne, 1989). This legislation required councils to collate and monitor data on the religious make-up of the workforce and to take affirmative action, as Equal Opportunity employers, to enhance fair employment policies and practices. Following the Good Friday Agreement 1998 (GFA), FETO replaced the Fair

Employment Act 1989 and established an Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) (Osborne, 2003). The NIA was the other principle statutory mechanism emerging from the GFA and it incorporated in Section 75 an obligation on statutory bodies such as District Councils not only to maintain equality of opportunity, but also to promote 'good relations' among people identified in nine 'Equality Categories', including those with contrasting religious and political views (Graham and Nash, 2006).

Following consultation with trade unions, most councils began putting in place, from the late 1980s, Neutral Working Environment (NWE) policies designed to create a 'sanctuary of neutrality' at work (Dickson *et al*, 2002). The purpose of this policy, as the term indicates, is to prohibit the display of politically sensitive symbols such as national and paramilitary flags and contentious sporting regalia in the workplace, and to restrict politically sensitive talk. Community relations initiatives up until this point concentrated on promoting ethno-national reconciliation in schools, voluntary schemes, community groups and youth projects, all of which were designed to promote peace and mutual understanding between Catholics and Protestants by providing opportunities for increased social contact (Gallagher, 1993; Dickson *et al*, 2008a and b).

This agenda shifted such that policy-makers began to view the workplace as an important context for enhancing community relations where employees should be encouraged to discuss community differences and learn more about one another (cf. Darby and Knox, 2004). The 'contact model' (Hughes and Knox, 1997) or 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Hargie *et al*, 2008), previously reserved for community relations initiatives in other contexts, was initially introduced in a small number of public and private sector workplaces during the early 1990s. These interventions were limited in scale at this point with social enterprises such as Future Ways (see below) and Counteract[1] working closely with participating organisations to reduce violence and improve relationships between employees. Policy-makers also began to recognise that because of high levels of segregation in housing (Fay et al, 1999), education (Coulter, 1999a; Mitchell, 2006) and leisure (Sugden and Bairner,

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[1] The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) established this organisation in the early 1990s to work with employers to reduce instances of ethno-national conflict in the workplace.

1993), the workplace is for many people one of the few places where sustained cross-community contact takes place (Hargie *et al*, 2003). The view that workplaces are useful contexts for relationship-building was given further impetus by research showing a growing number of people are employed in 'integrated' workplaces (Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2005). As the 2007 and 2008 *Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys* demonstrate, most employees welcome the opportunity to work alongside those from different community backgrounds. Furthermore, Dickson *et al*'s (2002, 2008a and b) findings show that employees are receptive to proactive organisational interventions that encourage cross-community interaction and that these interventions can have some positive effects on relationship building.

Despite the changes to community relations policy in the 1990s, the Harbison Review (2002) illuminated a number of weaknesses. The review concluded that the community relations agenda has not been as effective as initially anticipated and that the bodies responsible for meeting the obligations outlined in the NIA, including the District Councils, had yet to implement them fully. In 2005, the government introduced another policy aimed at addressing these concerns. The Shared Future framework[2] attends to many of the points raised by the Harbison Review and identifies ten 'headline commitments' emphasising, *inter alia*, the need to establish and maintain 'shared' work environments where the potential for conflict is minimised and where steps are taken to ensure all communities feel welcome.

1.3 A 'Contested Society'

Conflict began immediately following the partition of Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act 1921. Indeed, more than 200 deaths and nearly 1,000 injuries occurred in the first year after the Act was passed (Darby, 1983). The majority Protestant population dominated the newly formed state and held most significant economic and governmental positions (Foster, 1989; Cormack and Osborne, 1991; Michie and Sheehan, 1998). In the decades following partition, there were complaints that the Protestant majority was unsympathetic to the economic, political, religious, and cultural needs of the Catholic minority. While accusations of discrimination

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[2] This framework is currently under review.

continued, widespread conflict was uncommon in the region until the IRA's 1956-1962 border campaign (Tonge, 2006) and then in the late 1960s when sustained violence followed increasingly vocal calls for an end to discrimination (Whyte, 1991; McGarry and O'Leary, 1995; Coulter, 1999a).

Although there are historic differences between Catholics and Protestants, the late 1960s was a tipping point for relations between the predominant communities and marked the beginning of the contemporary 'troubles'. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), made up of socialists, trade unionists and republicans emerged in 1967 whose aims were to end discrimination in housing, employment, and the electoral system. Anti-discrimination demonstrations were organised by NICRA and the level of dissent grew until October 1968 when widespread violence occurred during an unauthorised civil rights demonstration leading to negative international news headlines and criticism of the NI government. Because of mounting political pressure, some of the protestors' demands were satisfied, but counter-protests further increased the tensions. During this period of protest and counter-protest, paramilitary groups gained influence and the British state security forces became increasingly involved in NI's affairs. By 1972, and in response to the apparent inability of the NI administration to manage the conflict, Britain governed the province once again. The levels of violence increased during this period and, from the 1970s, England became a context for paramilitary violence. The violence continued for the next two decades.

Most people in Ireland hoped the levels of discord would steadily reduce following the 1990s peace process and the GFA. While violence has diminished, there are ongoing reports of ethno-national harassment, intimidation, physical attacks and discrimination at work (Jarman, 2004, 2005). Furthermore, a steady stream of academic literature from a variety of disciplines documents how ethno-national differences affect a diverse range of workplaces. Studies have considered the impact of conflict on social work (Smyth and Campbell, 1996; Houston and Campbell, 2001; Pinkerton and Campbell, 2002; Campbell and McCrystal, 2005; Ramon *et al*, 2006), shipbuilding (O Murchu, 2005), leisure centre management (Bairner and Shirlow, 2003), hospitality (McMahon, 2000) and adult education (Nolan, 2007).

Countless arguments have been offered to explain why since the late 1960s NI experienced its 'longest sustained period of civil disorder' (Darby, 1983: p9). Politicians, historians, sociologists, journalists, media analysts and critics have all provided their own perspectives and the ensuing literature has presented historical, political and ideological analyses, which to varying degrees help explain the reasons for conflict, the extent to which it affects people in their everyday lives, and why peace and reconciliation initiatives have thus far had limited success. McGarry and O'Leary (1995), for example, argue that conflict is largely a result of ethno-national division; Coulter (1999a), on the other hand, suggests that material disadvantage among the working classes is a key explanatory factor; and, Brewer and Higgins (1999a and 1999b) emphasise the divisions arising from differences in Catholic and Protestant religious doctrine. Ruane and Todd (1996) show how conflict between communities in NI is shaped by a complex 'system of relationships' between a number of 'dimensions of difference' that include religious, ethnic and national facets.

1.4 Motivation and terminology

The initial curiosity that spurred me to undertake this thesis emerged initially because I lived for a long time in NI and remain interested in social and political developments in the region. Like so many young people in NI at the time, the troubles affected me on a personal level, not least because a family member lost his life as a result. It appeared to me, as someone living in this 'contested society', where so much ethno-national conflict has occurred and so many families have had to deal with its consequences, that reconciliation initiatives are profoundly important. Indeed, in my experience, the overwhelming majority of people from Catholic and Protestant communities want to live and work in a more harmonious society where historic differences do not involve violent conflict. Because of this, I wanted to explore WCR initiatives, the rationales that inform them and the degree to which they are effective and, where they do not work, to examine how organisations attempt to overcome the barriers to success. The desire to investigate these issues emerged also because there has been relatively little research into how ethno-national conflict affects employees and organisations despite the fact that,

8

'the Northern Ireland workplace has suffered the consequences of politico-religious difference, leading to major operational disruption and considerable financial loss when such differences become acute.' (Dickson *et al*, 2002: p14).

As the argument that workplaces are important contexts for improving community cohesion gathered momentum, a number of small social enterprises and consultancies emerged offering help in this area. My interest in the work of one particular organisation, Future Ways, informs many of the issues raised in the thesis. Future Ways' work can be traced back to a religious movement, the Corrymeela Community[3], set up in the 1960s by a group of Presbyterians who believed firmly in the 'contact model' (Hughes and Knox, 1997) of reconciliation whereby cross-community interaction is promoted as a means of strengthening relationships between Catholics and Protestants. Future Ways' strategy is informed by a view that also emerged in recent policy developments; that is, although many workplaces are segregated, they are one of the few environments where employees make regular contact with those from other communities and, therefore, are very valuable social spaces for community relations activity.

From the mid-1990s, following some initial interventions with participating organisations, Future Ways began developing a strategy influenced by Senge's Learning Organisation (LO) model. Pedler *et al*.'s (1991) and Jones and Hendry's (1994) argument that societal change is the ultimate purpose of a 'true' learning organisation appealed to the Future Ways team as it emphasises the need for fundamental culture change based on mutual understanding, trust and culture change (Eyben *et al*, 1997:p12). The LO approach was also alluring for its focus on personal and collective learning, which Future Ways believed would help avoid any employee cynicism or suspicion toward others, which would undermine attempts to bring about change. By the mid 1990s, Future Ways articulated their thinking in an Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI) framework (see Appendix 1), heavily influenced by the LO concept adopted by a number of public bodies including some District Councils. One of the major barriers to their work, and indeed to workplace

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[3]The Corrymeela Community is a group of people from different Christian traditions that remains active in promoting peace and reconciliation particularly among younger generations. They organise cross-community projects while some of its members helped form the Alliance Party Northern Ireland, a political party seeking to attract both Unionists and Nationalists.

interventions to reduce ethno-national conflict, has been the depth and resilience of community differences. Their work also demonstrated that some organisations are better prepared than others for implementing a good relations agenda. As my fieldwork shows, councils were doing more than most to build relationships among Catholic and Protestant employees. In light of this, the focus of attention shifted to examining their WCR initiatives as a way forward for the research.

Despite the depth and breadth of research on conflict in NI, considerations of workplace issues have been relatively uncommon while many of the studies concerned with this area have provided structural, macro-political and macro-economic analyses. O Murchu (2005), for example, examined the relationship between ethno-nationalism and economic prosperity arguing that the shipbuilding industry was for a long time strategically protected to avoid collective resistance by loyalist communities whose employment conditions and job security would be detrimentally affected by any downturn in the economy. Michie and Sheehan (1998) draw attention to the consequences of economic change for each community and suggest that without carefully planned economic restructuring, conflict will continue. Others have considered the reasons for apparent structural inequality in the employment opportunities of Catholics and Protestants (Shuttleworth and Lavery, 2004). Sheehan and Tomlinson (1998) and Shirlow (2006) illustrated how fear and intimidation resulting from ethno-national differences affects employees' experiences of, and attitudes toward, their working environments.

A notable exception to the concern with macro analyses and a reliance on surveys is David Dickson and Owen Hargie who carried out in depth empirical research into WCR in a variety of organisational settings over the last decade (Dickson and Hargie, 1999, 2006; Dickson *et al*, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Hargie and Dickson, 2005; Hargie *et al*, 2003, 2008). They have shown how, although WCR initiatives have achieved a degree of success, community differences continue to impact on relationships at work. Consequently, a final motivation for undertaking the research was to explore why this is the case by considering how employees interpret and respond to WCR policies and whether, in their view, District Councils' WCR strategies are having any discernible positive effects.

A broad lexicon of terminology has built up around community relations policy and practice in NI. Earlier in this introduction, I referred to some: NIA, GFA, ECNI, FETO, and WCR for example. A full listing of the abbreviations is included at the front end of the thesis. It is worth mentioning at this point that there is an ongoing debate concerning the appropriate terms to use when writing or talking about the people from NI (cf. Coulter, 1999a). For my purposes, I have chosen to retain one term each for the predominant communities. I refer throughout the thesis to Protestants and Catholics because research participants tended to use these terms. When I refer to the region/country/state in which my participants reside, I use the term Northern Ireland (NI) because the case study organisations are, legally, District Councils of Northern Ireland. The term 'workplace community relations (WCR)' is used when referring to relationships between Protestants and Catholics at work. 'WCR policy' includes any formal policy directly or indirectly affecting community relations between Protestant and Catholic employees. It incorporates aspects of the equality legislation, and government and organisation-level policies such as District Council Community Relations Programme (DCCRP), NWE and the Shared Future framework.

1.5 Methods and Case Study District Councils

For the fieldwork, I obtained a wide range of empirical material from a series of research visits to NI. Observations, a research diary and more than sixty interviews with a cross-section of participants comprise the empirical research. All interviews were recorded and transcribed before an initial analysis was undertaken to identify common themes. Research participants included employees from manual and administrative grades, Community and Good Relations Officers (CROs and GROs), line and middle managers, trade union officials and on-site trade union representatives (Shop Stewards), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Directors of social enterprises involved in implementation and delivery of WCR initiatives.

I chose three case study District Councils using a purposive sampling method (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) and a loose typology (Stake, 1994). The first case study, SDC is a large city council employing more people and electing more councillors than the other two case studies. SDC has a roughly equal number of Catholic and Protestant

employees and, because voting preferences tend to reflect the populations' community backgrounds, nationalist and unionist parties share a similar proportion of the vote with no single party controlling the council chamber. TDC, the second case study, has a predominantly Protestant population and is a medium-sized council where the council chamber has always been unionist controlled. The third case study, GDC, is a predominantly nationalist council that has always been under nationalist control while a majority of its employees are Catholic. These case study councils are representative of the current twenty-six councils and allowed me to draw comparisons between cases where the ethno-national makeup varies.

1.6 Outline of Findings and Key Arguments

The findings from each case study reveal a high level of support for WCR initiatives. Most research participants regard it beneficial that councils adopt these policies and they value appropriate policy guidance and WCR training. However, significant barriers to implementation and weaknesses in policy design have meant the WCR agenda has had limited success. It is evident from the research that the case study councils do not always provide managers and councillors with adequate levels of training and support to ensure WCR policies are effective. Furthermore, employees find it difficult to adopt a more open and conciliatory attitude to community relations issues.

My findings show how ethno-national identities shape perceptions of, and attitudes toward, WCR initiatives. Interviewees cited differences between Protestant and Catholic employees, managers and councillors as significant obstacles to the aims of WCR policy initiatives such as councils' NWE and good relations. Some research participants also suggested that ethno-national identities and values impact upon relationships with employees and managers from other communities, management practices, and views of, and attitudes toward, trade unionism. I identified, from the empirical research, three tacit norms relating to Catholic and Protestant ethno-national identities. There was a perception that Protestants are: (i) individualistic, (ii) protectionist and (iii) acquiescent toward management within the workplace. Catholics on the other hand show a greater propensity for (i) collectivism and (ii) resistance and (iii) are more confident and more willing to share views on community

relations issues. For many of my research subjects, these norms explain why WCR initiatives succeed and why they often fail.

What my research shows, which is central to the research questions and issues I explore in the thesis, is how a gap in policy and practice leaves employees to deal with their differences in informal ways. Interviewees identified three typical informal responses when faced with WCR problems; namely, avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour. These strategies help them cope with community relations issues outside official policy mechanisms. Employees avoided WCR issues when they found it difficult to come to terms with the good relations mutual understanding ethos. They refrained from disclosing details of their community backgrounds and felt it inappropriate to discuss local political issues at work because of the potentially damaging effects this may have on otherwise positive relationships with colleagues. Resistance to cross-community relationship building was another common response by managers and employees when, for example, they disagreed with policy aims or when they felt councils were unsupportive of WCR initiatives. The final common strategy for managing difference in the workplace is pragmatic humour. A wide body of academic literature shows how humour helps maintain cohesion between employees in organisations (Bradney, 1957; Roy, 1958; Noon and Blyton, 1997; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1988, 1992, 2002). Humour can be a means of addressing difficult issues (cf. Gabriel *et al*, 2000; Grugulis, 2002) including those arising from WCR issues in ways that serious discussions and formal policy mechanisms are unable to do.

My analysis of the empirical research presents a typology of responses to WCR in the case study councils. The typology draws from interviewees' perspectives on: the reasons for community relations differences at work; councils' WCR initiatives; the prospect of reconciliation; and their preferred informal strategies for managing WCR issues. From this, I define Enthusiasts, Pragmatists, Relativists, Optimistic Historicists, Cynical Historicists and Humorists. The typology emphasises how interviewees' responses to WCR policy and practice varied considerably. The empirical material and the typology derived from it demonstrate that ethno-national identities are influential but subjectively experienced by employees and managers in the District Councils. They show also that the social/political *workplace* context is

significant in three ways. First, occupational identity informed how, for example, some managers responded to WCR reflecting a felt need to maintain a 'professional' persona. Second, research participants' experiences of WCR issues influenced attitudes. Positive experiences during good relations events increased confidence in reconciliation initiatives, but negative experiences created long-term cynicism. Third, how councils addressed their WCR policy commitments contributed to whether interviewees were generally optimistic or pessimistic regarding the prospects of reconciliation.

The analysis of the findings draws from organisation studies literature on change and identity in arguing that responses to WCR policy are based on concerns regarding whether change will negatively impact on employees' and managers' 'sense of identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126). The informal responses to WCR are examined as 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton, 1997) necessary to manage a formal/informal culture gap (Oilila, 1995; cited in Fulop and Linstead, 1999) in political arenas where organisational members must be resourceful and creative to cope with the demands of organisational life (Noon and Blyton, 1997).

1.7 Thesis Outline

There are a further ten chapters in the thesis. Chapter Two addresses three key research questions: What are the major factors shaping community relations in the workplace? How and why does identity conflict shape and impact on the workplace in NI? How have identity differences affected employee relationships and management/employee relations? To answer these questions, I provide an account of the key political, cultural and socio-economic facets of the conflict to convey insights into why NI is a 'contested society' and why community relations initiatives were introduced to reduce tensions and reconcile differences. The chapter incorporates some background context on ethno-national differences because research participants referred frequently to these differences when explaining their views of WCR and, as later chapters show, when explaining experiences and attitudes to community relations.

I also examine the nature and extent of workplace conflict. Specifically, this chapter provides insights into why WCR policies were introduced and the underlying issues they address. Physical and emotional violence, contentious flags and emblems (etc) are chill factors (Teague, 1997; Shirlow, 2006, Hughes *et al*, 2007) that shape people's views on work environments and add to the concerns that generate segregation in some workplaces. While there is some evidence that ethno-national tensions have reduced since the signing of the GFA, ethno-national differences continue to affect the workplace. Many of these incidents go unrecorded and, therefore, are not immediately evident (Jarman, 2005). Differences between Protestants and Catholics manifest in ways other than physical intimidation or violence. For example, sporting affiliations and attitudes to flags and emblems, St Patrick's Day, Remembrance Sunday, 12th July celebrations and the 'marching season' generally are all potential sources of conflict and 'manifestations of separateness' (Hughes *et al*. 2007: p48) that reinforce division between Protestants and Catholics.

The policies informing how District Councils manage community relations are set out in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I summarise the major policy initiatives and government legislation driving WCR. The chapter deals with two of my key research questions. (i) What are the main policy drivers of community relations initiatives in NI? (ii) Why do policy-makers consider public sector workplaces important for enhancing community relations? The early legislation emphasised a need to reduce direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace. Following political progress, changes in European equality laws, and criticism of the reactive nature of this legislation, further legal frameworks were introduced in the late 1990s to encourage more proactive WCR strategies. I describe the responsibilities arising for councils from this legislation, which charged them with providing appropriate conditions to enable their employees to build stronger relationships in the workplace. A government department, the Community Relations Unit, and two non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) – Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC) – are key agencies in delivering the WCR policy agenda. The latter part of Chapter Three describes the role these organisations play in District Councils' WCR initiatives.

The literature on community relations policy and implementation is described in Chapter Four. It summarises evidence from attitudinal survey data on how community relations and mixed work environments are perceived. There are macro-level and socio-psychological examinations of community relations policies. Some macro-level studies critically analyse the legal and policy frameworks arguing, for example, that although public authorities are complying with their legal obligations, they have not fundamentally changed their approach (Osborne, 2003). Others debate the philosophical underpinnings of policy (Graham and Nash, 2006; McVeigh and Rolston, 2007). These analyses argue, *inter alia*, that community relations policy concentrates on the individual's role in maintaining division rather than on the structural reasons for conflict and, therefore, policy is inadequate for reconciling differences. A much larger body of literature has investigated intergroup behaviour between Catholics and Protestants. It adopts a SIT perspective on conflict emphasising the importance of identity in maintaining division. A relatively small but growing literature has applied an SIT analytical framework to an examination of community relations issues in the workplace (Dickson and Hargie, 1999, 2006; Dickson *et al*, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Hargie and Dickson, 2005; Hargie *et al*, 2003, 2008). The emphasis in these studies is on how intergroup relations and communications contribute or detract from community relations policy success.

Chapter Four also introduces organisation studies literature on change and identity in the workplace. This is used later in the thesis to analyse WCR policy as an organisational change strategy because it helps explain some of the responses to policy implementation. Due to gaps and weakness in design and implementation, and because, like any change initiative, employees and managers interpret change as a potential threat to existing positions and relationships, they responded by avoiding, resisting and engaging in pragmatic humour in relation to WCR.

I explain in Chapter Five the research strategy employed for collecting detailed empirical material. Qualitative methods were chosen given the objectives of the study and my key research questions. The methods helped obtain firsthand accounts of participants' experiences living and working in NI and, specifically, their perceptions of, and responses to, WCR strategy implementation. I conducted over sixty one-to-one and focus group interviews all of which were recorded and transcribed. The

empirical material also included written observations from the fieldwork and a research diary. A qualitative methodology, and particularly loosely structured interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000), were utilised to address the thesis objectives because it was necessary to obtain a good level of explanatory detail from participants concerning their views. A purposive sampling process (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) based on a loose typology (Stake, 1994) was used to identify appropriate case study councils. The chapter describes the process of access negotiation indicating how a key contact's endorsement made the research possible. It also discusses why the thesis is a form of critical social research (Harvey, 1990) that presents largely realist (Van Maanen, 1988), firsthand accounts of WCR. It reflects on insider/outsider dynamics, emotion work (Bolton, 2005) and 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959) during the empirical work to show how they shaped the interview process and the issues participants were (and were not) prepared to discuss.

In Chapter Six, I set out the key characteristics of local governance structures in NI. I then describe the structure, culture and community relations philosophy and practices of each of the three councils. There are two key research questions considered here: how and why have the three councils implemented their reconciliation strategies in the workplace? To what extent have their strategies been successful? The government-level community relations policy frameworks and associated legislation described in Chapter Three provides District Councils with guidance on community relations obligations, yet there are significant differences in how they meet these obligations. I highlight who in each council is responsible for this work, the level of accountability, and the strategies adopted to show, briefly at this point, how they are addressing policy requirements. The empirical research revealed a number of barriers to WCR policy implementation. For example, some senior managers have shown a lack of commitment toward WCR, contributing to problems with 'mainstreaming' policies throughout councils. Furthermore, employees have become accustomed to neutrality and, therefore, often struggled to adapt to the sharing and mutuality ethos of good relations policy initiatives.

Chapter Seven is the first of two findings chapters that consider how and to what extent employees welcomed, resented, embraced and resisted the WCR initiatives. There are three primary aims to the chapter. The first aim is to evaluate the extent to

which participants believe councils are effectively implementing WCR initiatives and whether or not they 'promote a good and harmonious work environment' (ECNI, Fair *Employment Code of Practice*). The second aim examines whether WCR initiatives increase sharing and dialogue, and mutual understanding and respect (Graham and Nash, 2006). The final aim is to determine if the case studies effectively support and 'mainstream' responsibility for WCR.

The chapter also focuses on longstanding NWE policies and councils' attempts to establish a good relations philosophy. It outlines in section one the training provision available in each case study and whether this is adequate. The barriers and weaknesses to WCR are set out in section two and include, as the Director of Social Enterprise A put it, 'a culture of avoidance'. The empirical research suggests that for some employees, managers and councillors, avoidance is common because, for example, some are unconvinced by good relations initiatives. Section three focuses on NWE policies and shows that although participants believe the principle of neutrality at work is important, they also identify some weaknesses in policy and practice. The final section evaluates councils' good relations initiatives.

Chapter Eight examines in greater depth the *reasons* interviewees gave to explain the barriers to WCR considered in Chapter Seven. A significant proportion of the interviewees contended that ethno-national identities impact upon attitudes to WCR initiatives. The chapter begins, therefore, by indicating in more detail than earlier chapters why community differences are influential in how employees respond to WCR initiatives. Some interviewees described Protestants as individualistic and protectionist who feared their culture and identity was under threat from an increasingly confident Catholic community. Protestants were, according to interviewees who raised these issues, concerned about whether policy would undermine aspects of their community identity. They argued that this leads to a less welcoming attitude toward good relations initiatives because Protestant employees and managers are concerned they could detrimentally affect aspects of their culture and lead to further concessions to Catholics. On the other hand, collectivism, resistance/rebellion and a confident outlook were associated with the Catholic community. From this perspective, Catholics' fight for equality and a history of rebelliousness continue to affect their present day experiences. Because of these tacit

norms and their subjective influence on Catholics, interviewees suggested that Catholics are more committed to WCR strategies, are predisposed to vocalise their views, and will more readily support reconciliation initiatives.

The second half of Chapter Eight summarises how employees respond to and manage community relations issues in the work environment in light of the weaknesses identified in Chapter Seven and the influence of ethno-national identity examined in the first half of the chapter. I demonstrate how employees adapt and respond to WCR policies and practices in informal ways that a) maintain existing relationships with employees, b) take into account aspects of policy and c) attend to ethno-national identities. The empirical research revealed three prominent practical responses to WCR. First, avoidance is a common strategy utilised by employees and managers to sidestep community relations issues. Participants sometimes accused managers of lacking support for WCR because there are few career gains in taking on responsibility for this work. Some of the managers interviewed admitted to evading WCR issues out of concern that drawing out underlying issues might result in further complications. Employees also frequently preferred to avoid WCR issues when they simply wanted to focus on the job at hand or for fear that their political views might undermine relationships with colleagues. Resistance to WCR was another common response when, for example, employees disagreed with the good relations premise and argued that they do not need to re-evaluate their views nor do they need to learn about other communities. Employees at SDC abandoned a GRF while there were also stories of employees and managers walking out of training events when they debated community relations issues. Pragmatic humour is the final common response considered in the chapter. Employees used political satire to lampoon local politicians, managers and other employees in ways that enlivened the working day. Humour also enabled them to confront identity concerns and to build and maintain social cohesion with colleagues from different community backgrounds in ways formal policy could not. Such informal strategies are significant to the thesis because they offer insights into how employees manage identity differences outside official policy.

A further reading of the empirical material reveals a typology of six characteristic responses to community relations initiatives: Enthusiasts; Pragmatists; Relativists; Optimistic Historians; Cynical Historicists; and, Humorists. The first analysis chapter,

Chapter Nine, introduces and describes the types incorporating interview quotes that illustrate characteristic aspects of each one. The typology brings together the major themes from the findings chapters to explain how participants avoid, resist and pragmatically engage in humour about WCR in light of their identity concerns and the barriers and weaknesses in WCR policy implementation. Although the tacit norms outlined in the previous chapter suggest that historical differences between Protestants and Catholics impact upon how they perceive WCR issues and policies, the typology indicates that interviewees' perceptions and responses are more complex than this implies.

Chapter Ten further analyses the main arguments from the findings, shows how the thesis answers the key research findings and explains my contribution to existing literature. The arguments in the thesis reflect many of those in Dickson and Hargie's research. Consequently, this chapter highlights where my research concurs with Dickson and Hargie before explaining how the analysis differs. The thesis examines in greater depth some of the ways historical ethno-national discourses inform employees' views on WCR. It also presents a typology of responses to capture and demonstrate the complexity of response to WCR. The second half of the analysis draws from organisation studies literature to analyse the social/political context in which the District Councils introduce policy initiatives and explain the reasons for resistance and pragmatic humour.

Chapter Eleven presents the conclusions to be drawn from my research. I restate what the findings tell us about the value of WCR policy and why there are gaps and weaknesses in District Councils' implementation. I reiterate why community relations initiatives remain necessary and why Protestant and Catholic historical discourses continue to affect the workplace. The chapter summarises in turn how the thesis answered each of the key research questions. Four limitations to the study are outlined: (i) the focus on District Councils, (ii) the concern with ethno-national identity, (iii) the representativeness and size of the sample, and (iv) the community relations climate at the time of the study. The conclusion finishes by suggesting some policy implications and emphasising areas for further research on the nature of ethno-national identity and WCR policy.

2. Historical Context and Conflict in the Workplace

'Almost every group with an axe to grind has thought it imperative to control the past in order to provide support for contemporary arguments and ideologies' (Hoppen, 1989; cited in Hutton and Stewart, 1991: p1).

'What remains, however, like many other political-cultural distinctions, is a level of Protestant-Unionist/Catholic-Nationalist psychological enmity in Northern Ireland that remains submerged in a past, but which is continually rejuvenated and reinvigorated to interpret and guide reactions to contemporary events' (McAuley and Tonge, 2007: p39).

2.1 Introduction

Countless violent incidents and more than 3,700 deaths related to the conflict have occurred since the contemporary 'troubles' began in the late 1960s. Conflict has taken place in the workplace where violent attacks, harassment, intimidation, and territory marking have contributed to high levels of workforce segregation (Shirlow, 2006). This chapter briefly considers some of the explanations as to why the conflict came about and why it has continued for so long. The chapter addresses four specific questions:

i.   How and why have community differences emerged in Ireland?

ii.   What explanations are there for why community differences persist in the present?

iii.   Why have community differences been so difficult to reconcile?

iv.   How and why do these differences affect the workplace?

I do not intend to explain the various perspectives used to account for conflict in NI. Rather, I map out the background to community division to contextualise the themes considered later in the thesis. The reasons for disagreement between Protestants and Catholics emanate from a number of historic differences. These have been variously described as 'totalising discourses' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998) or 'dimensions of difference' (Ruane and Todd, 1996) that have created divisions and resulted in ethno-national conflict in NI's communities and workplaces. The most prominent

21

contemporary forms of these ideologies are Protestantism and Catholicism, nationalism and unionism, loyalism and republicanism. There are also socio-economic explanations for the conflict (cf. Coulter, 1999a and b; Michie and Sheehan, 1998); these will be considered later in the chapter.

It is important to consider the history of conflict in NI because research participants often referred to this when explaining their perspectives on WCR (see Chapter Eight). In the empirical research, some interviewees described Catholics as 'rebellious' 'underdogs' whose attitudes in the workplace were informed by a sense of injustice and a need to fight for equality stemming back centuries. A significant proportion of interviewees viewed Protestants as defensive and protectionist - something that became more pronounced as Catholics experienced material improvements. Indeed, similar arguments have been presented in the academic literature where it is contended that important episodes in Ireland's history such as the late 17th Century Battle of the Boyne and Siege of Derry contribute to an ongoing 'siege mentality' (Cairns, 2000; Douglas and Shirlow, 1998; McAuley and Tonge, 2007).

2.2 Religious Ideology: Protestantism and Catholicism

Religious affiliations identify and differentiate between communities in NI. When a story breaks in the media, it is commonplace to refer, for example, to 'the Catholic Ardoyne' or 'Protestant Shankill' in Belfast, or the 'Catholic Bogside' and 'Protestant Waterside' in Derry. Religious terminology is also common in day-to-day talk and, indeed, most research participants in the thesis referred to themselves as Catholic or Protestant. Attitude surveys on public opinion rely heavily on these terms, as is the case, for instance, with the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* – the largest public attitude survey in the region. The 2008 survey uses the terms Catholic and Protestant in questions such as, 'are Britishness and Protestantism strongly intertwined?' and 'are Irishness and Catholicism strongly intertwined?' with little mention in the questionnaires of nationalism or unionism.

Many commentators view religion as a key explanatory factor for the conflict (Bruce 1987; Cormack and Osborne, 1991; Mitchell, 2003, 2004, 2006; Whyte, 1991). As Cormack and Osborne (1991: p1) note: 'religious sectarianism has underpinned life in

Northern Ireland for a considerable time'. For those who argue that religion causes division, significant differences in the teaching and practice of Protestantism and Catholicism create social enmity. For example, Catholic teaching contends that one Universal Church provides 'salvation' and that Church should play an authoritative role in the lives of its advocates. A different view of the Church is central in Protestantism where salvation can be achieved through biblical teachings irrespective of the Church's role. Because each subgroup within Catholicism follows the same set of guiding principles and affiliates with one Church, a greater degree of social and political cohesion exists among Catholics than Protestants, as Coulter puts it:

> 'While every Catholic living in the province belongs to one church, the same is not true of course of their Protestant counterparts. 'Protestant' is a generic term that covers literally dozens of religious denominations that vary enormously both in terms of size and theological disposition.' (Coulter, 1999a: p14)

Given that no single Church serves as an organising force within it, Bruce (1985: p592) argues that contemporary Protestantism has become somewhat fragmented or 'schism-prone' leading to a high number of Protestant subdivisions. Despite this, religious figures have been prominent in Unionist party politics with people like Reverend Ian Paisley and Reverend William McCrea gathering much cross-factional support. Not only have well known individual representatives of unionism held strong commitments to their Protestant faith but so too have significant numbers of Unionist political activists (Bruce, 1987).

Theological discourses are also significant because they reinforce a fear of the other and political figures sometimes draw upon them to legitimise other political agendas (Brewer and Higgins, 1999a). Writing specifically on Anti-Catholic discourse in Northern Ireland, Brewer and Higgins argue that political representatives have often invoked religious difference to galvanise members of the Protestant community against Catholics who they portray as,

> 'a threat to Ulster and to Protestantism, as represented in all sorts of conspiracies orchestrated by the Catholic Church, including civil unrest in the North of Ireland' (Brewer and Higgins, 1999a: p244).

23

Although religion remains influential in Ireland, the nature and strength of its influence has changed over time with significantly reduced faith-based conflict in recent years. Historically, religion has been used to buttress public opinion in favour of one political objective or another (Brewer and Higgins, 1999a and b) or used to distinguish between communities. There is, though, evidence to suggest that most religious leaders have sought to reduce conflict (Whyte, 1991) and although policy-makers employ religious identity markers when referring to the predominant communities, many do not subscribe to any religious doctrine. Other factors, or dimensions of difference (Ruane and Todd, 1996), have significantly influenced the cultural, political and economic makeup of Northern Ireland and it is to these I turn next.

2.3 Political and Cultural Ideology: Irish Nationalism and Republicanism; Ulster Unionism and Loyalism

This part of the chapter summarises four of the major political discourses influential in NI. Nationalism, unionism, loyalism and republicanism have a longstanding history and remain four of the most prominent ideologies in contemporary politics. Nationalism and unionism are the more moderate of these political discourses ideologically emphasising non-violent means of achieving objectives whereas loyalism and republicanism are predicated upon the belief that violence is a necessary means for achieving political goals. To reiterate an important point, interviewees commonly drew upon aspects of their identities to explain opinions on workplace issues including views on community relations initiatives.

2.3.1 Irish Nationalism and Republicanism

Nationalists are concerned with the reunification of Ireland and argue that it is only by returning Ireland to this state that the people living on the island can be free to engage in self-determination. We can trace back in Irish politics the roots of nationalist ideology to the United Irishmen of the late 18th Century whose espoused aim was to construct an egalitarian Irish state where those in authority treat all inhabitants equitably, whether Protestant or Catholic. It was not until the 19th Century, however, that nationalism and unionism split Irish society with Protestants articulating a

preference for union with Britain and Catholics increasingly favouring a Home Rule Ireland (Ruane and Todd, 1996). By the time of the Easter Rising in 1916, when the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Irish Volunteers and socialist republican James Connolly attempted a coup to overthrow the government, Irish nationalist sentiment had gained impetus. Although the coup was unsuccessful and the British executed many key figures in the nationalist movement because of their role, it was a symbolically important display of nationalist resistance and galvanised Irish nationalism in following years (Tonge, 2006). As the dust settled in the decades following partition, nationalist feeling declined and although Irish nationalism had not ceased nor had Catholics accepted the union with Britain, it was not until the IRA's 1956-62 'border campaign' (Tonge, ibid.) and the 1968-1971 civil rights movement that Irish nationalism became a prominent feature of NI's contemporary political landscape.

Much of the narrative and symbolism associated with Irish nationalism centres on material disadvantage as evidenced, for example, by the 1845-49 Irish potato famine during which it is estimated more than one million people died with many more displaced. Nationalists point to the apparent lack of concern shown for Ireland during these events by the British citing it as perhaps the most damning example of how British rule has caused many of Ireland's problems and argue further that the contemporary troubles were just the latest example of further British malevolence. Nationalist disadvantage and the fight for equality is exemplified by the 1845-49 famine and other more contemporary events, and is further reinforced by nationalists, not least through storytelling and the pictorial metaphors painted on gable walls, where the common theme is suffering at the hands of an often violent, economically advantaged unionist and/or British oppressor. Following the signing of the GFA, some argued political and economic improvements would reduce Irish nationalist calls for a united Ireland. However, the evidence from Breen's (2001) study suggests that the peace process has not significantly affected Catholic nationalism in this way and, consequently, it remains relatively strong among Catholics.

Republicans also cite the United Irishmen as influential ancestors who, in the late 18th Century, fought for an end to British rule in Ireland. The United Irishmen fought for autonomy from Britain initially through parliamentary means before eventually

adopting a military strategy influenced by American independence and the French Revolution (Kee, 2000). The groups espousing a contemporary republican ideology have traditionally been dogmatic in their attempts to constitute a unified Ireland leading to republicanism's portrayal as an 'extreme' political ideology. Republicans contend that conflict in Ireland, north and south, is a consequence of British occupation, but they differ from their nationalist counterparts in arguing that violence is necessary to bring this to an end. At a pivotal point in the late 1960s, northern republicans again brought this contention into the political foreground. There was growing dissatisfaction at what they saw as unwarranted unionist and British violence against civil rights protests. During the period from 1968 to 1971, there were increasingly vocal calls for equality and a series of protests by civil rights demonstrators. In response, prominent unionist politicians led calls for action against the protestors. Many urban working class neighbourhoods saw violence between members of the increasingly active Provisional IRA, the local police and British Army, strengthening Catholic opinion against what they increasingly viewed as partisan state forces.

The events during and after the civil rights protests led to major changes in the leadership and structure of republicanism, and eventually to a more cohesive political strategy centring on equality for Catholics (McGovern, 2004). However, in the decades following the emergence of the civil rights movement, there was a series of bombing campaigns launched against military and economic targets in both Northern Ireland and Britain. The Provisional IRA sought to justify their actions by referring to longstanding British oppression of Catholics and argued that a forcefully secured united Ireland was the only viable solution to Ireland's conflict. Sinn Fein represents contemporary republican political ideology in NI. Its President, Gerry Adams, concisely summarised the republicans' rationale for aggression:

> 'Violence in Ireland has its roots in the conquest of Ireland by Britain. This conquest has lasted … for many centuries and, whether economic, political, territorial or cultural, it has used violence and coercion, sectarianism and terrorism as its methods and has had power as it objective'. (Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom;* cited in McGarry and O'Leary, 1995: p33-34).

As the violence progressed throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, there was growing recognition that to secure their aims republicans needed a coherent long-term political strategy. This 'long war' approach saw the emergence of the 'armalite and ballot box' policy whereby both military and political campaigns operated simultaneously (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998). The impetus for a political campaign gathered momentum following the unexpected election, in 1981, of IRA prisoner Bobby Sands, who was on hunger strike at the time, as MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone. This event indicated to republicans that there was significant political support upon which they could build. They also recognised the value of a successful political strategy for adding legitimacy to their cause – a favourable vote strengthened the argument that a significant proportion of the Catholic population supported their aims (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998). In an attempt to enhance its appeal to the electorate, and because of mounting pressure from its Irish-American support base, Sinn Fein engaged in 'political pragmatism' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998: p171) with the issue of equality becoming an increasingly prominent feature of its political aims. Their emphasis on egalitarian ideals indicated a concern to link nationalists' fight for equality with broader, 'universalized' aspirations such that equality emerged as a meta-discourse in republican politics:

'Concepts, programs and policies associated with the idea of equality have been the ground upon which Sinn Fein has refashioned itself, its relationship with the northern Nationalist community and the formulation of Republican ideology' (McGovern, 2004: p623).

Because of this softening of political language and a better-developed political strategy, republicans experienced greater political representation (McGovern, 2004). The strategy proved successful because in the period following the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 and GFA, Sinn Fein became the largest republican/nationalist party in the region. This development came as a surprise to some who thought that an effective peace process would encourage 'moderate' political views and lead to greater support for the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP). It is interesting to note that the equality discourse is analogous with much of the terminology in GFA. While policy-makers anticipated that effective peace initiatives would lessen people's desire to support republican ideology, it remains influential for many Catholics more than a decade after the 1998 GFA.

2.3.2 Unionism and Loyalism

Unionism is a political ideology influential within NI Protestantism. A telling moment in its history was the 'Glorious Revolution' that helped sure-up Protestant authority in Ireland following the Protestant King William III of Orange's victory in battle over the Catholic King James II during the Williamite War in 1690. Significant numbers of Protestants in the region arrange bonfires and hold parades with marching bands annually on 12th July to celebrate the day of the battle. The fight to maintain cultural and constitutional links with Britain and to minimise the influence of Ireland over the lives of Protestants continued in the centuries following the Glorious Revolution and was typified by the Ulster Covenant movement. This development was a response to the 1912 Home Rule Bill designed to return local governance to Ireland, and more than 500,000 people demonstrated their resistance by signing the 1912 Ulster Covenant. Its wording makes clear the link between God and Ulster for many Unionists, as well as their objections to Irish independence:

> 'Being convinced in our consciousness that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship, and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects to His Gracious Majesty King George V., humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do herby pledge ourselves in solemn covenant, throughout this our time of threatened calamity, stand by one another in defending, for ourselves and our children, our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us, we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority. In sure confidence that God will defend the right, we hitherto subscribe our names' (1912 Ulster Covenant).

There are some differences in the arguments presented by proponents of unionism. McGarry and O'Leary (1995) identify two predominant strands that summarise these differences. First, devolutionists regard a strong association with Great Britain as essential, but argue that its people should retain control over the administration of the NI state. Integrationists on the other hand advocate a formalised relationship with Great Britain wherein Northern Ireland is a fully assimilated member and whose legislature is centralised within a United Kingdom administration. While there are

differences within unionism, devolutionists and integrationists have in the past because of their commitment to the union 'frequently agreed to overlook their many differences' (Coulter, 1999a: p233).

There are further similarities in the narratives describing loyalism and unionism including their concern to keep Northern Ireland separate from the Republic of Ireland, the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, and the 1912 Ulster Covenant movement. This sometimes leads to the mistaken belief that unionism and loyalism are one and the same, but there are important ideological differences such as the latter's more pronounced attachment to the Crown rather than parliament, their clearer commitment to the current six-county version of Ulster (Coulter, 1999a), and their greater willingness to use force to achieve their aims. In the context of the recent troubles, the propensity for violence shown by those self-identifying as loyalists has led some to view them as little more than sectarian (Bruce, 2004; Cairns, 2000; Coulter, 1999a.).

The Republic of Ireland's influence in Northern Ireland is a common, longstanding concern for Protestants whether more unionist or loyalist in outlook. While Irish nationalists argue that British involvement in Ireland is the root cause of conflict, Protestants often make similar arguments about the Republic of Ireland. They point to the fact that until the GFA, the Republic insisted on a constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. Indeed, Article 2 of the 1937 Irish constitution defined Ireland as a thirty-two county state, thus including Northern Ireland. It stated, 'the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and its territorial seas' (Darby, 1983: p29). Although the constitution has since been amended, Protestant political leaders continue to articulate a concern that the underlying position of the Republic has not changed significantly. As McAuley (2003: p64) noted when commenting on the DUP's position on the GFA, 'its real purpose was [seen to be] part of a grand plan to destroy Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the United Kingdom'.

Protestant political representatives regarded this constitutional claim to Northern Ireland as evidence of the Republic's undemocratic, irredentist role in Northern Ireland (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995); that is, successive Irish governments supported a united Ireland strategy and were accused of legitimising the IRA's violence in the hope it would achieve this strategy. In the early years of partition, the Irish

government's interest in Northern Ireland was publically acknowledged and a significant political issue of the time. A key question for political parties during this period was not whether Northern Ireland should be reunited with the Republic but the most acceptable means of bringing this about. As leader of the Provisional government, Michael Collins stated publically that although a united Ireland should not be pursued by force (Foster, 1989), it should nevertheless be pursued. There was a policy of non-cooperation with Protestants in Northern Ireland and trade tariffs were introduced to undermine economic development there. Despite arguing publically against coercion, his government supplied weapons to the IRA in Northern Ireland (Bew et al, 2002). Although Irish government policy on Northern Ireland became more co-operative and less militant over time, and while they eventually came to recognise and accept Northern Ireland's constitutional right to self-determination, there is a well-documented history of interference in and obstruction of Northern Ireland affairs (cf. ibid.)

Protestants also cite the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Republic's political and cultural arenas as a potential threat to Protestantism as Catholic values and teachings are embedded in Irish political and civil society (Mitchell, 2006). The revised constitution, introduced in 1937, specified the 'special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of faith professed by the great majority of the citizens' (Darby, 1983, p29). By implication, Catholicism is in a privileged position vis-a-vis Protestantism in the South and Protestants fear a united Ireland government would mean a similar development in Northern Ireland. At the cultural level, the Republic's promotion of Irish language (Gaeilge) and traditions is also at variance with Protestant culture and is a perceived threat to Protestantism. Further, Irish nationalists have been accused of exaggerating evidence of discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland to encourage support from international audiences. Because of this strategy's success, and the implicit support offered by the Republic, Northern Ireland governments struggled to effectively deal with IRA violence (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995).

Ruane and Todd (1996) identify three common views among Protestants on the Republic's role in Northern Ireland. Some are hostile and portray the Republic as a 'sick country' because of the Catholic Church's influence over state structures,

political interference in Northern Ireland's affair, a lack of support for Northern Ireland governments in the 1960s and 1970s, and for appearing to provide safe haven for IRA members (see also McGarry and O'Leary, 1995; McKay 2000: pp236 and 242). Another group of Protestants adopt an agnostic position whereby the South is simply another country with different values, traditions, systems and structures. The final group are receptive to the idea that the Republic is a different but similar country and accept there are positive aspects of Irish society. Those Protestants in the second and third groups are more likely to have personal experience working and living in the Republic.

For more than 200 years, the Orange Order, formally known as the Loyal Orange Institution of Ireland, has been influential in loyalist social and political life while some have gone as far as to conclude that NI was an 'Orange State' (Farrell, 1976). Membership of the Order formally excludes Catholics and according to McAuley and Tonge (2007), it has an estimated membership of 40,000 people. The Orange Order has also been prominent within unionist politics, something clearly demonstrated during the period of the Drumcree dispute where prominent unionist politicians such as David Trimble and Ian Paisley Senior wore Orange Order sashes[4] during public demonstrations. Moreover, before British Direct Rule replaced self-rule in 1972, each Prime Minister of Northern Ireland was a member of the Order (ibid.). Following the GFA, political attitudes and the aspirations of influential organisations such as the Orange Order began to change. Those who were most distrustful of nationalist and republican parties, as well as the role played by the Republic of Ireland, argued that the GFA was a threat to the union. Subsequently, the Orange Order disassociated itself from the more moderate Ulster Unionist Party favouring instead Ian Paisley Senior's Democratic Unionist Party (ibid.).

Loyalist political identity is represented in the homes of many of its followers by flags and emblems (union flags, paramilitary paraphernalia, etc.) signifying important aspects of this ideology. It has been suggested that these emblems appear more frequently in loyalist communities and households than elsewhere such that, 'they [...] are virtually a part of the furniture' (Cairns, 2000: p444). The desire to bring political

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[4] Sashes are symbols of the particular order to which members belong and are worn around the neck lying vertically along the torso of the wearer who is usually dressed in a suit and tie.

symbols into their homes, it is argued, derives from an ongoing felt need to defend their culture, something many in the wider Protestant population see as under threat from Catholic neighbours and resulting in a 'siege mentality' (Cairns, 2000; Douglas and Shirlow, 1998; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). From this perspective, the territory (including many workplaces), culture and identity of Ulster and its people must be defended by those who value it most and, for loyalists, by violent means if necessary. Ruane and Todd (1996: pp94-95) summarised this sentiment as follows:

> 'Protestants were being pushed out of their traditional areas and workplaces, they were under siege, subject to genocidal attack, forced to retaliate. Only Loyalist organisation, vigilance and militancy could defend the Protestant population'.

2.4 Socio-Economic Inequality

Class differences and material inequalities are key factors accounting for the ongoing conflict in Ireland (Coulter, 1999a). Indeed, most explanations of the troubles place some emphasis on the social and economic conditions within Catholic and Protestant communities. The plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s, the Land War beginning in 1879, the United Irishmen's insurrection in 1798, the 1916 Easter Rising and many of the other major events in Ireland's history have socio-economic dimensions. Nationalist and republican discourse has been for a long time imbibed with references to Irish Catholic discrimination due to British malevolence. They point to episodes such as the Irish potato famine in the mid 19th Century and, more recently, Catholics' fight for parity during the Civil Rights Period as evidence of their material disadvantage.

Accusations of systematic discrimination against Catholics increased during the 1968-1971 Civil Rights Period, yet some of the grievances prompting the civil rights movement remain with ongoing allegations that historic structural inequality continues unaltered - claims that appear to have some veracity when we look at available data (cf. Gallagher, 1991; Shuttleworth and Lavery, 2004; Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2005). For example, the 1971 census suggested that Catholic men were more than two and a half times as likely to be unemployed as their Protestant

equivalents, a situation that had only marginally improved by the time of the 1981 census (Gallagher, 1991; Whyte, 1991).

While the gap in employment between Protestants and Catholics has reduced to some extent, the 1991 and 2001 census, as well ongoing analyses of the *Labour Force Survey*, highlight an extant gap in unemployment levels (Shuttleworth and Lavery, 2004). Six percent of Catholics and three percent of Protestants were out of work and employment levels of sixty-two percent for Catholics and seventy-four percent for Protestants with wider differentials for women than men (*Labour Force Survey Religion Report*, 2005). However, there have been some important changes such as Catholics' improved socio-economic mobility, enhanced political representation and increasing community confidence producing among some sections 'a strong Catholic community, confidently represented and continuing to push ahead for more political 'gains'' (Mitchell, 2003: p4). Yet, the fight for material equality and an end to discrimination continue to inform current attitudes of many Catholics, as was the case for many of my research participants (see Chapter Eight).

Notwithstanding accusations of discrimination against Catholics, conflict has disproportionately affected working class people, whether from a Protestant or Catholic background (Coulter, 1999b) in one obvious way. People from this social class carried out most of the offences committed by paramilitary groups during the troubles (Shara, 1994; cited in Coulter, ibid.). Furthermore, a majority of those who died because of political violence were themselves from working class communities (McKeown, 1989; Fay *et al*, 1999). Socio-economic background, therefore, has a significant impact upon people's experiences of violence (Coulter, 1999b).

Unionist politicians have often presented socio-economic arguments when justifying the Union with Britain and resisting greater integration with the Republic of Ireland. When British governments considered Home Rule for Ireland, Protestants invariably contended that breaking constitutional ties would lead to substantial material disadvantage for the whole island and particularly for the Protestant community (Lee, 1989; cited in Michie and Sheehan, 1998). Nationalist politicians also use economic arguments to promote the potential benefits of a united Ireland. Indeed, the Republic of Ireland's post-partition protectionist economic policy was favoured because it was

33

designed to establish financial independence from Britain and, according to Taoiseach Eamon de Valera, to convince those in Northern Ireland of the economic benefits a united Ireland would bring the whole island (Lee, 1989).

2.5 Conflict and the Workplace

Following the 1990s peace process and implementation of the GFA, the levels of paramilitary violence in NI have significantly reduced (MacGinty *et al*, 2007). However, a degree of conflict between the two largest communities has continued with some of it affecting the workplace (Jarman, 2004, 2005). The purpose of this section is to show more clearly how historic identity differences among the Protestant and Catholic communities affect work environments. I consider both violent and non-violent workplace conflict because the latter also contributes to 'a sense of ethnic difference, fear and hostility on a daily basis' (Jarman, 2005: p9) and, therefore, councils must address them both. The chapter introduces themes attended to later in the thesis, but they are included briefly at this stage to indicate how community divisions manifest at work. The section begins by highlighting the extent to which, and how, physical and emotional violence occurs in work environments and how this affects employee attitudes and decisions about where to work. Violence is sometimes systematically orchestrated for political ends (O Murchu, 2005) while it may also be used to maintain workplace segregation when employees from one community attempt to prevent those from other communities applying for jobs in 'their' workplaces (Shirlow, 2003; 2006). It is also important to note that memories of past conflict can affect attitudes in the present (Hughes *et al*, 2007) and this can make employees reluctant to broach political subjects with colleagues.

The degree of hostility in NI during the post-1968 conflict was considerable and generated what some commentators have referred to as a 'war culture' (Ruane and Todd, 1996: p1) or 'culture of violence' (Jarman, 2004; p435) with effects beyond the immediate act of aggression itself. In the workplace, there are instances of intimidation, harassment, bullying, segregation, politicised arguments, and strained working relationships. Violent assaults and murders linked to the ethno-national conflict also occurred. Despite some positive changes in the political climate and paramilitary decommissioning and, although they have reduced, there are ongoing

reports of workplace violence (Jarman, 2004, 2005). The few studies to evaluate the effects of this estimate that anywhere between thirteen percent (ECNI, 2000, cited in Jarman, 2005) and fifty percent (Dickson *et al*, 2002) of employees experience some form of sectarian harassment. The most common forms of harassment, stopping short of physical violence, include singing sectarian tunes, knowingly telling insensitive political jokes, paramilitary graffiti, and threats of violence (*ECNI* reports, cited in Jarman, 2005).

Council employees experience ethno-national violence at work that, as noted by Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: p178) 'militates against the capacity to deliver fair and innovative services'. Adrian Lamph in 1998, Mark Rodgers and James Cameron in 1993, Seamus Sullivan in 1991, and Edward Gibson in 1988 were council employees killed by paramilitary groups. A number of more recent attacks indicate that ethno-national violence at work has not stopped. For example, in July 2008, an armed man claiming to represent a paramilitary group threatened a Belfast City Council Cleansing Depot employee while on his way to work. Further incidents have occurred recently such as when the Chief Executive of Craigavon Borough Council received, in November 2006, a bullet in the post and a threatening letter if a planned council restructuring went ahead. A GRO in one of my case study councils described the conflict in his workplace:

> 'We've had vehicles hijacked; we've had staff threatened; we've had cars and lorries burnt; we've had men shot in the workplace. We have by its very nature a segregated City. We have segregated workforces' (Catholic Female Good Relations Officer, SDC).

2.5.1 Conflict, Discrimination and Segregation at Work

The opening paragraph in the introduction to the thesis stated that many different workplaces and professions are affected by ethno-national conflict; from shipbuilding (O Murchu, 2005), to teaching (Nolan, 2007), social work (Smyth and Campbell, 1996; Houston and Campbell, 2001; Pinkerton and Campbell, 2002; Campbell and McCrystal, 2005; Ramon *et al*, 2006), and leisure centre management (Bairner and Shirlow, 2003). The violence is often sporadic and random, but it is also sometimes used in a more sustained manner to ensure one community gains pecuniary advantage

over the other (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996; O Murchu, 2005; Shirlow, 2006). Physical attacks, intimidation and harassment perpetrated by members of each community can help reinforce workforce segregation because potential recruits are much less likely to apply for jobs where they feel threatened. This is one reason why one third of Protestants and Catholics are unwilling to look for work in areas where the other community is in the majority (Donnan, 2007). As Shirlow argues, ethno-national considerations and perceptions of risk to safety continue to inform decisions about where to look for work:

> 'It is evident that the crossing of ethnosectarian boundaries, despite the reduction of political violence, still creates phobias, insecurity and harm among a noticeable section of the Northern Ireland workforce' (Shirlow, 2006: p1550).

Various factors inform these fears but employees can find themselves in the midst of violence when attending work because of misfortunate coincidence or deliberate targeting, or following indiscriminate attack. Paramilitary groups have intentionally pursued employees as they travelled to and from work, and attacks have occurred in the workplace itself (Shirlow, 2006). An interviewee, identified as a loyalist paramilitary, informed Shirlow and McGovern (1996) that socio-economic considerations prompted the murders of Catholic workers in East Belfast:

> 'Those murders were symbolic. Catholics can't expect to blow up our industries and then expect to take our jobs. It's not on. It's regrettable but it's about giving Catholics a signal. A signal which states "stay out of our community and don't take our jobs".' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996: p395)

The workforce monitoring data suggests that organisations where 70 percent or more of the employees come from one or other community employ almost 40 percent of the workforce (ECNI data, cited in Shirlow, 2006). When this data is disaggregated, it reveals that just under 38 percent of Protestants are employed in organisations with a 70 percent or higher proportion of people from their own community. For Catholics, there is a different picture with 18 percent of employees from their background working in predominantly Catholic organisations. Finally, only about 35 percent of employees work in places where there are a roughly even number of employees from both communities.

These figures vary across different regions of NI with particularly high levels of segregation at 'interface areas' (Osborne, 2003; Hughes *et al*, 2007) and, as Shirlow (2006) argues, within organisations themselves in ways often undocumented by policy-makers. However, the evidence collected by the ECNI suggests that, since the late 1990s, segregation levels are reducing particularly in larger organisations, although it remains a significant issue where there are high levels of residential segregation (Harbison, 2002; Osborne, 2003; Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004; Shirlow, 2006). Despite the comparatively high levels of workforce segregation demonstrated above, the point made early in the thesis remains valid; that is, workplaces tend to be less segregated than most other areas of social life and, as will be discussed in more depth as the thesis progresses, this is why community relations policy has increasingly focused on this context.

The levels of discrimination in this context, and in housing, education and the electoral system are one of the reasons why the contemporary conflict began and why it has continued for so long (Fay *et al*, 1999). There is a history of inequity in NI with much of the policy focus (see Chapter Three) from the early 1970s on addressing the under-representation of Catholics in the labour market (Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004), particularly in public authorities where there is evidence of discrimination by both Catholics and Protestants (Dixon, 2001). Analyses of labour market data highlight that Catholics experience higher unemployment levels than Protestants and this has not changed significantly since the introduction of fair employment legislation in the 1970s (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). While the numbers of Catholics in managerial and professional occupations has increased in the last decade or so, there remains a significant gap between the numbers of Catholics in these positions when compared to Protestants (Shuttleworth and Lavery, 2004). Further, Catholic men hold 39 percent of managerial positions compared to a figure of 56 percent for Protestant men, this despite the fact that a greater number of Catholics than Protestants hold a higher-level qualification (*LFS Religion Report*, 2009).

Workplace conflict in the region was sometimes engineered to exert macro-political influence. The Ulster Workers' Council dispute of 1974 is the best known and oft-cited example of this as it demonstrates how, when ethno-national sensitivities are aroused, groups of employees can play a central role in challenging government-level

37

political proposals (Ruane and Todd, 1996; O Murchu, 2005). Unionist politicians and loyalist paramilitaries (Nelson, 1984; Fay *et al*, 1999) along with Protestant employees, trade unionists, managers and owners caused considerable disruption to the local economy because of their objections to the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement (Ruane and Todd, 1996). The protesters argued the agreement would increase the Republic of Ireland's involvement in the government of NI, raising again for them the possibility of greater integration with the Republic and calling into question NI's constitutional link with Britain. The Protestant community's remonstrations led to a drastic reduction in deliveries of provisions, the electricity and gas supply, and the effectiveness of the public transport system, increasing political pressure until eventually the British and Irish governments stepped back from the proposals.

Whereas violence and paramilitary activity receive a high level of attention, ethno-national differences affect the workplace in many other ways. Interviewees for the thesis shared a number of examples where episodes of ethno-national conflict outside work threatened social relations in the workplace. While a considerable amount of time had elapsed since some of these incidents took place, they were often still fresh in employees' memories and generated a degree of tension, especially around the time of their anniversaries. The following two instances, a commemoration of Bloody Sunday[5] and employee involvement in the Drumcree dispute[6], illuminate how events in the wider societal context impact on the workplace. The first case happened in a majority Catholic workplace in Derry, where employees commemorated the anniversary of Bloody Sunday by observing a period of silence. However, this led to complaints from Protestant employees who argued the episode resonated more with the Catholic community and, therefore, employees should not commemorate them in the workplace:

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[5] In 1972, the British Army in Derry killed thirteen Catholics in controversial circumstances. Many Catholics still mark the anniversary.

[6] Orange Order bands paraded along the mainly Catholic Garvaghy Road in Portadown prior to 1995, but following protests from residents and their political representatives the Parades Commission prohibited the marchers from walking through the area. The dispute took on a wider resonance and affected many other regions of NI resulting in roadblocks, riots and paramilitary attacks. A decision was taken to forcibly remove Catholic protesters and allow the parade to pass through the area leading to triumphal scenes among parade members some of whom were unionist politicians. Since then, however, the Garvaghy Road has been closed to the marchers leading to further annual protests and disruption, although the degree of agitation has significantly dissipated.

'Recently, we had a situation to do with the anniversary of Bloody Sunday; there was a call for a two-minute silence. There was an issue in one workplace where a small number of Protestants who worked there actually raised a complaint about the way in which that was done; the workers all lined up in a row to do their silence and they felt intimidated'. (Protestant Male Full-Time Official, *TGWU*)

In the second case, when the Drumcree dispute began in 1995, employees were reluctant when at work to discuss their views on events, but colleagues were aware that some among them participated in the protests. This presented difficulties because the dispute aroused longstanding ethno-national tensions between Protestant and Catholic colleagues:

'I can remember some of our manual workers who were actually taking leave to go down to Drumcree to be part of the protest. Now those people fired up with something, coming back into the workplace isn't easy to manage' (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC).

It can be concluded from these incidents and the earlier analysis that the historic conflict continues to impact upon the workplace. It has contributed to workplace segregation, as employees are often reluctant to join workforces where members of the 'other' community are in the majority and where there is a real or perceived risk to their safety. Chill factors are important in this respect as they influence people's decisions about where to seek employment and their experiences in the work environment. As noted by Shirlow (2006: p1547), 'chill factors refer to the avoidance of sites of employment or other arenas due to fears concerning personal security and/or the wider patterns of hostility that emanate from a defined or perceived threatening group'. They include paramilitary activity, Irish language signage or portraits of the British monarch in councils, wall murals, painted kerbstones and flags (Hughes *et al*, 2007) or, atypically, even death (Teague, 1997). Violence also affects social relations in workplaces that have mostly managed to escape it, as memories and attitudes toward conflict outside work can highlight differences within the workplace. The next section examines how flags and emblems, and sporting affiliations contribute to community differences in the workplace and impact on community relations.

2.5.2 Flags and Emblems

> 'The use of flags and emblems can appear to be threatening and discriminatory towards individuals; they can amplify communal differences within society; and consequently have enormous ramifications for national and local governance, for policing, for community development and for inward economic investment. The use of flags is clearly connected to the demarcation of territory through fear and intimidation' (Bryan and Gillespie, 2005: p8).

'Manifestations of separateness' (Hughes *et al*, 2007: p48) such as ethno-national flags and emblems legitimise Catholic and Protestant identities (Ruane and Todd, 1996) and publically represent the political aspirations of both communities (Brown and MacGinty, 2003). They demarcate one social space from another affirming and reaffirming community identity and culture (Bryson and McCartney, 1994; Cairns, 2000; Graham and Shirlow, 2002). Protestant and Catholic communities use political emblems in territoriality as 'control of space is still regarded as being crucial to identity, power and politics' (Graham and Nash, 2006: p262). Following the GFA, it was hoped attachments to ethno-national symbols would diminish, but evidence suggests that this is not the case (Brown and MacGinty, 2003) and although they are officially prohibited by organisational neutrality policies, ethno-national symbols are still placed officially and unofficially in work environments (Cairns, 2000).

The symbolism associated with each community is based on the historical narratives considered earlier in the chapter. For Catholics, commemoration of ex-IRA members, symbolic figures from Irish mythology, rebellion and 'equality' are common themes. The 1916 Easter Rising, the 1981 Hunger Strikes and the 1845-49 Famine are also frequently portrayed. The Union with Britain, Battle of the Boyne and Siege of Derry are mythologized in Protestant symbolism as is loyalist paramilitary strength, although there are ongoing attempts to reduce the proliferation of paramilitary imagery through, for example, the Re-Imaging Communities Programme that has seen other cultural and sporting imagery replace the paramilitary (Mitchell, 2008). Flags cause a degree of resentment and resistance because they are associated with and signify the political aspirations of one community or the other. In District Councils, Union flags are displayed on official occasions and, for a small number of councils, there remains a policy of flying it every day on some buildings. This practice is often criticised by Catholic employees who argue the Union flag is problematic because it

symbolises Protestants' political aspirations for continued union with Britain. The following extract from an interview with a trade union representative is indicative of the views on flags:

'We have had one fellow in particular who was sent into a Protestant area and he seen [sic] a [Union] flag and he refused to work – he said he wasn't working under British rule. As long as that flags flying there, he says, I am not working under it!' (Protestant Male Trade Union Representative, GDC)

Arguments about the culture change prescribed for the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI), what was then the Royal Ulster Constabulary, is a notable example of how symbolism divides opinion. The Patten Commission was set up in 1998 following the GFA to undertake a 'root and branch' review of existing policing arrangements and consult on how best to inculcate change. For the Catholic community to accept the changes, a completely new set of symbols had to accompany them. Patten included in his list of recommendations a name change and new iconography with no British or Irish connections (McGarry, 2000). A further recommendation was that the practice of flying the Union Flag on police property should cease. Modifications were made to the recommendations, but it was generally accepted that if the new proposals were to have any chance of success in convincing both Catholics and Protestants of the force's representativeness new iconography was required.

Because of their political significance, Irish, Ulster and British flags, as well as the plethora of paramilitary flags, are significant risks to harmonious community relations at work (Bryan and Gillespie, 2005). A politically sensitive flag in the workplace can leave employees feeling marginalised and/or threatened, but similar emblems outside the workplace are also problematic (Shirlow, 2006). Organisations are often located in neighbourhoods demarcated by politically sensitive symbols meaning a journey to work can be a difficult one if, for example, a Protestant employee works in a predominantly Catholic area where Irish Tricolours are flying either side of the street. In this instance, the flag is a reminder of ethno-national difference and employees interpret it as a sign of one community's claim to that territory – the flag is understood as a warning that they are not welcome there. Because of this, employees such as the

trade union representative alluded to on the previous page may react negatively when flags are positioned in or around work environments. From this perspective, flags are not just territory markers but are also barriers to employment (Shirlow, 2006).

For these reasons, flags on council buildings remain one of the more contentious community relations issues in local government. The reaction in the mid-1980s when the Irish Tricolour was erected on two council-managed facilities (a Leisure Centre and Community Centre) in Catholic areas of Belfast demonstrates the strength of feeling about flags on council property. Part of the finance used to construct the centres came from Belfast City Council funds. Before the official opening of the buildings, representatives of Sinn Fein carried out their own unofficial ceremonies during which they placed an Irish Tricolour and Irish language plaque on them (cf. Knox, 1986). Many of the city council's unionist councillors reacted angrily calling for their immediate removal. Although disagreements about how to respond hampered unionist councillors' reaction, one councillor decided in both cases that he would remove the tricolours himself threatening a major community relations incident (Knox, 1986).

This example demonstrates how political crises can develop when flags are erected on council buildings. For council officials, deciding how to respond to the appearance of unofficial flags and emblems presents a dilemma since there can be a backlash from the local community if they remove them. This is a difficult issue as councils run the risk of increasing community relations tensions while employee safety may be jeopardised if they become involved in flag removal:

> 'Sometimes these things are nailed up against your boundary wall during the marching season by paramilitaries [...] if I went and confronted that issue and tried to get that taken down, I would probably have a strike or a protest, a reaction from politicians, a reaction from community representatives, etc. [...] I tend to try and get the things talked down rather than do something precipitous which exacerbates the situation. ' (Protestant Male HR Director, SDC).

When people debate politically sensitive symbolism, most attention is devoted to the meanings and proliferation of national and paramilitary flags. There is also much time and space given over to street art and particularly wall murals (Rolston, 1992). The

chapter has already highlighted how flags in councils' workplaces can lead to WCR problems; however, other emblems hold ethno-national significance and they too can foster disagreement and conflict among employees. The poppy is one example of this, as some see it as a contentious symbol because of its association with Britain:

> 'People say the poppy is grand, but it is essentially a British emblem. They might not have a problem commemorating the fallen dead at World War I and II but why not do it with some other emblem rather than a British institutional [Royal British Legion] emblem?' (Catholic Male Recreation and Sports Development Officer, GDC).

A link with the Royal British Legion in itself leads many employees, particularly Catholics, to refuse to wear the poppy and in some cases adopt a hostile attitude toward Remembrance Sunday commemorations and related symbols (Graham and Shirlow, 2002). The poppy has come to embody, for these employees at least, Protestant political aspirations, as it is taken as a sign of their commitment to Ulster British ideology (Todd, 1987) while Remembrance Sunday or 'Poppy Day' is 'long regarded a unionist ceremony' (Graham and Shirlow, 2002: p899). For this reason, the decision to wear a poppy or not in the lead up to Remembrance Sunday can result in increased tension for employees unsure of how colleagues will react to the decision they take.

In one high profile case, for example, a local BBC news presenter decided in 1995 not to wear a poppy live on air. Following reports in the local press, and a large number of complaints, the BBC decided that all presenters would be compelled to wear poppies on Remembrance Sunday or they would take them off air for that week (McKay, 2000). Poppies have generated controversy in other workplaces such as the Coates Viyella factory in Derry where in 1997 the company suspended employees for wearing a poppy in contravention of company policy. More recently, a line manager at the British Passport Office in Belfast asked an employee to remove her poppy following complaints from work colleagues (McDonald, 2008). For some managers, there is also a concern that employees may view wearing a poppy as evidence of their political preferences and potential for partisan decision-making:

> 'There is no reason why I would be guarded, for example, about wearing a poppy outside work. I would fully subscribe to, and I do believe, that the dead should be honoured and all

those sorts of things, but as head of Human Resources, there might be people who would say that if I wore a poppy I was making some sort of semi-political statement or whatever. I would wear the poppy outside on Remembrance Day, but I think people just may at some stage in the future go back and say, "I think that his actions were slanted; in some way skewed. And I remember he's probably in the Orange Order"' (Protestant Male HR Director, SDC).

Sporting Affiliations

'In Northern Ireland, all significant aspects of life are bound up with the politics of division. Sport is no exception' (Sugden and Bairner, 1993: p1).

Employees' ethno-national identity informs their sporting interests because they are influential aspects of 'individual socialisation and community construction' (Sugden and Bairner, 1993: p10). The types of sport people are interested in and, in the case of soccer, many of the teams supported by Catholics and Protestants mirror their ethno-national affiliations (Coulter, 1999a). This is the case with Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports, as well as support for local (e.g. 'Catholic' Cliftonville and 'Protestant' Linfield), Scottish (e.g. 'Catholic' Celtic and 'Protestant' Rangers) and international (i.e. Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) football teams. Few Protestants participate in GAA games and, therefore, an interest in these activities is seen as signifying Catholic identity (Coulter 1999a). Indeed, GAA sports are only available as part of the national curriculum in Catholic schools and almost all of the supporters and participants are from Catholic communities. The reasons why Protestants do not participate in GAA sports are put down to the GAA's overt Irish history and ethos (cf. Sugden and Bairner, 1993), which is by implication a significant barrier for many Protestants:

'It's a political issue in the same way that you would perceive the Orange Order to be a political issue. The GAA is exclusively a Catholic organisation. Although they've made particular strides to change that but it's perceived as Catholic in the same way as Orange Order is perceived as Protestant. No Protestant will play Gaelic football generally because it's not played in their schools. It's played in the Catholic schools. So a Catholic person will be brought up playing Gaelic Football along with soccer or football, whatever, whereas in Northern Ireland, you'd find it very hard to find anybody who is Protestant who has played Gaelic Football.' (Catholic Male Environmental Co-Ordinator, GDC).

Rule 21 of the GAA's constitution disbarred members of the British Army and the then Royal Ulster Constabulary from playing GAA games. This added further strength to the feeling that Protestants were not welcome in GAA sports. The problems for Protestants were epitomised by the treatment of one of the few Protestants to play GAA to a high standard. Darren Graham resigned in July 2007 because of continued derogatory comments by both players and spectators about his community background, although he later withdrew his resignation after an apology from the GAA.

There are also some sports in NI whose affiliates are more likely to come from Protestant than Catholic backgrounds. For example, players and supporters of cricket and hockey are mainly from the Protestant community - although the Protestant proportion of membership in these sports is not as high as the percentage of Catholics in GAA sports (Coulter, 1999a). The reason for Catholic reticence to participate in what they deem to be Protestant sports is their association with English cultural identity. As Coulter (ibid. p30) puts it, 'in choosing to shun [these sports] nationalists in the six counties advance an important definition of who they are or, more accurately perhaps, who they are not'.

Ethno-national division also affects those sports attractive to both communities and this is particularly true of soccer. One community or the other almost exclusively supports local clubs such as Cliftonville and Linfield. Tensions run high between supporters of these teams when they play one another, which was not helped by the fact that, until relatively recently, some teams employed a deliberate policy of fielding a team of players entirely from one community (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998). Community background also influences the decision to support Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. In other words, Catholics more often than not support the Republic of Ireland team whereas Protestants support Northern Ireland. These differences became pronounced as the post-1968 conflict progressed because, according to Sugden and Bairner (1993; cited in Coulter, 1999a), during this period the expression of ethno-national identities through support for national football teams became increasingly important to both communities. Community differences also add to the support for, and increase the rivalry between, the Scottish clubs Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic who receive widespread backing from Protestants and

45

Catholics respectively. Supporters use Irish tricolours, Union Flags, Irish and British national anthems, sectarianised chants (etc.) to indicate support for their team.

Because sporting affiliations reflect and reinforce community differences, most organisations see them as problematic and regard them in much the same way as the politicised flags and emblems already discussed in the chapter. Many sporting affiliations emphasise division and embody political connotations that can make other employees uncomfortable and increase WCR tension. While councils are legally bound to provide services for all ratepayers irrespective of the community with which they are associated, some councillors and employees remain reluctant to see funding apportioned to sports associated with the ethno-national other. Further, councils regard talk at work about sporting activities and their associated emblems as politically significant and, consequently, it is prohibited under their WCR policies. However, this has created some contention because not all sports and their associated symbols are problematised under NWE policies leading to accusations of inconsistency (see Chapter Seven).

2.6 Conclusion

When analysing the impact of identity in organisations in Northern Ireland, and assessing the extent to which WCR policies are successful, some understanding of the ideological reasons for conflict is important. On the one hand, there are religious differences between people that, according to Mitchell (2006) and Cormack and Osborne (1991), inform self-identities and the nature of NI society. There are also different ideas of nationhood and culture with some favouring a return to a United Ireland and others wanting to remain constitutionally bound to Britain. This chapter described four factors that have, in varying ways, impacted upon the nature of conflict.

The economic hardship experienced in Ireland contributed to centuries of conflict not least following the 1845 famine for which some still hold Britain responsible. The feeling that Catholics experienced economic, cultural and religious disadvantage because of Britain's role in Ireland remains strong among nationalists and republicans. Many Protestants remain unconvinced that a united Ireland would benefit

46

them and, therefore, see their interests best served by Britain arguing that the Union should remain intact. For them, greater integration with (Catholic) Ireland would surely result in the erosion of their culture and lead to discrimination and, for this reason, there is a need to defend and protect the Union with Britain.

Religion is frequently cited as a root cause of conflict, yet there is little evidence to suggest that religious differences between Protestantism and Catholicism caused the most recent period of violence. That is not to say religion is unimportant as many people attend religious ceremonies and identify as Catholic or Protestant, as evidenced in the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys* and Census data. Occasionally, anti-Catholic sentiment has furthered political ends, but warring factions have only very rarely used religion as an excuse for conflict. Religion is significant, however, in that its institutions provide a social structure for people. There are some sociological differences between the Protestant and Catholic religions in that schisms (Bruce, 1985) within Protestantism make it more difficult for Protestants to develop social cohesion in their communities, which Catholics have found easier because of their affiliation to one Church (Coulter, 1999a).

In practice, unionist and nationalist, republican and loyalist discourses continue to influence social and political attitudes across the respective communities. I explained in the chapter, for example, that the advocates of unionism and nationalism promote democratic means of achieving their ends: unionist communities argue for continued union with Britain while nationalists are stereotypically proponents of a united Ireland. Both unionists and nationalists are more openly religious than republican or loyalist, usually accepting that their respective religions have a role to play in political affairs. For loyalist and republican, violence is a legitimate method of achieving objectives because, for different reasons, they say there is no other option. Republicans have traditionally blamed British imperialism for their subjugation in Ireland arguing that violence is the only effective mode of resistance, whereas Loyalists regard their violence as the logical outcome of republican attempts to bring about a united Ireland where, despite republican claims to the contrary, their cultural identity and right to self-determination would be undermined.

Ethno-national conflict is an ever-present issue for employees and managers in organisations because even with the political improvements and documented reductions in paramilitary activity following the 1990s peace process, reports of physical violence, intimidation and harassment continue. Employees have at times deliberately made threats to those from other communities to prevent them applying for jobs to safeguard employment for existing workers (O Murchu, 2005; Shirlow, 2006). The workplace has also been used to organise collective resistance to macro-political developments in the region (Nelson, 1984; Fay *et al*, 1999). The Ulster Workers' Council 1974 dispute, commemorations of Bloody Sunday, sectarian harassment, intimidation and graffiti, and paramilitary threats to employees and managers bring to the fore the historic ideological differences between Catholics and Protestants as described earlier in the chapter. Notwithstanding the fact that much time has elapsed since many of these events occurred, employees' collective memory of them remains strong and, as Chapters Seven and Eight will show, they continue to affect employees in the workplace.

Three significant issues, flags and emblems, poppies and sporting affiliations highlight how ethno-national differences emerge in council workplaces in other ways. How people feel about the Union Flag appearing on council property, or how they perceive the poppy symbol is often taken as an indication of their community background. Likewise, many of the sporting affiliations held by employees can be indicative of their ethno-national identity, as the vast majority of those playing GAA games, supporting Glasgow Celtic, Cliftonville FC and the Republic of Ireland international football team are Catholic. Protestants rarely participate in GAA games or support the major rivals of the football teams just mentioned. The chapter introduced all of these signifiers of identity because they demonstrate how community differences materialise and because I refer to them when analysing WCR within District Councils.

There are, then, considerable areas of disagreement among the majority communities in NI that have led over time to varying degrees of conflict and, while there are differences among academics concerning the extent to which ideological disputes have contributed to the arguments, it seems they have all played some role. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, community differences continue to inform

48

attitudes at work for many of my research participants. The later chapters also demonstrate that how employees interpret and respond to community relations policies and practices rely to some extent on the narratives set out in this chapter.

3. Workplace Community Relations Policy

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the WCR policies introduced to deal with the inter-community conflict examined in Chapter Two. It also explains why policy-makers consider District Councils strategically important organisations for delivering the community relations agenda and shows how, since the mid-1970s, they have been bound by statutory commitments in this area. Government policy has focused on three major issues (Gallagher, 1995: p13): increasing opportunities for cross-community contact among Protestants and Catholics; improving levels of tolerance of other cultures; and, equal opportunities. The 'peace process' in the 1990s led to new 'consociational' (O'Leary, 1999) political arrangements and revised community relations legislation and policy initiatives. This had implications for all organisations in the region, but public authorities were identified as central to community relations delivery with, for example, s75 of the NIA (Northern Ireland Act 1998) placing upon them specific obligations for enhancing 'good relations'. The legal responsibilities set out in the chapter provided councils with the impetus to introduce a number of practical WCR measures, which I also examine. They have recently introduced new equality policies and job roles to reflect better the wider ambitions of the current good relations policy agendas. The policy language has changed with the term community relations in many cases revised and gradually replaced by the term good relations. These changes reflect the political mood and align WCR policy with local and European legislation.

The first section of the chapter describes three main phases through which community relations in NI has progressed. The second section examines the legislation with a community relations dimension. Section three focuses on two major policy frameworks (District Council Community Relations Project and the Shared Future policy). The fourth section examines the remit of government department and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and their role in District Councils. The penultimate section explains the range of initiatives employed by councils to meet their legal and policy commitments before the chapter ends with some concluding remarks. I intersperse throughout the chapter examples of where community relations initiatives address aspects of the conflict described in the previous chapter.

3.2 Phases of WCR Strategy

The first phase of development of the community relations began in the years after the commencement of the post-1968 conflict when, as described in the previous chapter, the level of violence was high. During this time, the emphasis was on containment of disorder and tackling inequality. The major strategy at this point for dealing with workplace inequality was anti-discrimination legislation (Fair Employment Act 1976) intended to reduce direct religious and political discrimination in organisations because this, along with discrimination in the housing allocation and electoral systems, was identified as one of the root causes of conflict (Fay *et al*, 1999).

As time moved on, the range and depth of policy initiatives increased. From the late 1980s, a second phase of community relations policy saw the introduction of new equality legislation (Fair Employment Act 1989) and further policy changes. The 1989 Act extended the powers of its precursor placing on larger organisations, including District Councils, greater responsibility for monitoring and tackling discrimination in employment. Policy frameworks during this phase were aimed at addressing social deprivation and included the 1991 Targeting Social Need (TSN) and 1994 Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) non-statutory guidelines. The PAFT guidelines placed responsibility with public authorities for ensuring an equitable service provision for those people in nine 'equality areas' and this principle was retained later in fair employment legislation (Osborne, 2003).

The third phase of WCR development, from the late 1990s until the present time, saw many of the previous objectives reinforced and in some cases further extended. The GFA gave rise to new legislation in the form of FETO[7] and the NIA. The legislation and policy frameworks during this phase generated a number of new obligations for District Councils but it also changed the policy emphasis from reactive community relations to proactive 'good relations' where employees from all backgrounds can work in 'shared' environments. The Harbison Review (2002) set out to establish whether community relations policy achieved its original aims; that is, to examine if relationships between Protestants and Catholics had improved to any significant degree. The review team concluded that community relations had not resulted

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[7] Some changes were made to this legislation in 2003 (to meet obligations of EU Framework Directive for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation) when it became the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. It incorporated victimisation in addition to direct and indirect discrimination.

in the levels of success initially anticipated and, therefore, they recommended further changes. As a result of their conclusions, work started on the 2005 *Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework*, which was designed to better fulfil the obligations of the GFA emphasising, among other things, the need to develop 'shared workplaces'.

3.3 Aspects of the Legislation

A précis of the legislation with a community relations dimension introduced since the 1970s is provided in this section (see Table 3.1). The most noteworthy of the statutes specific to NI include the now redundant Fair Employment Act 1976 and 1989, and more recently the NIA and FETO. The table below summarises each of the legal frameworks and lists the obligations included within them for District Councils.

Legislation	Summary of Equality/Community Relations Aspects	Key Obligations for Councils
Fair Employment Act 1976*	Outlawed direct discrimination on religious/political grounds in employment. Created Register of Equal Opportunity Employers. Established Fair Employment Agency[9]	Prevent direct discrimination in employment on religious/political grounds. Only work with organisations listed on Register of Equal Opportunity Employers.
Fair Employment Act 1989*	Established Fair Employment Commission[9]. Established Fair Employment Tribunal. Both direct and indirect discrimination illegal. Retained 'Register of Equal Opportunity Employers'. Affirmative action required where weaknesses identified.	Prohibit direct and indirect discrimination. Automatically registered as Equal Opportunity employer[8] with Fair Employment Commission[9]. Monitor religious make up of workforce. Review recruitment, training and promotion policies once every three years. Only subcontract work to Equal Opportunity employers. Affirmative action plans when necessary and practical.
Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998	Unlawful to discriminate, directly or indirectly, in employment (applying for a job or promotion) or in provision of goods, services and facilities on grounds of religion or politics. Affirmative action required where inequalities identified. Set up and defined functions of Equality Commission Northern Ireland that replaced four organisations including the Fair Employment Commission. Fair Employment Tribunal retained.	Equality in recruitment and selection, training, promotion opportunities and service provision. Automatic registration as equal opportunity employer. Submit annual equal opportunity monitoring return[10] to ECNI. Review workforce data and practices at least once every three years. Take affirmative action where necessary and practical.
Northern Ireland Act 1998	Promotion / mainstreaming[11] of good relations among groups in nine Equality Categories (see Table 3.2 below). Equality Schemes required from employers. Established Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Effective consultation necessary before policy implementation.	Proactive mainstreaming of good relations policy. Good relations strategy and action plan. Preparation and implementation of Equality Schemes reviewed every five years by ECNI. Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs). Annual Public Authority Progress Reports on s75 duties.

Table 3.1: Equality/Good Relations legislation from 1976-2009[12]. * No longer on the statute books

[8] All applicable public sector Equal Opportunity employers are listed in the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006, which includes "Any District Council".
[9] No longer in existence.
[10] Councils must include data on employees' community background, sex and occupational group. In addition, they are legally obliged to provide this data on those receiving promotions and leaving the organisation.
[11] Defined by the Council of Europe as 'the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a[n] ... equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking' (cited in ECNI 2005 Guide to Statutory Duties).

The Fair Employment Act (1976) was introduced to improve employment rights for Catholics and Protestants in the labour market by prohibiting direct religious discrimination, which the newly formed Fair Employment Agency (FEA) was responsible for monitoring. The Act gave the FEA the power to initiate investigations into employers, including public authorities, suspected of discriminatory practices (Osborne and Cormack, 1989, 2003). Evidence from FEA investigations suggested that Catholics were under-represented in the public sector and particularly in managerial positions while it also identified areas of weakness in public sector employment policy (Osborne, 2003). Following criticism that the legislation and the FEA were ineffective in addressing employment discrimination (Miller, 1988), a new Act was introduced in the late 1980s.

The Fair Employment Act (1989) saw the FEA replaced by a Fair Employment Commission (FEC) and the introduction of a Fair Employment Tribunal. All employers with more than ten employees were required to provide annual workforce monitoring data to the FEC and to prevent both direct and indirect religious and political discrimination (Gallagher, 1995). Moreover, the Act required employers to collect community background data on job applicants, to write statements on job advertisements encouraging applications from under-represented groups and to generate timescales for achieving pre-determined performance indicators. In other words, there was a new focus on attaining clearly defined improvements in equality for Protestants and Catholics (Osborne, 2003).

The late 1990s saw a further substantial revision to the legislation with the passing into law of FETO. This statute maintained many elements of the previous legislation, retaining the Fair Employment Tribunal and the requirement for affirmative action; however, it broadened employers' commitments to the prevention of discrimination to the provision of goods, services and facilities (Osborne, 2003.). This legislation also outlaws discrimination by many different organisations including employment agencies, further and higher education institutions, vocational organisations and sub-contractors. For councils, the legislation applies to most facets of their recruitment and selection decision-making processes including how they appoint contract workers. The government introduced another major piece of legislation at this time, the NIA, spelling out for councils a number of additional duties. Chapter 47 s75

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[12] Before the Fair Employment Act (1976), the Constitution Act (1973) made it illegal for public authorities to discriminate against people on religious or political grounds. However, it was not until the introduction of the 1976 Act that the state made a major attempt to attend to this type of discrimination (Breen, 2001) and, therefore, my analysis begins with the 1976 statute.

of the Act requires public authorities to 'have due regard to the need' to promote good relations among those with different political, religious and racial beliefs and backgrounds. The intent behind the new legislation was summarised by the ECNI as follows:

'Section 75 was intended to be transformative; to change the practices of government and public authorities so that equality of opportunity and good relations are central to policy making and implementation. It formalised the role of the public sector in their promotion and ultimately was aimed at improving lives' (ECNI 2008 *S75 Review – Final Report*: p45).

The NIA lists a total of nine equality categories (Table 3.2) and councils are obliged to pay particular attention to, and in many cases undertake statutory Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) on, how major decisions impact upon these groups.

Religious Belief	Political Opinion	Racial Group
Age	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation
Gender	Disability	Dependency[13]

Table 3.2: Nine NIA 1998 Equality Categories

The statutory duties for councils, as set out in NIA (Schedule 9), include the provision of an equality scheme approved and agreed by ECNI (see Figure 3.1 below). Councils are required to follow a three-step process (see Appendix 2) whereby they regularly monitor the scheme and make the results of this monitoring available to the public. In addition to those duties listed below, councils are committed to consulting relevant stakeholders on the scheme's effectiveness.

A scheme shall state, in particular, the authority's arrangements:
(a) for assessing its compliance with the duties under section 75 and for consulting on matters to which a duty under that section is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted),
(b) for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity,
(c) for monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity,
(d) for publishing the results of such assessments as are mentioned in paragraph (b) and such monitoring as is mentioned in paragraph (c),
(e) for training staff,
(f) for ensuring, and assessing, public access to information and to services provided by the authority.

Figure 3.1: District Councils' Statutory Duties under NIA1998 Schedule 9

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[13] Those with and without dependents.

3.4 Aspects of Policy

Community relations policy has also been the subject of considerable change. The table below (3.3) highlights two policies to impact on District Councils' WCR strategy and lists the specific obligations they place with councils.

Policy	Summary	Obligations on District Councils
District Council Community Relations Programme 1990 – Present	Dedicated Community Relations Officer in Councils. Cross-council agreement required on main principles. Associated projects determined on the basis of local need. 75% funding provided by Community Relations Unit.	Appoint Community Relations Officer. Obtain agreement on key principles. Define community relations policy statement. Devise projects to enhance community relations.
Shared Future Framework 2005[14] – Present	Headline commitments include: shared space for employees, promoting cultural diversity, addressing sectarianism, shared communities. Gradually phase out DCCRPs and replace them with 'a better-resourced and focused programme' (Shared Future Policy 2005). Recommended a new Good Relations Challenge Programme[15] to replace the DCCRP. Funding for good relations work conditional on successful achievement of agreed aims.	Councils key organisations in delivering these objectives. Action required in councils at all levels. Councils 'held to account' for their responsibilities. Chief Executive Officer and good relations staff should work closely and be active in delivery. Three-year good relations action plan provided by all councils. Training to include councillors and officials.

Table 3.3: Summary of Major WCR Policies

The most significant practical initiative informing councils' community relations work is the District Council Community Relations Programmes (DCCRPs[16]) set up in 1989 by a small government department, the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU)[17]. All twenty-six councils currently subscribe to the programme with each having achieved cross-party agreement on three issues: 1) the general aims of the programme; 2) the projects they will put in place; and, 3) a council community relations policy statement. Each council has, as per DCCRP conditions, also appointed at least one CRO to oversee the programme the main purpose of which is to fund and offer support to community relations projects with a cross-

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[14] A 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration' is currently being drafted for implementation and will replace the Shared Future framework.

[15] The final proposals have at the time of writing yet to be finalised and implemented.

[16] It is important to note that while the DCCRPs continue to inform the councils' activity, there are plans following the Harbison Review (2002) to replace them with 'Good Relations Challenge Programmes', but the detail and implementation of these new initiative have yet to be finalised.

[17] This was established in 1987 but in 2000 renamed as the Community Relations Unit.

community reconciliation agenda in local communities. However, the CROs appointed to carry out the DCCRPs in councils also play a key role in councils' WCR initiatives (see section below on WCR in District Councils).

Further policy initiatives such as the 'Partnership for Equality' White Paper, TSN and PAFT guidelines were introduced in the 1990s because it was accepted that socio-economic inequalities had yet to be tackled sufficiently by previous initiatives (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003). The PAFT policy focused on the need to ensure equality in all areas of public sector service provision, which is a principle that continues to inform government policy. As a result of PAFT, public sector organisations were required to 'equality proof' (Osborne, 1996; cited in Hughes and Donnelly, 2003: p644) all significant decisions and thereby limit any negative impact on defined equality groups, which were included in the later NIA.

As the previous section on legal aspects documented, the signing of the GFA and implementation of the NIA led to significant changes in community relations policy emphasising the promotion of good relations. However, following the Harbison Review's criticism of community relations provision in 2002 the government introduced in 2005 the Shared Future framework. This policy made a number of proposals for managing community relations (Ultach Trust 2003; cited in Graham and Nash, 2006) and District Councils were seen as key organisations that 'should set the pace on movement toward a shared society and should lead by example' (OFMDFM, 2005: p13). The Shared Future recommendations included the reorganisation of two strategically important organisations, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC) and Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) (described in more detail below), with considerable oversight responsibility for the community relations agenda. It also specified ten key indicators (see Table 3.4) and all relevant stakeholders, including the councils, began working towards them. Initial government pronouncements described the over-riding aim of Shared Future as to help reconcile differences through 'sharing' and 'dialogue' such that full participation in society is possible for everyone and that mutual understanding and respect is central to NI society (Graham and Nash, 2006).

Tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism	Reclaiming shared space
Reducing tensions at interface areas	Shared education
Shared communities	Supporting good relations through diversity and cultural diversity
Shared workplaces	Good Relations, community development and tackling disadvantage
Ensuring that voice is given to victims	Shared services

Table 3.4: Shared Future Key Indicators

(Adapted from Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework, 2005)

Each indicator has implications for District Councils. They are, for example, required again to deal with the 'visible manifestations of sectarianism' such as paramilitary flags and emblems, and to 'promote diversity' in their workplaces. Ten Shared Future 'priority areas' and headline commitments related to the key indicators were also devised and further refined following publication of the *Shared Future 2006 Triennial Action Plan*. The seventh priority area is the most significant for WCR as it states that 'all workplaces are safe and shared'. The associated headline commitments include: 'continue to ensure good and harmonious working places and relationships and that front line staff are fully trained and aware of the implications of the principles of a Shared Future for service delivery'; and, 'continue to treat sectarian, racist or homophobic harassment as a serious disciplinary matter'.

The need to 'mainstream' equality and community relations provision is central to WCR policy. Indeed, the *2005 ECNI Guide to Statutory Duties* emphasised this as one of the most important requirements of public authorities' good relations strategies. ECNI guidance stipulates that councils need to integrate or 'mainstream' this responsibility into all areas by, for example, ensuring appropriate community relations objectives, timescales and funding are agreed at senior management level to bring this about *(2005 ECNI Guide to Statutory Duties)*.

The chapter has thus far provided some indication of the type of direction and support provided by regional community relations organisations in the District Councils' community relations strategies. The next section examines these organisations and describes more precisely how their remit influences WCR in councils.

3.5 The Role of Government Departments, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Social Enterprises

There are three main types of organisation (see Table 3.5) with varying degrees of influence on WCR within councils: government departments, NDPBs, and, a variety of social enterprises (SEs). The government departments and NDPBs are examined in more depth later, but numerous SEs with a community relations agenda have also emerged and they comprise voluntary, charitable and community associations. They provide varying degrees of training and consultancy services for councils on WCR policy compliance. Although not listed in the table below, the recognised trade unions also contribute to councils' WCR policy, as councils consult with them before introducing WCR initiatives, as they did when councils first introduced Neutral Working Environment (NWE) policies in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, in 1990, trade unionists from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) established Counteract, one of the SEs/NGOs listed below, to help improve community relations in the workplace.

Government Departments	Non-Departmental Public Bodies	Social Enterprises[18]
OFMDFM (Equality Unit)	Equality Commission Northern Ireland	Future Ways
OFMDFM (Community Relations Unit)	Northern Ireland Community Relations Council	Mediation Northern Ireland
	Labour Relations Agency[19]	Counteract
	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Co-Operation Ireland
		TIDES

Table 3.5: Organisations Involved in Community Relations

The Community Relations Unit (CRU), located within the Good Relations and Reconciliation division of the OFMDFM is the main government department responsible for community relations. It has retained its predecessor's (the Central Community Relations Unit) task of allocating seventy-five percent of funding for programme costs for DCCRPs, with the other twenty-five percent coming from council funds. The CRU also reviews council good relations action plans ensuring they are aligned with Shared Future objectives, particularly

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[18] The social enterprises listed here are the more well known with a WCR remit. However, many other social enterprises of varying sizes contribute to community relations initiatives.
[19] This organisation shares many similarities with the UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). It provides guidance on employment law and mediates employee relations disputes.

those pertaining to public service provision where the expectation is that 'public services are delivered impartially' (*Shared Future Triennial Action Plan 2006-09*: p8).

The 2005 Shared Future framework led to a series of changes in the structures and responsibilities of two NDPBs - ECNI and NICRC - and both emerged with substantial remits for strategic and operational implementation of the community relations agenda. Both organisations are involved as co-Chairs in a regional Good Relations Forum (distinct from the council-level good relations forums to be discussed later) established in 2005 and described as a community relations 'think-tank' comprised of policy-makers and practitioners. While the over-arching responsibility for this work lies with government departments, the ECNI and NICRC retain a degree of autonomy from government structures. The chapter provides further details of both NDPBs' activities because they play a central role in the community relations agenda, and significantly influence District Councils' provision.

'The Equality Commission has the vision of Northern Ireland as a shared, integrated and inclusive place, a society where difference is respected and valued, based on equality and fairness for the entire community' (ECNI *Corporate Plan 2006-09*: p7).

The ECNI is a statutory organisation constituted by the NIA (Schedule 8) with a brief to monitor and implement equality and good relations provision in District Councils. The NIA set out its duties as follows:

Keeping under review the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75,
Offering advice to public authorities and others in connection with those duties,
Carrying out other functions conferred on it by the provisions of Schedule 9, including preparation of guidelines on equality schemes, responding to Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs); and,
in certain areas, referral of equality schemes to the Secretary of State.

Figure 3.2 NIA Schedule 8 ECNI Duties

It replaced four other organisations: the Fair Employment Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission, Northern Ireland Disability Council, and Commission for Racial Equality. In addition to the NIA, a number of other legislative changes at local and European level inform much of what ECNI does with, for example, the recent introduction of new sex, race,

disability and sexual orientation laws having major implications. A significant element of the commission's work with councils is, as indicated in the 'Aspects of Policy' section, to provide guidance on, and to approve, statutory equality schemes as determined by the NIA (Schedule 9). Each District Council must establish an approved scheme detailing its procedures for meeting NIA (s75) good relations duties and the means by which it will assess the scheme's effectiveness. The ECNI reviews public authorities' annual good relations progress reports before they publish generic conclusions and recommendations in an annual report. Indeed, a report on the 2005-06 period identified 'considerable variation' in authorities' plans with some authorities 'yet to substantially address the duty' (ECNI 2007: p4).

The ECNI covers five strategic areas: Strategic Enforcement; Promotion and Education; Employment Development; Policy and Development; and, Corporate Services. The support for councils arising from this work includes discrimination advice, equality training and up-to-date guidance on equality and good relations issues. It also monitors councils' responsibilities under FETO. Further, the NIA (s75) requires that in some circumstances the equality commission formally investigate allegations of discrimination. Equality Commission Northern Ireland is also influential in other ways with, for example, the Policy and Development Unit informing public policy and contributing to equality elements of emerging agendas such as the Review of Public Administration (RPA). As discussed in next the chapter, the RPA will fundamentally restructure public authorities reducing significantly the total number of councils and the volume of people employed by them. To date, the ECNI has participated in discussions regarding these changes to minimise any detrimental equality outcomes and they will continue to perform this role after the introduction of the RPA.

The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC) is the other NDPB with considerable responsibility for community relations. An assessment of community relations activity undertaken in 1986 by the Northern Ireland Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights recommended this organisation's establishment, and it began work in 1990 as an independent, public limited charitable organisation with a remit for enhancing social cohesion among Catholics and Protestants. It oversees and allocates the CRU's funding for DCCRPs and it is responsible for: the commissioning and publication of research into conflict, practical guidance to councils on good relations, and community relations training delivery. In all, seven programmes of work are undertaken: Cultural Diversity, Policy and

Development, Funding and Development, European, Finance and Administration, Communications and Learning Resources, and IFI Community Bridges. In its 2007-10, Strategic Plan the NICRC highlighted a number of significant principles and strategic priorities, but its overarching philosophy draws to some extent from Future Ways' Equity, Diversity and Interdependence framework discussed in the introductory chapter. Indeed, the current Chairman is a former Co-Director of Future Ways and his introduction in the plan refers to all three elements of this framework. The major priorities set out by NICRC in their Strategic Plan include increased recognition as a regional body for community relations work and to further deal with violence and conflict (see Table 3.6).

1.	In the context of "A Shared Future", position the Community Relations Council as the regional body for community relations
2.	Challenge and support all sections of our society to work together with each other to promote sustained trust and interdependence
3.	Communicate a vision of a shared society
4.	Extend the work of the Community Relations Council to reflect the developing cultural diversity of our community
5.	Ensure that the legacy of violence and conflict is actively addressed, underpinning movement towards a peaceful future for all
6.	Maintain an organisation that is fit for purpose delivering services that are effective, efficient and in line with best practice

Table 3.6: NICRC Strategic Priorities.
(Source: NICRC Strategic Plan 2007-10)

The 2005 Shared Future framework specified the need for NICRC to be an 'enhanced and more broadly representative' (OFMDFM, 2005: p50) organisation. In its revised form, it works more closely with the ECNI to promote good relations across the region offering training, guidance and support, while serving as a 'challenge function [...] on their good relations plans' (OFMDFM, 2005: p51).

3.6 WCR in District Councils

In this section, I describe in detail the councils' WCR initiatives. Councils must adhere to the underpinning principles of fair and equitable employment and service provision; they must

also provide shared work environments, be politically neutral and 'mainstream' WCR measures. Most community relations projects fall into one of four categories (CORPUS, 2000; cf. Knox *et al*, 1993): high profile community relations events; inter/intra community development; cultural traditions; and, focused community relations programmes. Councils use all four of these project types to assist their compliance with legal and policy duties (see Chapter Six).

The explicit practical obligations arising from community relations commitments comprise *inter alia* Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) of all major council decisions, provision of annual equal opportunities monitoring returns to the ECNI[20], and good relations strategies and action plans. Councils put into practice additional initiatives such as good relations forums (GRFs), structured training programmes, and provide periodic policy updates while many CROs attend meetings of Local Government Association networks. The analysis below pays particular attention to NWE and good relations strategies and action plans, EQIAs, training provision and the work of GRFs.

Although the policy guidelines emphasise the importance of involving the full range of managers, employees and councillors in mainstreaming community relations and embedding responsibility throughout councils, CROs perform a pivotal role in community relations policy delivery (CORPUS, 2000). A definition of the CRO role identified four main areas of work (Knox *et al*, 1993: p5):

- developmental: initiate contact, investigation and appraisal work usually related to existing groups;
- promotional: increase public awareness through the supply of information to organisations and groups, advice, guidance and encouragement;
- provider: actively involved in the actual organisation and delivery of programmes;
- enabler: enable groups to generate projects themselves and take on ownership of them, leaving community relations officers to concentrate on network building, co-ordination, funding, training and disseminating models of good practice.

The CRO job description also inflated as the community relations agenda expanded. They now co-ordinate and carry out good relations strategic plans, collate monitoring returns for

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[20] Councils must maintain data on the community background, gender, and occupation of part-time and full-time employees to provide 'an annual snapshot' of the workforce; but it also includes information on job applicants, appointees, 'promotees' and leavers (ECNI 2004 *Step-by-Step Guide to Monitoring*).

the ECNI, undertake EQIAs, administer GRFs, attend and disseminate information from Local Government Association network events, attend council committee meetings to input on community relations issues, and organise and deliver community relations training. The next section describes the longstanding NWE policy and explains why councils continue to emphasise neutrality in the workplace.

3.6.1 Neutral Working Environment

Councils devised and implemented NWE policies in the 1980s and 1990s to reduce conflict at work by limiting many of the chill factors (Shirlow, 2006) described in the previous chapter such as the display of flags and emblems. The ECNI described NWE as a policy that:

> 'promote[s] a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated because of his or her religious belief or political opinion, for example, prohibit the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti or the circulation of materials or the deliberate articulation of slogans or songs which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension among groups of employees' (ECNI 2003 *Fair Employment Code of Practice*: p16).

As Chapter Two indicated, these chill factors (Teague, 1997; Shirlow, 2006) can increase segregation and result in accusations of discrimination. Further, the chill factors inform employees' perceptions of the workplace and can limit the likelihood of them applying for work in, and remaining with, organisations where they are prevalent. For this reason, councils were encouraged to consult with trade unions before adopting NWE schemes. The *Fair Employment Code of Practice* contains recommendations for organisations and recognised trade unions to enter into a 'Joint Declaration of Protection' of employees that sets out the principles of workplace neutrality. Indeed, councils typically follow the sentiment and in some cases the wording of the Code of Practice definition (see Table 3.7 below) when constructing their own NWE declarations; although they also often prohibit talk about sensitive subjects such as paramilitary affiliation and political ideals not necessarily mentioned in declarations. In fulfilling NWE policy, councils monitor work environments carrying out visual checks for breaches of policy. However, they also rely on reports from employees and trade union representatives and local interventions by managers, which commonly involve informal and, therefore, often undocumented resolutions to problems as they arise.

District Council	Neutral Work Environment Declarations
Armagh City and District Council[21]	The Council declares that its premises shall be a neutral work environment. It therefore prohibits the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti or the circulation of any material or deliberate articulation of slogans or songs which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension to a particular group of employees.
Craigavon Borough Council[22]	The Council declares that all work places should be neutral and that an intimidating work environment should be discouraged by prohibiting the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti, or the circulation of any material or deliberate articulation of slogans or songs which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension to a particular group of employees. Notwithstanding, this does not prohibit the Council from flying the Union Flag at any of its buildings or displaying a portrait of HM the Queen or any other Civic memorabilia at the Civic Centre and Town Halls.
Belfast City Council[23]	The essence of a neutral working environment is that employees should not be subjected to a detriment by feeling intimidated or harassed or subject to any form of "chill factor" in the workplace.

Table 3.7: Examples of Neutral Work Environment Declarations

The premise that organisations should maintain politically neutral environments was the subject of two legal test cases brought before the Fair Employment Tribunal because despite the commitments laid down in the legislation, there was some confusion over what symbols organisations should prohibit. In 1995, an employee of the aircraft manufacturer Shorts took the first case (*Brennan vs. Shorts Plc.*) and argued that flags and emblems on the factory floor amounted to sectarian harassment. The Tribunal upheld his complaint and specified that 'a neutral working environment is one where employees can work without contemplating their own or any one person's religious beliefs or political opinion'. In a later case (*Johnson vs. Belfast City Council*), an employee from Belfast City Council's Cleansing Depot made a complaint about a portrait of the British monarch, which colleagues had placed in a shared room in the Depot. Again, the Tribunal found in the employee's favour and the judgement stated that the portrait was 'inappropriate with the religious and political makeup of the workforce'. However, unionist-controlled councils continue to fly the Union Flag leading to a Judicial Review in 2001. Lord Chief Justice Kerr ruled that flying the Union Flag on designated days and in the appropriate places did not contravene the GFA.

Although the more recent government-level legal and policy initiatives emphasise proactive approaches to community relations and the promotion of good relations, the principle of

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[21] Armagh City and District Council 2004 Equality Impact Assessment on Flying of Flags and Emblems.
[22] Craigavon Borough Council 2002 Consultation Document - Equality Impact Assessment of Flying of the Union Flag and Rescreening of Policy on Flag Flying,
[23] Belfast City Council 2004 *Flying of the Union Flag: An Equality Impact Assessment.*

neutrality remains a key component of WCR policy. For example, the Shared Future framework contends that social spaces such as the workplace should remain neutral environments; therefore, even though, as the next section discusses, there has been an ideological shift in emphasis from neutrality to promotion of good relations, councils have retained political neutrality as an important principle. As Dickson *et al* (2002: p20) explain, neutral workplaces are essential not only for reducing workforce segregation or limiting accusations of discrimination, they also 'create a fertile setting for more adventurous initiatives to promote higher levels of respect for diversity'.

3.6.2 Good Relations Strategies

Good relations became the focus of WCR following the changes in legislation outlined above and because of criticism that NWE policies limit the opportunity for reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants. The 'Aspects of Legislation' section set out the good relations commitments embedded in NIA s75 but the ECNI defines the basic philosophy of good relations as:

> 'The growth of relationships and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its form' (ECNI, 2008: *Promoting Good Relations – A Summary Guide for Public Authorities*).

Councils' plans for tackling good relations commitments are outlined in their statutory good relations strategies and action plans. As with other WCR initiatives, the ECNI has issued guidance on how to construct good relations strategies. This guidance indicates seven topics for inclusion (ECNI 2007 *Good Relations Guide for Public Authorities*: p28):

(i)   a vision or aim;

(ii)   key principles underpinning the strategy;

(iii)   an action plan and timetable for implementation;

(iv)   a commitment to consultation;

(v)   a commitment to the communication of the strategy;

(vi)   training plans, and performance indicators and targets; and

(vii)   regular monitoring, review and evaluation.

Derry City Council, for example, released its second strategy in 2008 and included ten aims for the period 2008-11 such as 'mainstreaming' good relations commitments. In keeping with good practice, these strategic aims are supplemented by clear timelines, budgets and performance indicators (cf. DCC *Good Relations Strategy, 2008/09 – 20010/11*). The good relations strategy and action plans are aligned with Shared Future priority outcomes highlighted earlier in the 'Aspects of Policy' section.

Councils provide annual *Public Authority Progress Reports* on their NIA (s75) duties. They must indicate in their reports any good relations weaknesses and specify appropriate action plans. The reports should also list any s75 complaints received and how, specifically, councils will deal with them. The emphasis in these reports is on defining how councils will ensure compliance with the legislation and, where problems have not been resolved, why resolution was not possible.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are the main processes used by councils to monitor the effects of policy decisions on employees and service users (ECNI 2008 *s75 Review – Final Report*). They are structured around a 'seven-step' process: (i) definition of the aims of the policy, (ii) consideration of available data and research, (iii) assessment of potential and actual impacts, (iv) consideration of measures, (v) formal consultation, (vi) decision and publication of the results of the EQIA, and (vii) monitoring for adverse impact. When undertaking an EQIA, councils and other public authorities must consider whether their policy decisions are likely to cause problems for those groups in the nine Equality Categories specified in the NIA.

Councils' WCR policy commitments include a requirement that employees, managers and elected representatives receive sufficient training and development in WCR. As the quote below demonstrates, the ECNI emphasises the importance of effective training in the guidance it provides for councils:

> 'Training for employees is one of the most important initiatives that public authorities can take to facilitate the promotion of good relations. Training ensures that employees are fully aware, and informed, of what is expected of them, and it also contributes to individual personal growth, awareness of the need to secure equal citizenship, and the benefits of a more open, diverse and intercultural society' (ECNI, 2007; *Good Relations Guide for Public Authorities*: p36).

This is necessary to ensure compliance with the NIA duty to promote and mainstream good relations and to comply with the FETO obligations. Moreover, the 2005 Shared Future framework explicitly demands that councillors and council officials receive community relations training while all councils' good relations strategies should specify WCR training plans (ECNI, 2007; *Good Relations Guide for Public Authorities*).

The empirical and documentary research for the thesis identified some common training strategies. Council employees usually receive initial WCR awareness training supplemented by periodic updates following new policy guidance. It is less common for management development programmes to incorporate community relations training as a core element. Most councils expect newly appointed managers either to have already a clear understanding of the ethno-national dynamics in their workplaces or to learn on the job from more experienced colleagues. There is currently no mandatory training for councillors on good relations, although this was a recent ECNI recommendation (ECNI 2008 *s75 Review Final Report*). When a more detailed training programme is in place, it usually incorporates GRF events facilitated by external agencies. During these events, councils invite employees to discuss politically sensitive topics and advise them on how to manage cross-community relationships. When councils offer this kind of training, the tendency is to commission external agencies for delivery because there are sensitive issues involved. Councils have enlisted as training providers organisations such as TIDES, Future Ways, Counteract and Mediation Northern Ireland. Their approach has focused on learning through constructive dialogue between Catholic and Protestant participants.

Good Relations Forums encourage greater contact between Protestants and Catholics (and the other groups highlighted in the s75 equality categories). Membership of GRFs include employees, managers, councillors, representatives of religious groups, local business owners and others from a range of community backgrounds. Meetings occur periodically and, depending on the council, somewhat sporadically. Some meetings discuss current community relations issues such as flags disputes while others consider planned changes to policy and contribute to consultation processes. Good Relations Forum events help councils meet good relations commitments because they are proactive measures aimed at increasing mutual understanding and respect through enhanced cross-community contact. Given that councils still operate NWE policies, and therefore discussion of WCR matters is heavily restricted, GRFs are important mechanisms for tackling difficulties.

In addition to the council level GRFs, regional forums for CROs and GROs were set up to encourage the sharing of good practice between councils. Participating officers and keynote speakers give presentations at organised events occurring throughout the year. Other methods of sharing good practice take place such as visits to destinations outside Northern Ireland. For example, representatives from some councils travelled to Holland to discuss how they managed the integration of increasing numbers of migrant workers. There have also been visits to other councils in the UK such as Bradford, Manchester and Birmingham, which have experienced cross-community unrest.

Councils near the border with the Republic of Ireland have been building tentative links through forums with some of their cross-border counterparts. Strabane and Derry City District Councils, for instance, participate in cross-border partnership working designed to improve perception and understanding among the residents of Strabane, Derry and Donegal (in the Republic of Ireland) councils. In recent times, councils have launched additional initiatives with, for example, Strabane District Council committing to the establishment of a Flags, Emblems and Memorial Forum to support a community re-imaging project. The purpose of these initiatives is to remove or replace many of those contentious symbols referred to in the previous chapter. These projects operate alongside a variety of community support projects, many of which have been functioning in various guises for a number of decades.

District Councils also have in place formal complaints procedures whereby employees can raise concerns about community relations provision. The procedures can lead to investigations by external agencies. Where councils do not satisfactorily deal with complaints, they can be referred to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. Other community relations practices have emerged as councils work through policy expectations. For example, a number of councils have introduced Bonfire committees liaise with local communities on the management of 12th July celebrations. Community Relations Week is an annual event to which organisations and groups with a community relations focus are asked to contribute and councils are among the organisations who facilitate awareness sessions, drama performances, poetry readings (etc) to which employees and others are invited to attend. The final common practice is for councils to communicate regular community relations policy updates for employees.

3.7 Conclusion

The chapter summarised the equality and community relations obligations from the legislation and policy frameworks. The last three decades or so have seen a number of changes including the development of consociational political structures and alterations to WCR policy. Because of these changes, councils are now legally obliged to more effectively and proactively monitor equal opportunities and to take reasonable steps to resolve problems when they arise. Councils must also mainstream policy and promote harmonious relations among people from diverse backgrounds. Good relations strategies encourage constructive cross-community contact that gives people from different communities the opportunity to learn about one another's respective cultures and traditions. While policy frameworks emphasise a good relations philosophy, councils also continue to operate neutrality policies.

Both the NICRC and ECNI, who act in an advisory/consultative capacity, help inform councils' community relations work. They are key agencies in council community relations as between them they formally agree strategy, evaluate councils' provision, and advise on good practice, among other things, while the government's CRU performs an important oversight and funding role. Non-governmental organisations and social enterprises also work alongside councils. The next chapter outlines the context in which District Councils operate. It describes the nature of employee relations and the structures in place for delivering services at each organisation. The chapter also examines the phases of community relations transition through which each case study council has progressed and it details how they manage their community relations obligations. Despite the various legal and policy duties documented here, there are differences in how the three councils approach WCR.

4. Community Relations, Social Identity and the Workplace

4.1 Introduction

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the study of community difference and why conflict in NI has continued for so long has been approached from a variety of perspectives. This chapter outlines key arguments from the academic literature on community relations. It begins by summarising the evidence from attitudinal surveys on perceptions of community relations and on attitudes toward mixed workplaces. The data reveals a high level of optimism in recent years regarding community relations and working in mixed environments. The second section of the chapter summarises the literature specifically on community relations policy implementation. There are macro-level analyses that critically evaluate the purpose of legal and policy frameworks (e.g. Osborne and Cormack, 1989; Osborne, 1996, 2003). Other macro-level studies question the philosophical and political foundations of community relations policy arguing, for example, that insufficient attention is paid to the role of the state in generating and maintaining divisions between Catholics and Protestants (e.g. Graham and Nash, 2006; McVeigh and Rolston, 2007). There are also micro-level analyses that predominantly adopt a SIT perspective to examine intergroup behaviour between Catholics and Protestants (e.g. Gallagher, 1989; Cairns *et al*, 1995; Cassidy and Trew, 2004; Muldoon *et al*, 2007). They argue that identity difference is a key reason why conflict continues and that in order to reconcile differences it is important to understand how identity is socially constructed and reproduced.

Section three of the chapter discusses a burgeoning literature that has adopted a SIT theoretical framework for analysing intergroup relations and communication in the workplace (Dickson and Hargie, 1999, 2006; Dickson *et al*, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Hargie and Dickson, 2005; Hargie *et al*, 2003, 2008). This research demonstrates that there are a number of barriers to effective implementation of WCR initiatives at a workplace-level. For example, it highlights a gap in understanding, and employee confusion about, WCR policies and that people at work generally avoid WCR issues preferring instead to deal informally with such issues when they arise.

Organisation studies has debated many of the issues raised by Dickson and Hargie's research and provides further insights into how and why change is embraced and resisted at work. The fourth section, therefore, sets out key arguments from this literature used later to analyse the research findings. It considers how change in organisations is viewed and theorised and how it impacts on, and is affected by, identity concerns and issues. It describes how in organisations people often react negatively to change because they are concerned about how change will affect them. In other words, they may see change as a threat to their sense of self; thus, change is rejected, ignored and treated with cynicism.

4.2 Attitudes to Community Relations

Attitudinal survey research from the late 1960s has examined perceptions of community relations in NI. In the early surveys such as the one undertaken by Rose (1971), most respondents were positive with reference to community relations, but perceptions began to change as violence increased in following decades. The data from a 1986 survey (Smith, 1987), for example, indicated that after high levels of violence in the 1970s and early 1980s attitudes had deteriorated and the vast majority of respondents felt things were either the same as, or worse than, the previous five years. However, things changed again and, as the 'peace process' gathered momentum during the 1990s, the survey data suggested optimism was increasing (Gallagher, 1993, 1995; Hughes and Donnelly, 2004). The data on perceptions and experiences of cross-community contact at work consistently suggests that people want more opportunity for interaction with others. Indeed, between 1989 and 1993, the number of Protestants wanting to work in mixed workplaces increased from seventy-two percent to eighty-seven percent (Gallagher, 1995). Furthermore, the findings from these and later surveys show that although they believe policy-makers should do more in this area, respondents view community relations policies and initiatives positively (Gallagher, 1993, 1995).

Survey data (see Table 5.1) from the late 1990s and early 2000s indicates that while there remained a desire for increased cross-community contact, the level of support for this decreased in the years following the GFA (Hughes and Donnelly, 2004). The datasets for the years from 2003 until 2008 show that following a period of relative political stability and historically low levels of violence, a majority of people are now more optimistic about community relations than in previous years. In 2008, ninety-four percent of Catholic and

ninety-one percent of Protestant respondents preferred to work in a mixed workplace – the highest recorded figure in the decade since the GFA. Furthermore, sixty-eight percent and sixty-three percent respectively believed that cross-community relations are better or the same in 2008 as they were five years previously. These indicators show a high degree of optimism that community relations are improving and that there is an increasing preference for mixed workplaces.

	Prefer Mixed Workplace %			CR Improved in Last 5 Yrs. %		
	Cath.	Prot.	Total	Cath.	Prot.	Total
2008	94	91	92	68	63	65
2007	92	94	93	67	64	65
2006	90	88	90	60	54	56
2005	91	86	88	54	51	52
2004	92	87	90	59	53	56
2003	87	78	83	49	42	44
2002	89	82	86	37	26	30
2001	82	70	76	33	25	28
2000	83	80	81	52	37	42
1999	91	83	86	60	42	50
1998	85	78	82	60	44	50

Table 4.1: Attitudes to Mixed Workplaces and Improvements in Community Relations.
(Source: 1998-2008 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey)

4.3 Community Relations Policy

The academic literature on community relations policy covers two overlapping areas. First, there are studies on macro-level aspects that have debated the nature and purpose of equality legislation (Osborne and Cormack, 1989; Osborne, 1996, 2003), and the appropriateness of good relations and the Shared Future framework (Graham and Nash, 2006; McVeigh and Rolston, 2007). Another series of studies has considered the extent to which policy has a discernible effect at a socio-psychological level among groups. They adopt a social identity theory (SIT) analytical framework to 'evaluate and critique attempts to reconcile the two communities' (Cairns, 1994: p14), to show how Catholic and Protestant identities are formed, and why conflict between them continues (e.g. Cairns, 1982, 1994; Muldoon *et al*, 2007; Niens *et al*, 2004; Taush *et al*, 2007). This sub-section of the chapter describes the macro-

and micro-level analyses in more detail and summarises how they address community relations policy and its impact.

4.3.1 Macro-Level Analyses

Chapter Three described the aspects of legislation with an equality and community relations dimension. Osborne (1989; 1996; 2003) reviewed the purpose and impact of this legislation arguing that, following a number of investigations into discriminatory practices in the civil service in the 1980s, the government accepted it had to put 'its own house in order' (Osborne, 1989: p288). Since then, there has been a greater concern with ensuring that public sector organisations are taking their responsibilities for equality more seriously. In a later paper, Osborne (2003) examined current legislation, including the good relations commitment to 'mainstream' effective policies and procedures throughout public authorities. He concluded that while public authorities are in the main complying with statutory obligations, this has not led to a fundamental change in approach:

> 'There is little evidence as yet that public organisations are taking mainstreaming to mean the wholesale reconsideration of how things are done both internally and in terms of how they formulate and deliver policy' (Osborne, 2003.: p356).

Osborne (2003) suggests that because statutory duties place a considerable bureaucratic burden on public authorities, it is difficult for them to go beyond compliance. Bodies such as the ECNI and NICRC require a large amount of information on policy implementation and issue a variety of guidance papers on how to promote good relations. There is a raft of legislation such as the aforementioned NIA s75 and FETO, but responsibilities also arise from the Shared Future framework and DCCRPs not to mention the legal requirements of the Race Relations Act, Human Rights Act, and so on. The NIA and FETO have also been criticised for providing no sanctions for employers who do not meet their legal duties should they have 'acted in good faith'. There is another barrier to equality at work in that the 'chill factors' discussed in Chapter Two means potential recruits are sometimes unwilling to work in areas where the other community is in the majority, thus making it difficult for employers to tackle workforce segregation.

Good relations policy has also been examined in the academic literature. In their critique of the Shared Future framework, Graham and Nash (2006) list five problem areas. First, they argue that the framework is a 'charter for apartheid rather than transition' (ibid. p257) in that it reproduces and reflects difference, reinforcing the "two traditions" model and leaving underlying differences unchallenged. A second problem is that it presumes community relations problems can be resolved by 'consumerism and a buoyant economy' (ibid. p271). In other words, the good relations ethos emphasises the benefits of a capitalist democracy for reconciling differences. Third, good relations policy focuses on individual responsibility for reconciliation and pays less attention to structural reasons for conflict and particularly socio-economic inequality. Fourth, there are concerns among the major political parties that the Shared Future agenda may hinder their political ambitions and, therefore, there is some resistance to it. Community relations is criticised by republicans for an overemphasis on internal versions of the conflict and for not considering the role of the (British) state. In addition, Sinn Fein's response to the Shared Future consultation called for recognition of their united Ireland aims. Unionist criticisms of good relations, on the other hand, allude to a fear that it would soften attitudes toward a united Ireland. A fifth problem with the Shared Future strategy is that it reflects the messy and contradictory nature of politics in NI and, in trying to achieve cross-party consensus, suffers from 'constructive ambiguity' and 'definitional illusiveness' (Graham and Nash, 2006: p260). Thus, it stresses conflict management rather than transformation or resolution.

McVeigh and Rolston (2007) criticised good relations policy describing it as a superficial 'fig leaf' masking policy-makers' inability to address the deep divisions between people in NI. In their view, community relations initiatives are attempts by a 'colonial state' to absolve itself of any blame for racism and sectarianism in NI. Like Graham and Nash (2006), they argue that the Shared Future framework cannot address divisions because it does not attend to the state's role in institutionalising differences. They further contend that because of how the NI state was formed, it is inevitably racist and sectarian and, consequently, a fundamental, state-level restructuring is required or community relations problems will continue. In their critique of government policy, Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) argue that legislation and policy initiatives do not adequately account for how people at the local level subjectively interpret their implementation despite the fact that policies are evaluated in terms of how they will impact upon each community and whether they pose a threat or represent an opportunity. As Shirlow and Murtagh (ibid.: p178) comment, 'the fundamental problem remains in that each

policy idea is deconstructed by community and political leaders in order to see how their community will benefit or, even more dismally, how it will lose out.' It is pertinent at this point in the chapter to consider the literature examining community relations issues and policy implementation at the socio-psychological level.

4.3.2 Socio-Psychological Level

The most common analytical framework for examining community relations at a socio-psychological level is SIT. This perspective builds on the work of Henri Tajfel (cf. 1978) who theorised intergroup behaviour and argued that identity emerges out of a process of social categorisation that helps us manage the complexity of the social world. People identify with influential social groups because this increases their self-esteem while they are also inclined to denigrate members of the 'out-group' (Niens *et al*, 2004). This process is integral to how we perceive 'self' and 'other' and, therefore, to our self-identity. Social identity theory became influential in the 1980s and mirrored a trend in European psychology whereby Freudian analyses of intergroup conflict (that it is the result of individual pathology) were challenged by social psychological ideas that took account of other factors such as religion, politics and history (Cairns, 1994).

The underpinning argument in SIT studies on community relations is that Protestants and Catholics identify with other Protestants and Catholics taking on the attributes of 'in-group' members, which in turn informs their sense of self and influences behaviour (Hargie *et al*, 2008). An SIT reading of the NI context suggests that the differences between Catholics and Protestants are socially constructed. Or, as Hargie *et al* (ibid: p795) note, they 'have their respective clearly defined, group-based sense of belonging [and] largely assume the political attitudes of the religious faith into which they were born'. Further, because Protestant and Catholic identities are relatively stable ascribed identities (Jenkins, 1996), they are difficult to change making it hard to reconcile differences.

Some examples of the SIT literature include Cairns and Mercer's (1984) examination of young people's attitudes toward social identity and Cairns *et al*'s (1993) and Hargie *et al*'s (1999) study of inter-group contact between University students. Cassidy and Trew (2004) investigated the impact of ethno-national identity during students' transition into University while Gallagher (1989) studied political activists' perceptions of the conflict. The extent of

division following the GFA was the subject of Muldoon *et al*'s (2007) study while Stevenson *et al* (2007) argued from their SIT research that conflict in NI is best described as a struggle for 'symbolic power' between Protestants and Catholics.

The 'contact model' is a common theme in SIT studies that evaluate whether greater interaction between Protestants and Catholics improves relationships (Niens *et al*, 2004; Paolini *et al*, 2004). The theoretical arguments underpinning these studies are derived from the work of early contact model theorists such as Allport (1954) and Amir (1969) who argued that, in ethnic conflict situations, contact under appropriate conditions between opposing groups can reduce tensions and improve relationships. Proponents of this approach contend that because of the high levels of segregation in housing, education, and so on, people have limited opportunities for cross-community contact and, therefore, division. Thus, more contact between Protestants and Catholics in favourable circumstances might eventually challenge misconceptions and soften attitudes. There are three contact models identified in the literature (cf. Niens *et al*, 2004; Pettigrew, 1998). The first is the 'decategorisation' model (Brewer and Miller, 1984) where individual members of each group meet one another away from other in-group members. There is also a 'recategorisation' model (Gaertner *et al*, 1993) that encourages group members to develop ways of relating to one another based on shared identities. In both the 'decategorisation' and 'recategorisation' models, participants are prompted to 'switch-off' the aspects of identity that are in conflict. A third approach is the 'inter-group' model (Hewstone and Brown, 1986) based on contact between people where their differences are 'switched on'.

Social identity perspectives have been influential in community relations policy development as policy-makers adopted psychological and spatial perspectives on the conflict (Hughes *et al*, 2007) that saw policy-makers apply an 'integrationalist' approach based on a belief that increased cross-community contact would improve relationships. Cross-community contact projects involved schools, youth and community groups, and voluntary organisations. Social identity analyses have, as with the macro-level studies considered earlier, highlighted problematic aspects of community relations policy. They suggest, for example, that many early community relations initiatives encouraged assimilation rather than respect for diversity (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003). They also recognised that these initiatives paid insufficient attention to structural inequalities in, for example, the labour market and housing allocation (Hughes *et al*, 2007). Another weakness of the earlier contact initiatives is that they focused

on internal divisions without adequately considering the role of the state in creating and maintaining conflict (Hughes and Donnelly, 1998; cited in Hughes and Donnelly, 2003).

Recent SIT studies have further explored how ethno-national identity differences inform responses to community relations policies. For example, Hughes *et al* (2007) explained that the downward trend in support for the GFA immediately after its implementation occurred because people viewed it as a potential threat to identity and led both Protestants and Catholics to adopt a defensive approach to community relations issues. Since Protestant and Catholic identities are social identities, perceived threats to the groups 'leads members to vigorously defend the group' (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003: p580) against 'the "other side"'. There is some evidence that Protestants have become less supportive than Catholics of the GFA. As noted by MacGinty and Wilford (2002; cited in Hughes and Donnelly, 2003), the Catholic community sacrificed 'aspirational' goals for the GFA but Protestants' compromises were more tangible – the RUC was replaced by the PSNI and paramilitary prisoners were released. Hughes and Donnelly (2003; 2004) concluded from their analysis of attitudinal data that Catholic respondents felt more optimistic than Protestants about cross-community contact initiatives and generally believed the GFA was not a threat to their community. Protestants, however, were concerned that material gains for Catholics would come at a cost to them. Consequently, Protestants perceive existing community relations policy as reflecting and supporting nationalist and republican political goals while undermining their communities' aims.

In another SIT study, MacGinty and du Toit (2007) argue that political and psychological intransigence has impeded community relations despite the GFA and implementation of community relations policies. The GFA has had limited effect on the community differences and, as was considered above, it has reinforced rather than challenged political divisions (cf. McAuley and Tonge, 2007). There is also evidence to suggest that Catholics have become increasingly confident as a community while 'fragmentation and insecurity' (MacGinty and du Toit, 2007: p9) are apparent in the Protestant community. Participants in Hughes *et al*'s (2007) research into emotion and anxiety in segregated residential areas presented similar arguments. Protestants research participants argued that they are 'under siege', but Catholics were optimistic concerning the social and political context as a result of improvements in their material circumstances. This and other research suggests that despite some signs of progress, community differences remain intact as ethno-national identities are

77

'transgenerational' (Muldoon *et al*, 2007) and very difficult to change because of social, political and economic factors (Burgess *et al*, 2007). Given this, it remains to be seen whether state-level policies such as the GFA can bring about any discernible change in attitudes.

While a high proportion of community relations has drawn from SIT, Bloomer and Weinreich (2004) highlight weaknesses in SIT as a theoretical framework for examining conflict. They point to the disparate ways in which academics have used SIT, making it difficult to compare results. Moreover, studies in this area usually focus on 'the here and now' do not consider the historical context of society, nor do they acknowledge differences in individual experiences and how they affect self-identity (Bloomer and Weinreich, ibid. p144). The studies of SIT to which these criticisms apply portray social identity as a fixed entity that can be studied and understood outside the complex social context in which it exists. Recent SIT studies have taken account of some of these criticisms. Muldoon *et al* (2007: p92) for example explored the situated nature of identity and emphasised the need to examine 'the content and understandings which underpin social identity processes'. Hargie *et al* (2008: p812) noted this as a potential issue for their research that 'treated Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist as each representing a monolithic, single identity' when there are important subjective differences in how people perceive these identities.

4.4 Workplace Community Relations

David Dickson, Owen Hargie and colleagues have undertaken the most comprehensive empirical examination of WCR policy implementation. Over a ten-year period, from 1999, their work has drawn from SIT and Communication Theory to investigate inter-group communication in the workplace. In an initial 'scoping study', Dickson and Hargie (1999: p4) argued that the workplace offers significant opportunities for cross-community contact and, therefore, the potential for relationship building to 'ripple out through the wider community'. The issues investigated in their research include:

(i)   the factors influencing cross-community relationships at work (Dickson and Hargie, 1999),

(ii)   how employees and managers should manage these relationships (Dickson *et al*, 2002),

(iii)   the effectiveness of NWE policies (Dickson *et al*, 2008a),

(iv)   how formal good relations policies are perceived (Dickson *et al*, 2009),

(v)   the level of WCR policy awareness (Dickson and Hargie, 1999),

(vi)   whether intergroup disclosure can be improved (Hargie *et al*, 2008; Dickson *et al*, 2009),

(vii)   why cross-community communication at work sometimes breaks down (Dickson and Hargie, 1999; Dickson *et al*, 2002; Dickson *et al*, 2008a), and

(viii) how informal processes impact upon relationship building (Dickson *et al*, 2008a; Dickson *et al*, 2009).

Their research identified a number of findings on the nature of, and responses to, WCR at a workplace level. First, they show that workplaces are potentially constructive settings that can 'act as a vehicle for helping to move forward the process of peace and reconciliation' (Dickson *et al*, 2009: p49). Second, NWE policies can have beneficial effects and employees strongly endorse them because of their 'calming effect' at work (Dickson *et al*, 2002, 2008b; Dickson *et al*, 2009). Third, their findings demonstrate that whilst sectarianism continues to occur in the workplace, relationships between Catholic and Protestant research participants are generally positive (Dickson *et al*, 2002).

They also highlight problematic aspects of WCR policy implementation. For example, they identified a gap in WCR policy (Dickson and Hargie, 1999) that leads to a lack of depth of understanding and confusion in organisations (Dickson *et al*, 2002). Another common finding is that employees and managers often avoid WCR issues when they arise because they prefer to keep community relations issues outside the workplace (Dickson *et al*, 2008a, 2009). This is because addressing WCR issues can lead to 'an uncomfortable or potentially explosive situation' (Dickson *et al*, 2009: p45). Employees are also reluctant to discuss WCR issues because of a fear that employers will take disciplinary action against them (Dickson and Hargie, 1999) while some respondents were reluctant to report sectarian incidents for fear of being labelled a 'troublemaker' (Dickson *et al*, 2002). Thus, current practice in many organisations is for both employers and employees to sidestep these issues (Dickson *et al*, 2009).

Among the areas of weakness in policy implementation is that employers often take a reactionary approach to WCR (Dickson *et al*, 2008a) and provide insufficient policy awareness training or opportunity for cross-community contact between employees (Dickson

and Hargie, 1999). They argued that the WCR training organisations provide sometimes leads to complaints when those present feel they should not discuss these issues at work. A further potential barrier to implementation is a lack of communication among employees, as well as a lack of courage or enthusiasm for tackling difficult issues (Dickson and Hargie, 1999: p19). Nevertheless, there are differences in how organisations approach WCR with some more adequately prepared than others for encouraging mutuality among employees (Dickson *et al*, 2002). In a recent study on younger, 'neophyte' employees, Dickson *et al* (2009) found that employees turn, more often, to trusted colleagues than managers for support and guidance, relying on informal networks for dealing with WCR issues when they arise:

'bottom-up, employee led socialisation processes were thought to be more effective by employees in maintaining harmonious cross-community work relations than more formalised management initiatives' (Hargie *et al.*, 2006; cited in Dickson *et al*, 2008a: p10).

When employees raise WCR issues with managers, they tend to use formal channels of communication (Dickson *et al*, 2008a, 2009) and they usually exclude managers from their informal networks. When managers become aware of the informal or subtle ways employees manage differences, they may not appreciate their significance and, hence, mismanage them. This can undermine the organic relationship building that happens in organisations and, therefore, make it less likely that employees will establish harmonious relationships (Dickson *et al*, 2008a). Dickson *et al* (2009) analyse two areas of informal communication in organisations: (i) interaction with colleagues, and (ii) issues discussed in the staffroom. During interactions with colleagues, community background, strength of relationship and the degree of cross-community contact, both within and outside work influence whether employees discuss community relations issues. Informal responses in the staffroom include strategic avoidance, 'banter' and comfort with difference (Dickson *et al*, 2009). They describe two-way, reciprocal humour as an 'indispensible' aspect of informal workplace communication, particularly for younger male employees, that can help maintain positive relationships (Hargie *et al*, 2006; cited in Dickson *et al*, 2008a). However, they also argued that the difference between acceptable and unacceptable humour is difficult to determine while their respondents limited banter to English football steering away from politically contentious subjects such as the rivalry between Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic. In the small number of cases where their respondents engaged in political banter, it took place between friends.

The evidence from Dickson and Hargie's decade of research suggests relationships between Protestant and Catholic employees are generally quite positive while workplaces are potentially beneficial social spaces for reconciliation initiatives. Their research demonstrates the importance of informal networks for managing relationships, as employees often prefer not to use formal channels when discussing community relations issues. However, their research also shows that, despite the positive signs, enhancing relationships in the workplace is a problematic process due to of widespread avoidance and gaps and weaknesses in WCR policy implementation.

4.5 Identity and Informal Responses to Change in the Workplace

The research undertaken by MacGinty and du Toit (2007) and Hughes *et al* (2007) demonstrates that Protestant and Catholic identities affect how people view community relations initiatives. Dickson and Hargie's research also suggests that these identities influence how employees perceive community relations initiatives in the workplace. Furthermore, they revealed a number of reasons why there is a gap in WCR policy and practice, and why employees respond informally to WCR issues when they arise. They argued that strategic avoidance and banter helped Protestant and Catholic employees manage their relationships.

Workplace Community Relations is analysed later in the thesis as an organisational change strategy driven by the government policy initiatives set out in Chapter Three. In a changing social, political and economic context, employees and managers in District Councils are coping with a range of new issues that require them to respond, often in informal ways, with limited knowledge of the reasons for change or how it should be managed. The case study organisations are political environments where existing power relations affect, and are in some cases threatened by change initiatives and, therefore, change is a political endeavour. Some have interpreted these change strategies as a threat to existing relationships at work and in wider society. In these politicised environments, employees and managers respond to change initiatives based on 'situated rationality'; that is, they interpret change 'through their understanding of the world, their interpretations of other people and those things that populate their world' (Clegg *et al*, 2008: p33).

This sub-section focuses on two aspects of the organisation studies literature. First, it explains how identity and change have been analysed in studies examining organisational culture change. The identity work and impression management concepts are also introduced to indicate how employees manage competing pressures at work. The second part discusses two informal responses to managing change: avoidance/resistance (Knights, 1990; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fineman, 2003; Linstead *et al*, 2004 Rhodes *et al*, 2007; Clegg *et al*, 2008) and humour (Bradney, 1957; Roy, 1960; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999.; Collinson, 1988, 2002; Grugulis, 2002; Taylor and Bain, 2003).

4.5.1 Identity in the Workplace

Identity informs 'what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains, including organizations' (Albert *et al*, 2000: p14 cited in Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) and has, therefore, a significant bearing on our behaviour at work. Identity has been theorised in the organisation studies literature as the outcome of a socially constructed (Collinson, 2003), interpretive (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) and emergent (Rhodes *et al*, 2007) process. The organisations we work for and the jobs we do can influence employee (e.g. Collinson, 1992) and management identities (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1999; Watson and Harris, 1999; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) while there are also consumer (Saren, 2007) and organisational (Cornelissen, 2007) identities among others.

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that employees' subjective needs for social interaction and emotional satisfaction are important determinants of their commitment to organisational aims and objectives. However, the prescriptive management literature portrays identity narrowly and suggests that organisations and their managers can neatly capture and explain identity before attempting to change it. The proponents of the 'excellence literature' (e.g. Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982), for example, suggested that identities can be manipulated through strong corporate cultures to produce model employees committed to pre-determined organisational goals. They encouraged employers to implement corporate culture programmes for their presumed positive impact upon levels of employee commitment. An underlying presumption embedded in much of this literature is that employee identity can be managed to better serve work organisations. The reason for this lies in a belief that well directed identity-shaping interventions impact positively upon levels of employee commitment (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Hence, a recurring argument is that

not only do we work at our self-identities, as Giddens (1991) contends, but so too do our employing organisations. In seeking to strengthen and maintain employee attachment to the organisation, self-identity has become a legitimate target for management. However, and as Rhodes *et al* (2007) argue, this often downplays employees' capacity to resist the increasingly sophisticated techniques for managing identity. Employees use, for example, impression management, humour, and cynicism to create emotional distance between themselves and the organisation.

Academic papers on employee identity in organisation studies became increasingly common from the mid to late 1980s (see for example Knights and Willmott, 1985) and, since then, the subject has become one of the most frequently debated subjects in this field (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Concepts such as 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959) and 'identity work' (Cohen and Taylor, 1978; Watson, 2007) were used to explain how employees manage their identities at work. The impression management concept emphasises the presentational or performative qualities in our social identities to show that we 'idealise' aspects of identity depending upon the audience and context (Goffman, 1959). Watson (2007: p136) refers to identity work as, 'the mutually constitutive set of processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of self-identity'. He differentiates between social identities and self-identity where the former refers to aspects of identity that derive from social 'category identities' such as class and race, but also to 'formal role identities' like occupation and 'local-personal identities' specific to a given situation.

4.5.2 Informal Responses to Change

Most models of organisational change build on Lewin's (1951) three-step 'force-field' analysis[24]: (i) 'unfreezing' the existing organisational structures and cultures, (ii) 'moving' the target of change in the desired direction, and (iii) 'refreezing' the new formation so that it maintains a consistency across time. For example, French and Bell (1984; cited in Thompson and McHugh, 2009) suggest three similar phases of change, but they refer to them as preparation, evaluation and implementation. Other theories account for the variables likely to

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[24] There are many other models and analyses of change. See Thompson and McHugh (2009), Clegg *et al* (2008) and Linstead *et al* (2009) for more on the models, why they have been subjected to critique and some alternative ways of conceptualising change.

affect change with Leavitt's (1965) model emphasising the need to focus on four things: people, task, technology and structure.

Managers at the planning stages often over-simplify change when designing culture change strategies. The 'excellence literature' (e.g. Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982) mentioned earlier imply like many theories and models of change that resistance is an irrational response from employees and/or managers who are in some cases pathologically predisposed to resist change and fail to appreciate the need for change. These models have been criticised for reducing complexities of change and the organisational environments in which it takes place to managing people as 'variables'. Consequently, the change strategies deriving from them may appear effective on paper, but in practice can meet a high degree of resistance. As Fineman (2003: p216) put it, 'organisational changes [...] may make sense in the executive boardroom. But to the receivers of change, they can mean and feel very different'. This is because change 'contravenes the psychological contract' especially where those involved have little say over how the change is introduced or what it entails (Fineman, ibid.). Furthermore, change is a 'social process' (Collins, 1998: cited in Thompson and McHugh, 2009: p302) that has consequences for employees and managers, some of which can be detrimental to individual and group identities (Fineman, 2003).

Employees and managers respond to change in the workplace in various formal and informal ways. They may seek the official support of their trade unions or use formal disciplinary procedures; they also react informally to change. The remainder of this sub-section focuses on the informal responses to change avoidance/resistance and humour because they were often discussed during the empirical research and are evaluated in the analysis chapters.

4.5.2.1 Resistance to Change

The first question examined below is, why do employees resist change? The second is what form does this resistance take and how is it understood in the organisation studies literature?

> 'When people resist, they are mobilizing their own power against some other source of power because they feel uneasy, put upon, insecure or fearful' (Fineman, 2003: p126).

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) argue that there is a link between employee commitment to organisational gaols and their levels of resistance. Resistance in organisations takes a multitude of forms and can be overt and covert (Linstead *et al*, 2004) and involve individuals, groups and organisations whose 'resistance is an expression of opposition [...] to official or unofficial forms of control' (Fineman, 2003: p125). Overt resistance includes organised, collective activity and particularly official and unofficial strikes. There are also less obvious forms of resistance such as covert sabotage, absenteeism and reduced commitment (Linstead *et al*, 2004), 'fiddling' or theft (Ditton, 1978; Mars, 1983), and employee cynicism (Fineman, 2003; Gabriel, 2005; Rhodes *et al*, 2007) or distancing (Cohen and Taylor, 1978; cited in Thompson and McHugh, 2009).

Resistance is a subjective response (Knights, 1990; cited in Clegg, *et al* 2008: p267) based on concerns about fairness at work or challenges to the existing order. It is often a 'reactive process' (Jermier *et al*, 1994: p90; Clegg *et al*, ibid.) embedded in existing power relations such that employees and managers resist initiatives because they fear change will disturb established relationships and positions. In this respect, resistance is a means of protecting the self. Organisational change strategies invariably result in some form of resistance and inertia and hostility are common responses (Linstead *et al*, 2004). Adams (1987; cited in ibid.) identified five aspects of organisational inertia. First, there are emotional blocks that occur when employees and managers regard change a threat to their position and are fearful of the consequences of change – avoidance is a common response. Second, inertia occurs when cultural blocks exist that make it difficult for organisations to change because of existing acceptable patterns of behaviour and organisational norms. Third, cognitive blocks produce inertia whereby an inability to communicate and process information regarding change creates obstacles. Fourth, when people are unwilling or unable to adopt a rounded view of the need for change, perceptual blocks arise. In these situations, negative experiences from the past can result in a high degree of apathy. Finally, inertia arises when there are environmental blocks such as management inaction when problems occur.

Linstead *et al* (2004: p447) highlight hostility as another barrier to change whereby employees and managers 'actively work to frustrate it'. There are four kinds of hostile resistance to change (Markus 1983; cited in Rollinson *et al*. 1998: p620): people-focused resistance; system-focused resistance; organisation-focused resistance; politics-focused resistance. The first form of resistance to change arises from psychological differences

between employees that affect their views on and attitudes toward change. System-focused resistance pertains to negative reactions to change because organisations inappropriately implement processes and policies – there may be flaws in the original policy or a lack of employee support for the new system. Organisation-focused resistance can be a response when change initiatives are incongruent with existing cultures and systems in the workplace. The final form of resistance, politics-focused resistance, is concerned with resistance to internal and external power structures. It occurs, for example, when new initiatives threaten existing power structures and employees and managers believe it may disadvantage them. The avoidance (inertia) and hostility discussed above is a potential threat to employee identity. As Fineman notes, resistance occurs because change interrupts established social relationships and the existing relationship between employees and the organisations. But, it also creates a degree of 'anxiety and uncertainty [...] to person's sense of identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126).

4.5.3.2 Humour at Work

> 'If you do not see constant badinage in your organisation, you are not seeing the relationships as they really are so far as the majority of participants are concerned.' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: p103)

The study of humour 'is a valuable way of exploring recurrent, structurally produced organizational problems' (Collinson, 2002: p270; paraphrasing Mulkay *et al.*, 1993). Yet, much humour is subjective (Noon and Blyton, 1997) and resides in the backstage of organisations, which can make it a difficult subject to study. This is made doubly difficult because organisational members usually suppress emotions such as humour as 'people are required to keep their mouths shut a lot of the time' (Gabriel, 2000: p189). Despite the barriers to rigorous research on humour, a growing body of academic literature has examined its significance in the workplace (e.g. Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1988, 1992; Grugulis, 2002; Linstead, 1985; Taylor and Bain, 2003). These studies have generally concluded that there is a serious intent behind humour such that "no joke, it would seem, is 'just a joke'" (Watson, 1994:p191). Humour can be used as a pernicious way of bullying others that is difficult to challenge (cf. Connelly and Keenan, 2001; cited in Dickson *et al*, 2008a). Other studies of humour have argued, for example, that it can provide opportunities for both individualised and collectivised forms of dissent (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Taylor and Bain, 2003) while the work context can affect the degree and style of humour

86

employees engage in. As Collinson (2002: p270) demonstrated, for example, manual workers rely upon joking when 'coping with deskilled, high pressure and/or physically dangerous work'.

The organisation studies literature highlights four constructive effects of workplace humour. First, it generates and maintains cohesion between groups of employees (Bradney, 1957; Collinson, 1988). Noon and Blyton (1997) describe humour as an organisational survival strategy whose main purpose is to reduce antagonism between employees thus maintaining social cohesion. In this respect, humour contributes to social relationships because it helps 'regulate' interpersonal relationships between employees, plays a role in maintaining 'a shared group identity' and is an accepted means of dealing with tensions at work (Noon and Blyton, ibid.: p157) based on 'permitted disrespect' (Fineman, 2003: p155). Humour maintains the boundaries between one group and another, and defines expected norms and behaviours for social group members (Collinson, 1988). For example, the construction and telling of in-jokes is a significant means of differentiating between blue-collar and white-collar workers. For the manager who appears unable or unwilling to share a joke, informal sanctions may result and s/he may be excluded from informal networks. When people do not participate in humour, they sometimes become its target. As Gabriel *et al.* (2000: p188) note, 'a person without a sense of humour quickly becomes the butt of many jokes'. This leads to another, more sinister side of humour meaning it is 'somewhat of a double-edged sword with a very thin line between collegial and bullying behaviours' (Gabriel *et al.* 2000: p193).

Second, humour reduces boredom at work and makes it easier to 'get the day in' (Bradney, 1957; Collinson, 1988; Roy, 1958). Aspects of work and organisational environments can induce boredom that humour helps alleviate. Donald Roy (1958) for example demonstrated how joking behaviour among groups of employees enables them to cope with monotonous, de-skilled work in factory environments. By participating in daily joking rituals, the subjects of Roy's study could relieve the boredom of repetitive work – humour created a temporary and welcome diversion for employees who returned to work with more enthusiasm. Third, it can be an effective strategy for relieving the frustrations of formal organisational constraints (Fineman, 2003) as employees can use joking and satire to poke fun at the organisation and its rules and regulation in ways unacceptable during 'serious' interactions (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Fourth, it provides an effective 'escape route' for people introducing

contentious subjects (Gabriel, 2000). As noted by Grugulis (2002: p400), 'humour is used to conceal, defuse or distance the group from negative emotions'.

The organisation studies literature demonstrates that humour is a widespread, relational and subjective activity in organisations. It helps build and maintain cohesion between employees and relieves some of the boredoms and frustrations employees experience at work. Humour can also: exclude individuals and groups from informal networks; be an effective form of resistance to managerial authority; and, sustain existing power relationships. As Noon and Blyton (1997: p160) conclude:

> 'joking at work plays an important regulatory function by providing a means of expression that assists group cohesion, deflects attention from the dehumanising aspects of work and acts to preserve the existing power hierarchy'.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined community relations legal and policy frameworks, the implementation of community relations initiatives at workplace level and debates in the organisation studies literature on identity and informal responses to change. The macro-level and micro-level studies on good and community relations policy suggest that there are weaknesses in how policy is designed and implemented. Osborne (2003), for example, argued that mainstreaming good relations initiatives is problematic because of a considerable bureaucratic burden for public authorities in complying with legal and policy frameworks. Graham and Nash (2006) and McVeigh and Rolston (2007) on the other hand criticised good relations for adopting an internal analysis of the conflict that ignores the question of how the state contributes to community difference. A number of SIT studies examine community relations issues at an individual and group level in areas such as education, community and youth projects, and residential segregation. They argue that although there is some evidence to suggest that cross-community contact helps relationship building, it remains to be seen whether this can change societal attitudes in the long-term. Other studies of policy implementation explain how early strategies promoted assimilation rather than diversity (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003) and play down structural causes of inequality and conflict (Hughes *et al*, 2007). They also show how Protestants and Catholics subjectively interpret

community relations policy and are often anxious regarding how good relations will impact upon them (MacGinty and Wilford, 2002; Hughes and Donnelly, 2003)

After their first scoping study in 1999, Dickson and Hargie investigated how community relations issues impact on the workplace. In the last decade or so, they have examined the extent to which, how and why community differences affect the workplace. Their research suggests that cross-community relationships are quite positive in most instances and when problems arise, employees are generally capable of resolving them without recourse to official WCR policy. Nevertheless, they identify a number of gaps in WCR policy that reduce the possibility of reconciliation. For example, they revealed confusion about how organisations should implement WCR policy and what employees must do to comply with it (Dickson et al, 2002). Further gaps and weaknesses include the fact that employees and managers avoid WCR issues to protect relationships, for fear of disciplinary action and because they are concerned about giving a negative impression (Dickson and Hargie, 1999; Dickson et al, 2008a, 2009). Employers are reactive rather than proactive in how they address community relations issues (Dickson et al, 2008a) while they also note that a lack of appropriate training can lead to difficulties (Dickson and Hargie, 1999).

The chapter described arguments within organisation studies concerning identity and change in the workplace because they help analyse how employees and managers respond to WCR policy. This literature suggests that change in the workplace can increase identity concerns and anxieties when employees and managers are uncertain of how it will affect them. Resistance to change is portrayed in much of the change management literature as irrational behaviour when it is often a response to weaknesses in policy and genuine fears that change may be a threat to aspects of self-identity. Two analytical frameworks that take account of the complex nature of resistance were described. The first explains why inertia occurs in organisations and examines five barriers to change: emotional, cultural, cognitive, perceptual and environmental blocks (Adams, 1987; cited in Linstead et al, 2004). The chapter also introduced a four-type model of hostile resistance (Markus, 1983; cited in Rollinson et al, 1998): people-focused, systems-focused, organisation-focused and politics-focused resistance. The models of inertia and hostility described in the chapter are used later to explain how and why employees and manager in the District Councils engaged in resistance. As these models suggest, the reasons for resistance are often quite complex and the empirical research shows this was also the case in the case study councils.

Humour is another informal, commonly occurring aspect of working life that is a pragmatic response to change. There is one side to humour whereby it may also cause harm to others through deliberate and consistent ridicule that amounts to bullying behaviour. Chapter Nine reflects on four arguments in the organisation studies literature concerning constructive workplace humour: it helps maintain social cohesion (Bradney, 1957; Noon and Blyton, 1997; Collinson, 1988); reduces boredom (Bradney, 1957; Collinson, 1988; Roy, 1958); relieves frustration with official policy (Fineman, 2003); and, provides an 'escape route' when sensitive subjects are introduced (Gabriel, 2000; Grugulis, 2002).

The informal responses to WCR, considered later in the thesis, were often responses to anxieties regarding organisational change and are necessary ways of managing the formal/informal culture gap (Oililia, 1995; cited in Linstead and Fulop, 1999). An examination of these informal behaviours is beneficial because they provide insights into social and political areas of organisational life. They further highlight how organisational members are resourceful and creative in how they respond to change in complex social settings (Noon and Blyton, 1997) based on 'situated rationality' (Clegg *et al*, 2008: p33) whereby they interpret WCR policies and issues 'through their understanding of the world, their interpretations of other people and those things that populate their world'.

5. Research Methods

5.1 Introduction

Researchers have used an assortment of methods to investigate conflict in NI. These include closed-question surveys, participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews on a one-to-one and focus group basis, and archival analyses. Outputs include government department and non-departmental public body (NDPB) reports, academic journals, historiographies and doctoral theses, many of which adopt survey instruments as their primary method of data collection. I adopted a qualitative methodology given that the primary purpose of the research was to examine in detail participants' firsthand experiences of and attitudes toward WCR. I did not intend to test a series of structured hypotheses through experimental or quasi-experimental means, nor did I want to count responses to questions on attitudes to WCR. There are three main reasons why a quantitative methodology was not used. First, it would have failed to capture in sufficient depth participants' accounts of the issues raised in my research questions. Second, one of the risks of using quantitative techniques (although it can be a problem for some qualitative methods too) is that too many limits are placed on interview topics so they fit with pre-conceived research hypotheses. Third, it was not my intention to determine the numbers of people who regard relationship-building strategies worthwhile, or to measure precisely how many people think their organisation has in place effective policies for managing conflict. I was much more interested in what people made of these initiatives and why – something best suited to qualitative methods.

Qualitative techniques helped obtain a better understanding of how participants experienced relationship-building initiatives and what factors they regarded as significant to their success or failure. Table 5.1 below summarises the preferences of qualitative researchers and all five preferences applied to my research strategy. By utilising a qualitative methodology for gathering empirical materials, participants were able to highlight *and explain* their perspectives on the issues raised and could introduce things that other methods would not capture.

1.	A preference for qualitative data – understood simply as the analysis of words and images rather than numbers
2.	A preference for naturally occurring data – observation rather than experiment, unstructured rather than structured interviews
3.	A preference for meanings rather than behaviour – attempting 'to document the world from the point of view of the people studied' (Hammersley, 1992: p165)
4.	A rejection of natural science as a model
5.	A preference for inductive, hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis testing (cf. Glaser and Straus, 1967)

Table 5.1: Preferences of Qualitative Researchers
(Adapted from Hammersley, 1992: pp160-172; cited in Silverman, 2000: p8)

Many qualitative methodologies are based on the phenomenological paradigm and the work of interpretivists such as Silverman (1985; 2000). From this perspective, the world and reality are socially constructed and given different meanings dependent upon participants' personal, social and occupational identities, as well as the context in which research takes place. Firsthand accounts during 'loosely structured' interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) in a workplace setting provided most of the empirical material because it was important, given my research aims, to allow participants the opportunity to speak in-depth about the issues raised. This interview method:

> 'is beneficial in as much as a richer account of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas and impressions may be considered and documented. Interviewees are less constrained by the researcher's pre-understanding and preferred language. The researcher may get perspectives, information and ideas that he or she has not thought of before (or is not documented in the earlier research literature). There is space for negotiation of meanings so that some level of mutual understanding may be accomplished, making data richer and more meaningful' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: p71).

In what follows, I describe the stages through which my empirical research progressed and explain my choice of research method. I reflect later in the chapter on the impact of my identification as a regional insider and convey some of the complexities experienced when doing research on politically sensitive subjects in a contested society.

5.2 Methods

A case study method was used to find out in-depth details about, and explain, people's experiences (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000) of WCR in different organisational settings. The case studies were carefully selected to facilitate comparisons of what, on the face of it, are similar organisations (District Councils delivering a comparable range of services). However, it was anticipated there would be significant social and political differences, and variations in how councils implemented WCR strategies. The case study approach was beneficial because it offered sufficient flexibility for gathering descriptive and analytical material on, a) aspects of councils' WCR strategies, b) who takes responsibility for them, and c) how they developed across time. Although the primary method of empirical research was qualitative, I gathered a variety of materials to obtain insights into the case study organisations. As Yin (1981) argued, researchers can use quantitative as well as qualitative data to construct case studies where relevant materials include, for example, verbal reports, observations, and fieldwork, or a mixture of these sources. I used all of these materials in completing the research for the thesis, because they provided a variety of insights into the organisational structures of my case study District Councils, how employees experience working there and how effective councils are in managing WCR.

My fieldwork consisted of sixty one-to-one and three focus group interviews with over seventy participants. I made eleven separate trips to NI with two visits in the first phase where preliminary interviews were undertaken and the interview questions and technique refined. To select the most appropriate organisations to invite into the research, I used purposive sampling (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In the first instance, this process involved identifying the most likely environments for effectively investigating employees' experiences of WCR initiatives. After some preliminary considerations and discussions with key contacts, I felt that to meet the research brief District Councils would be the most appropriate organisations to approach. Another reason for selecting councils is their specific obligations under legal and policy frameworks whereby policy-makers consider them strategically important for reconciliation efforts (see Chapter Three). The next stage of the selection process was to identify the case study councils with whom to negotiate access. I concluded at this stage that at least three representative councils were required to meet the research

objectives, but that I should invite a number of others should access problems arise. To determine which of the twenty-six to invite, I used a loose typology (Stake, 1994) based on two variables: (i) the community backgrounds of the council workforce; and, (ii) geographical location. Finding a spread of case study councils that provide services to, and employ people from a one or other predominant community, or that are made-up evenly of Catholics and Protestants was important for ensuring the representativeness of the case study samples. The geographical location of councils was also taken into account for the sake of representativeness because although much attention on community relations focuses on urban environments, councils in other areas also experience problems of this kind (Harbison, 2002; Graham and Nash, 2006).

After consulting secondary data such as council strategy documents and community relations evaluation reports, reviewing demographic information and speaking further to key contacts, I identified seven potentially suitable councils (see Table 5.2). The initial approach entailed written correspondence followed by telephone contact with CROs and GROs. The responses at this point were lukewarm at best and, in some cases, decidedly cold. As a result, I decided to bring forward a planned trip to talk about the research with some contacts who I felt would be well placed to comment and potentially participate in the research. This visit provided me with the opportunity to establish stronger links with the contacts some of whom, for the reasons explained below, became integral to the future success of the research strategy.

	Urban Demographic	Semi/Rural Demographic
Nationalist	1 (Council F)	1 (GDC)
Unionist	1 (Council D)	2 (TDC; Council G)
Mixed	1 (SDC)	1 (Council E)

Table 5.2: Typology of Potential Case Study Councils

The prospects of gaining councils' commitment increased greatly when on the second research trip a key contact from a social enterprise who had worked with a variety of District Councils in the past, agreed to provide a database of community relations

contacts and to endorse my study. Until this time, obtaining sufficient access was proving difficult because the proposed research would focus on politically sensitive subjects and take place in work time. The key contact's endorsement helped me overcome another problem insofar as my credentials and level of trustworthiness with potential participants had yet to be established, which could have been a fatal setback (cf. Knox, 2001). Academics and practitioners with previous experience of community relations studies undertake most existing research in this area, but this was my first major proposal in the field.

The database provided by my key contact included details of at least one named person within each of the shortlisted councils who was approached, in some cases for the second time, and informed of my contact's endorsement. Following this approach, five of the seven case study councils expressed a firm interest in the research and indicated a desire to participate. On the third research trip, I discussed the research plans with, and interviewed contacts from, the five councils to establish further the degree of research support and access. Three of the five emerged as the most desirable because the level of access was more suitable and because they were at different stages of WCR policy development. SDC, TDC and GDC agreed to full participation on the basis that they would receive a summary of the research findings. A CRO at Council F refused from the outset to participate in the research citing too many work commitments and unfruitful involvement in other research projects. However, I did go on to interview CROs in Council D and Council E, but decided not to investigate these in any greater depth because of time constraints and obstructive limitations on the level of access.

Community Relations Officers were the key contacts in two of the case study councils while in the third it was the Head of Administration. Before each period of fieldwork, the host council provided me with an interview schedule; suitable locations were also organised by them. Of course, this meant that my key contacts and in some instances participants' line managers selected the interviewees; nevertheless, my request for a roughly even proportion of male and female, Catholic and Protestant interviewees from a stratified sample of the workforce was granted in each case. The research participants did not just come from within the case study councils. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) argue, it is important that people other than those currently employed by

case study organisations are interviewed. Hence, I also interviewed a stratified sample of officials from the major trade unions and made a particular effort to speak to those among them responsible for organising the District Councils. Further interviews took place with representatives of social enterprises working with councils on WCR initiatives. The trade union officials and representatives of social enterprises were for the most part very willing to discuss the research themes, but it was sometimes difficult to arrange meetings at suitable times because, for example, some were engaged in discussions about the impending Review of Public Administration (see Chapter Six).

Interviewees from the councils ranged from manual grade staff such as refuse collectors (Cleansing Technicians), to Administrative Assistants, line managers, middle managers and CEOs. Interviews in case study councils were organised in at least three contrasting settings and this incorporated Landfill Sites, Cleansing Depots, Grounds Maintenance shelters, CEO/Town Clerks' offices, and HR departments. The interviews with trade unionists and representatives of social enterprises took place in canteens, hotel lobbies, cafes, restaurants, and trade unions' regional headquarters. In the vast majority of cases, the research setting was appropriate, but interviews in public areas were occasionally difficult to transcribe because of the background noise. It was, however, beneficial for the case study research that I visited places like Cleansing Depots, Landfill sites and canteens, as well as office environments because this gave me a much broader feel for the case study organisations. Another benefit was that interviewees regularly met with me on familiar ground, which I felt was particularly important given the sensitivity of the research. Scheduling interviews with Cleansing Technicians, Gardeners or Labourers in central office settings may have been unsettling for some of them. Indeed, when I asked manual grade interviewees to comment on how their experiences of WCR compare with those for administrative employees in office environments, they were invariably unfamiliar with these areas.

While the interviews were loosely structured, a list of broad themes and questions (see Appendix Four) linked to the research objectives helped guide the interviews. The questions and themes introduced during individual interviews were also employed during focus groups. Questions focused on the interviewees' experiences of and attitudes toward WCR, their community relations role, and the impact of community

background and WCR policy on their working lives. Each interviewee was asked to comment on the effectiveness of WCR policy, the barriers to success and how they managed community relations issues when they arose. Some demographic information such as community background, gender, occupation and length of tenure was also gathered at the beginning of each interview while the confidential nature of the research was also made clear at that point. For most interviewees, there was a pre-defined time they could devote to the research and so scheduling follow-up interviews to cover topics missed out first time around would have been difficult. As the research progressed, insightful examples from previous interviews supplemented the original themes because participants sometimes introduced new issues requiring further investigation.

Referring to themes in earlier interviews was beneficial because it demonstrated to interviewees that I had a degree of insider knowledge, especially when the issues demonstrated an awareness of sensitive issues. Thus, 'through demonstrating knowledge about these sensitive issues the researcher shows that he or she is trusted by other informants and is transcending the dividing line between insider and outsider' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: p197). This happened in the early meetings where, for example, interviewees explained that a variety of informal methods for managing WCR seemed to be achieving some success. While I anticipated employees would identify strategies for informally managing cross-community relationships with colleagues, how and why they did this only became apparent after the research commenced. Participants often pointed out, for instance, that reciprocal humour added to social cohesion (see Chapters Eight and Ten). In later interviews, I asked participants to comment on these and similar issues to investigate how widely they were experienced and for further clarification on their implications.

Although many of the interview themes were the same in each case, there was some variation when, for example, interviewing senior managers, manual grade employees or trade union officials. I posed more follow-up questions on the thinking behind WCR strategies to senior managers than I did to administrative and manual grade employees because senior managers were more likely to have been involved in their design. The nature of these questions depended on the issues raised by the respondent and the examples given when explaining their views. Consequently, the questioning

varied in each case although the key questions and thematic content indicated in Appendix Four were always addressed. When interviewing trade union officials, I added themes on the trade unions' philosophical outlook on WCR strategies and officials' personal views on whether specific strategies are working in practice. Interviews with Administrative staff included a number of different themes when compared to those for employees working, for example, in Cleansing Depots. These variations were introduced at the outset to explore any variation in the experiences of both sets of employees.

After receiving the necessary permissions from participants, I recorded and transcribed each interview. The average duration of interviews was roughly forty-five minutes but a significant number took longer than an hour to complete. The three focus group interviews ran for over two hours because of the number of people involved and the fact that participants were well versed in WCR matters – one group was made-up of trade union representatives, one of CROs, and the other of training providers in a social enterprise. There was a considerable amount of empirical data and, therefore, a method of data-analysis was required to help organise it. An initial 'coding' (Strauss, 1988) process was used whereby a summary was produced for each interview. I mapped the main themes onto a spreadsheet against the interviews where that issue emerged. The emphasis at this point was on identifying any patterns or inconsistencies in responses. I completed this process manually because it allowed for a much more intimate appreciation of the issues than would be possible using a qualitative data analysis tool such as NVIVO. As May (1997: p140) argues, 'the process of analysis should not come to override the need to be familiar with the data produced'.

In addition to the loosely structured interviews, much time was spent during the research visits observing the council work environments. This was particularly important because my intention was to compare community relations in different contexts. I kept a qualitative research diary (Symon, 1998) throughout the empirical research that held details of unrecorded conversations, impressions of the organisations visited, contact information, interview schedules, etc. The diary was beneficial because it encouraged me to reflect on events shortly after they occurred and, therefore, when they were still fresh in the memory; but, it also helped me

identify interesting issues and to note matters requiring follow-up action. An initial research visit demonstrated the importance of keeping a research diary. During the visit, a participant made some noteworthy comments while walking away from the interview room (and after I had switched off the recording equipment). It was because the diary was with me that I was quickly able to note accurate details of this exchange while I could still recollect them.

Secondary source materials provided me with insights into councils' legal and policy commitments and into how they went about addressing them. Much of this documentary research came from, *inter alia*, the case studies' Good Relations Strategies and Action Plans, detailed periodic reviews of these plans, minutes from council committee meetings, commissioned academic reports, and recommendations from oversight bodies such as the ECNI. A considerable amount of time was devoted to documentary analysis because the research was evaluating the impact of WCR initiatives informed by organisation and government policy frameworks. As a result of the increased availability of these materials, it was possible to trawl through hundreds of significant documents published by the case study councils. It was also relatively easy to access the strategy documents, guidelines and evaluation reports generated by agencies like the ECNI and NICRC. Indeed, the summary of WCR legal and policy initiatives in Chapter Three draws heavily from this information.

5.3 A Critical Social Research Study

The arguments presented in this thesis are underpinned by aspects of critical social research because they use a variety of 'building blocks' to explore WCR to a much deeper level than positivist social research allows (Harvey, 1990: p19). Critical social research involves more than simply describing or analysing at surface level the nature of WCR:

> 'In examining the context of social phenomena, critical social research directs attention at the fundamental nature of phenomena. Rather than take the abstract phenomena for granted, it takes apart (i.e.) deconstructs the abstraction to reveal the inner relations and thus reconstructs the abstract concept in terms of the social structural relations that inform it' (Harvey, 1990: p19).

I take account of the historical development of ethno-national differences between Catholics and Protestants, and highlight how discourses of unionism and nationalism, Catholicism and Protestantism, loyalism and republicanism affect the region and its workplaces. I do not simply describe or interrogate the internal consistency of WCR policy but analyse the impact of WCR in a deeper sense that attends to the influence of historical discourses.

Although my research is not ethnographic in the traditional sense, I draw from Van Maanen's (1988: p49) ethnographic representational styles in arguing that my style is largely 'realist', insofar as 'the views put forward are not those of the fieldworker but are rather authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the horse's mouth'. My research is realist in another sense in that it is concerned with how the historic ethno-national discourses discussed in Chapter Two inform the social conditions (May, 2001) at work, affecting how WCR initiatives are implemented and understood by participants. Moreover, as the author of the study, I have mostly kept reflections on my subjectivity and its impact on the research out of the write-up, as is usually the case with realist accounts. That said, the narratives I use are not entirely the same as the realist research described by Van Maanen (1988). The development of the thesis depended significantly upon my background and experience as a Catholic from an interface area in north Belfast, which has undoubtedly influenced the questions asked and interpretations of answers given. It is also true that some aspects were in keeping with social constructionist research in that there was a considerable degree of reflexive introspection (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) on my part during the empirical research.

There is an ongoing debate as to the value of empirically derived data with some favouring empiricism and others questioning its value (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Critics view empirical research as the outcome of a subjective process, which is always dependent upon the researcher's standpoint. Thus, the results produced may bear little resemblance to the realities of those studied. From this perspective, data from interviews, questionnaires (etc), are inherently problematic because they limit the variety of interpretations informing both the results and the arguments presented from them. Similar to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), the position I adopt in this research is best described as somewhere 'in-between' the proponents and critics of

empiricism - while empirical data may be problematic, this very much depends on the arguments presented while it can be 'surprising and inspiring' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, ibid. p3). I found engagement with participants the most enlightening and interesting aspect of the research, and an important reason for starting the thesis in the first place. There is another reason why I take this view; by accepting that interview data is subjective does not undermine its value for providing insights into the interviewees' experiences. Further, my emphasis on the subjective is in keeping with an important aspect of the research brief, which was to explore participants' (subjective) perspectives on the implementation of WCR initiatives.

5.4 Community Background and the Research Process: Insider/Outsider Issues

'The size of Northern Ireland and the close knit nature of the communities means that a bad opinion of a researcher can precede their arrival, seriously impeding future research work [...]. Northern Ireland is a highly researched situation where some people have been misrepresented in prior journalistic, government or academic projects and therefore continue to harbour suspicion of researchers and are often reluctant to participate' (Pickering, 2001: p495).

In this section, I examine in this section how community differences affected the empirical research process. Interviewees often highlighted, during discussions, aspects of their identities and, on occasion, sought out clues as to my background that affected how the research progressed. When carrying out fieldwork on community relations issues in NI, participants' assumptions about researchers' community background and likely affiliations can lead to potential problems the researcher must overcome if the research is to be successful (Brewer, 1993; Knox, 2001). However, researchers may also find the interviewees' opinions difficult to deal with with (cf. Pickering, 2001) – I reflect later in the chapter on why this became a concern in the empirical research. This section of the chapter begins by explaining the complexities of this kind of research. Some examples are provided from interviews where: participants refused to discuss sensitive topics; interviewees were guarded about discussing their lives outside work; my background and assumptions became a potential obstacle to the empirical research. Since identity emerged as a potential barrier during interviews, I adopted a variety of strategies for managing its impact. Emotion work/management

(Bolton, 2005) and 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959) were needed as the research progressed.

Given that my empirical research touched on sensitive political subjects, I had to consider carefully how to introduce and debate issues with participants. Many of the issues raised were politically sensitive while most participants had become, for two reasons, accustomed to suppressing their views on religion and politics. First, expressing political opinions can lead to questions about employees' impartiality. Several interviewees raised this issue, but two senior managers were particularly aware that disclosing their political views in public could lead to criticism from employees. Second, NWE policies in councils have had some effect in limiting expressions of politically sensitive opinions among the workforce. Employees' concerns about raising these issues at work came out in a high proportion of interviews, but this is epitomised by the following quote:

> 'I would like to be able to talk openly about life in general; the way my life is; the things I do at the weekend - go and listen to Irish traditional music. I would like to be able to talk about that. I wouldn't even talk about that or I wouldn't even say about the places where I would go. I would lie. I would come in and lie to them here about where I've been at the weekend because I wouldn't talk about things like that' (Catholic Male Charge Hand, TDC).

In another interview, the participant (Catholic female Grounds Maintenance Assistant, TDC) routinely closed down discussions about politically sensitive subjects. Her refusal to talk about relevant matters meant the interview added little of value to the main research objectives, but it indicated how employees could react to this type of research:

I: At times, it's rough. You just have to sort of work away and keep your head down. There would be an odd dig.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about that? When you say it is rough, what sort of examples do you think would summarise that?

I: Round the 12th [July] it would be a wee bit...it's not fighting or anything but there would be an odd wee thing that would happen. I would rather not say.

Q: Ok. Would you be prepared to say if I turn that [the recording equipment] off? Would you be prepared to tell me some examples, or is it too sensitive?

I: No. I wouldn't, no.

This interview took place midway through the empirical research phase and, consequently, the interview technique was well developed and proved successful during previous interviews. From follow-up discussions with a key contact, it seems the interviewee closed-off because her line manager asked her to participate and she did not want to snub the request. Thus, she was willing to sit through the interview without disclosing politically sensitive opinions or experiences.

Given that community relations was an important research subject, and that I was identifiable as someone from the region, interviewees sometimes sought, directly and indirectly, to find out more about my community background before sharing their own views. Since I was asking them as an outsider to do something to which they were unaccustomed, interviewees in a few cases expected a *quid pro quo* arrangement and asked me to share details of my life history. I reflect below on how I tried to avoid some of the pitfalls of undertaking research as a regional insider.

My experiences during some of the initial interviews highlight the implications of, and potential drawbacks in, doing regional insider research. I presumed before the research began that similarity, or my experiences as a regional 'insider', would in most cases be a positive influence on interviews and, therefore, richer, perhaps more insightful data could be collected as a result. Indeed, in some cases interactions were permeated by similarity and what Luff (1999) calls 'moments of rapport', which often made interviews more enjoyable and required less emotion management than others. However, this was not always the case. Two early interviews highlighted the complexity of insider/outsider issues. One interview was qualitatively different from the other because some 'moments of rapport' in the first interview were missing from the second. The first interview took place in Belfast with a male ex-trade unionist who identified as a Catholic. The second interview was in Derry with a Protestant female community relations specialist working for a social enterprise who described herself as a loyalist. The presumptions I made about the standpoint of both interviewees (given the pseudonyms James and Sharon) were of critical importance in determining how the research interactions progressed. The interviewees often raised issues from their past about their local community, the influence of their family, schools attended etc.

I reflected afterwards on both interviews. The interview with Sharon lasted no longer than twenty minutes and was not easy to manage because I experienced a level of awkwardness and tension after she identified as both a loyalist and a peace activist. As is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, loyalist paramilitaries were responsible for innumerate violent attacks on Catholics. I reasoned that distinct differences between Sharon's identity and mine presented a barrier during our interview making it difficult for me to talk fully about relevant issues. Sharon's loyalist identification took me by surprise partly because she described herself as a loyalist and a peace activist, but also because she was forthright in presenting her views.

In contrast, my interview with James continued for over an hour and was, for the most part, quite a comfortable and, at times, enjoyable experience. James informed me part way through his interview that he lived in the same working class district of Belfast where I once lived. He revealed during the interview some similar experiences to mine and I found myself interweaving important episodes in my life with his. Until this point, the interview had progressed in what I would describe as a relatively sanitized manner; that is, the interviewee's responses were to the point with little by way of personal opinion. However, when I shared some information about my ethno-national background, the tone became more relaxed and 'moments of rapport' (Luff, 1999) permeated the remainder of the interview. I recognised at this stage that if I was to undertake the planned number of interviews for the thesis, similar issues would affect future interviews and that a lack of empathy could detrimentally affect other interviews. As a result, I began to think through the potential implications of community background for the research process and to contemplate appropriate strategies for managing these issues should they emerge again.

There were occasions when interviewees expressed views with which I strongly disagreed. In these cases, I had to work hard not to react negatively to them using emotion management strategies. On one occasion, for instance, a HR Assistant at TDC argued that Catholics were more capable than Protestants of 'bullying' their way to welfare benefits:

> 'You have a Catholic on benefit and you have a Protestant on benefit; *the Catholic is getting more benefits than that Protestant is getting*. The *Catholics seem to be able to bully the right*

people and the right people sort it out for them. I just think that *the Catholics have more interest in getting all that they can off the government.* I have always thought that and my husband has said to me over the years, "if you were Catholic you would get that. You would have no problem. You go to the Priest here, he'll sort it out. He'll get that sorted out for you". And I do believe that; and I am afraid I still believe that'. (Protestant Female HR Assistant, TDC)

Interviews such as this required a high degree of emotion management on my part to ensure personal feelings did not affect the interviewees nor detract from main research objectives. However, failure to exhibit empathy or to establish rapport, as occurred in the interview with Sharon, meant there was a risk the interviewee would mistrust me. On other occasions, there was a danger that a social connection with participants could lead to over-rapport. This can be problematic because, as Howarth (2002) demonstrated, there may be fewer opportunities to explore diverse perspectives if too much time is spent reminiscing about shared experiences and enjoying the moment of connection.

Before I explain in more depth the techniques used to manage my identity and emotions during the empirical research, I take some time to highlight further the ways in which insider and outsider dynamics emerged. For example, interviewees sometimes decided my 'insider' knowledge meant I would appreciate the finer details of their arguments without them needing to explain them. Explanations as to why politically sensitive symbols were likely to cause problems, or why some councils were better than others at dealing with sectarianism were sometimes prefaced by statements such as: 'you'll know what I mean by this', 'you know what these guys are like' or 'you'll have heard the stories about...'. This was potentially a major practical problem because I planned to present a largely critical realist account requiring detailed responses from respondents and, if they were not forthcoming, the data would be severely limited and the research objectives hard to achieve. To prevent this, I engaged in a degree of 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959) by frequently accentuating my 'outsiderness'. I periodically highlighted my role as a researcher with little experience of the research context. I explained that for a long time I lived in England and pointed out that my experiences in NI were mostly limited to one relatively small geographical region.

I reflected after the interviews with James and Sharon in my research diary on whether it was appropriate to convey my community background to participants. I was mindful of the view within interpretive inquiry advocating inclusion of the author's positionality (or what is sometimes referred to as standpoint judgement or standpoint epistemology) in the research process and write-up (cf. hooks, 1992). Proponents of this perspective argue that empirical research is too often based on an unequal power relationship as researchers ask participants to share sensitive personal information without reciprocation. They argue that to redress this imbalance, researchers should take more time to divulge their personal experiences and perspectives to participants. However, I was unconvinced of the benefits this would bring to the research and was concerned that it could introduce some unhelpful barriers, which I consider next.

One critique of standpoint epistemology arises from my reading of Weber's (1949) arguments on researcher values. He contended that values should, as far as possible, be kept out of the research process should they lead to interpretive mistakes. In other words, these values can undermine the researcher's ability to understand social reality such that we may only see what our values (community background in this case) allow us to see, unless we take appropriate steps to allow for more nuanced understandings of the field. Hence, while my values as someone from NI were important in deciding how to study WCR, and although I reflected critically upon them during the fieldwork, they were not a primary concern. Another reason for not adopting standpoint epistemology is that participants' knowledge of my community background could have hampered interviews with those from other backgrounds. Highlighting my positionality might have encouraged some participants to be more frank, but there was a danger that others would withhold views should I draw unfair conclusions about them.

Difference as much as similarity shaped my interactions with participants because I was a researcher, a PhD student attached to an English University, a man, a Catholic/nationalist, and someone from Belfast. Similarly, contributors identified themselves as, *inter alia*, mothers, fathers, employees, trade unionists, managers, peace activists, nationalists, unionists, Catholics, Protestants, and, atheists. They also worked in a variety of different settings and in a diverse range of jobs. Consequently,

I could only ever claim to be a 'partial insider' (Sherif, 2001). Distinguishing between insider and outsider status during interviews is problematic because, as Goffman (1959) suggests, we (both interviewer and researcher) routinely distinguish between the 'front' and 'back' stages of everyday interactions and our perspective, and hence our identity (community background), may be communicated differently depending upon the stage and the audience. It seems likely that participants maintained these 'front' and 'back' contexts during the interview process such that they make pragmatic choices about what to say, and how to say it, based upon their views of the researcher and where the interviews take place.

I adopted a pragmatic (Knox, 2001) strategy for the empirical research and avoided disclosing my community background unless specifically asked to do so by participants. This information was shared with participants in three interviews. When researching paramilitary violence in the region, Knox (ibid.) argued that participant perceptions of his religious and/or political identity influenced levels of access to the field. While my research was not concerned with paramilitary violence, this example illuminates how sensitive research requires a pragmatic approach whereby the researcher uses a range of techniques to overcome barriers to access. One recurring issue in my research, and one Knox (ibid.) also identified, was that I had to judge carefully the nomenclature employed when interacting with participants, as there was a danger interviewees would take the terms I used as an indication of my political leanings and close down interactions as a result.

A host of different, politically revealing terms are used to refer to Northern Ireland and that 'there is a conflict about what the conflict is about' (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995: p1). This is an important consideration when doing research in NI as when participants deem the terms used by others inappropriate, they can limit what they are prepared to say or may even refuse to take part in research. Decisions concerning what labels to use when referring to the geographical region ('Northern Ireland', 'Ulster', 'the north of Ireland', 'the Six Counties') are significant as Protestants generally refer to the region as NI or Ulster while Catholics, particularly those with Republican sympathies, prefer to use the term 'north of Ireland' or 'six counties'. According to a trade union official interviewed, referring to Britain as 'the mainland'

can also present difficulties and, as the quote below shows, he reprimanded representatives of a company from England for using it:

> 'Employers that come to Ireland are very naïve in terms of what makes England, Scotland and Wales our mainland. Is it their idea that the Irish are stupid, laid back? Like Tescos when they first came to [Northern Ireland]; when I first dealt with them they always spoke about the mainland. I said to them, 'well what part of Europe are you from' (Catholic Male Full-Time Official, *TGWU*).

Appropriate terminology is not only an issue for regional outsider researchers; it is also a matter for regional insiders as they may not be as easily forgiven as outsiders for using terms others dislike (Knox, 2001). The importance of language came to the surface on various occasions during my empirical research, but I felt it appropriate to presume that even when interviewees did not raise it as an issue, they would be reading something into the terms I used. My approach was to be sensitive to the preferences of individual participants, but I referred to the region as Northern Ireland. In truth, it was not very common for interviewees to question any of the terminology I used either because they found what I said unproblematic or because they were disinclined to discuss this out of courtesy even when they preferred different terms. This latter explanation seemed to apply when a line manager at GDC referred to the 'north of Ireland' throughout our interview while I had commenced, as I had in all other interviews, by referring to NI. On another occasion, an interviewee from a social enterprise used the term 'Ulster' instead of Northern Ireland again indicating her particular political preference, but like the former case, this was not something she raised.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter began by describing my methodological approach to investigating WCR in NI. A qualitative methodology was adopted wherein a series of loosely structured interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) were conducted with a cross-section of people from participating organisations. I used a form of purposive sampling (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) to help decide which participants to invite and, at this point, I decided to contact District Councils because of their statutory community relations remit. I

created a loose typology (Stake, 1994) to help narrow down the most appropriate of the twenty-six District Councils who I then asked to take part. Seven potential cases were identified and, following negotiations with key contacts and gatekeepers, this narrowed to four, although interviews took place with a small number of employees in two of the other three councils. Following initial discussions with key participants, I identified relevant interview themes to guide the interviews. As the research progressed, interview questions were modified taking into account new themes or critical incidents requiring further investigation.

Sixty interviews took place over eleven separate research visits, the majority of which were one-to-one with a small number of focus groups. I recorded and transcribed all of the interviews before an initial analysis of responses highlighted common topics and informative examples. Although there is a debate in the organisation studies literature as to the value of empirical material for studying organisations (cf. Alvesson and Skolberg, 2000), I chose to gather this kind of data because I wanted to know what employees and others felt about WCR issues in their own words. As policy and legal frameworks were devised to help manage community relations at work, and there is a wide range of evaluation reports on their implementation, it was possible to undertake a considerable amount of documentary research on them. From this material, I constructed a synopsis of the WCR policy context presented in Chapter Three. I explained that my study is a form of critical social research (Harvey, 1990) that builds a picture of WCR initiatives and takes account of the historical context in which they exist. The representational style used to present the research findings is mostly realist (Van Maanen, 1988) and draws from aspects of critical theory and constructivism (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). The thesis presents participants' views as they introduced them during interviews, while I reflected on the impact of my subjectivity on the research process.

The second part of the chapter illuminated the importance of community background and insider/outsider issues when researching conflict-related subjects in NI. Much was learnt from the early interviews where parts of my life history were disclosed to participants who themselves provided insights into their ethno-national identity. 'Moments of rapport' (Luff, 1999) and pronounced identity differences had a considerable impact on how two of the early interviews progressed. Presumptions

about my insider knowledge affected the empirical research in other ways such as some interviewees' belief that it was unnecessary to provide in-depth explanations for their views. To prevent this becoming a major obstacle, I devoted time at pertinent points to highlight my outsiderness by, for example, explaining that I had no experience of interviewees' specific work context. Although advocates of standpoint epistemology (hooks, 1992) are in favour of researchers sharing with interviewees their political outlooks and identities, I decided to avoid discussing my community background in all but the few cases where interviewees asked me to do so. This approach was preferred because while 'moments of rapport' (Luff, 1999) may have made some interviews more amenable, this familiarity could have distracted from the main research objectives. Moreover, in other interviews participants may have been reluctant to discuss views for fear I may have misunderstood and misrepresented them.

A pragmatic (Knox, 2001) approach to interviews was adopted for the reasons indicated above where I tried not to offend political sensitivities or emphasise my community background during interviews. There were some occasions though when it was very difficult to avoid highlighting potential political differences, as was unavoidable when deciding what label to use when referring to the region. Given the complexity of the conflict and how people's identities are shaped by Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist, republican and loyalist identities, it was often difficult to work out how researcher and participant community identities were affecting the interview process. Consequently, doing the empirical research demanded a high level of emotion management as rapport or empathy in one interview may be missing from another.

6. District Council Context and Case Study Councils

6.1 Introduction

The earlier chapters explained why District Councils introduced WCR initiatives and how they can benefit the aims and objectives of the reconciliation agenda. This chapter describes the specific WCR initiatives implemented by each case study District Council to meet their legal/policy obligations. Before examining the three case studies, I briefly describe the current local government policy context in which District Councils operate. Three sub-sections are included in the case study descriptions: (i) structure and culture (ii) WCR initiatives, and (iii) perceptions of WCR initiatives. The chapter includes details on structure and culture because they provide some contextual information about each council and because I refer to this later when explaining each council's approach to community relations. The sub-sections on councils' WCR strategies address three main issues: a) what community relations initiatives they have introduced, b) who locally was involved in their design and how they have implemented them, and c) how they have been received. The third sub-section describes briefly how respondents view WCR and whether there are any current community relations issues, however the two findings chapters (Seven and Eight) more fully explore the gaps and weaknesses in policy.

All three councils have made considerable changes to their strategies over the last three decades having gone through identifiable periods of transition. The chapter also, therefore, describes WCR progression although it devotes most space to examining existing rather than previous strategies. While many of the councils' WCR initiatives are similar, there are variations in how each meets its WRC commitments – the chapter highlights these differences.

6.2 District Council Structures

The Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 formed the existing twenty-six District Councils (see table 6.1). Each provides a variety of services including: recycling; rubbish collection; building control; registration of births, deaths

and marriages/civil partnerships; and, leisure and cultural facilities. Fewer services are delivered by the region's councils than many of their counterparts in other countries prompting Professor John Stewart, a proponent of devolved local government, to argue that local government in Northern Ireland is in fact the weakest of any western democracy (February 2008 *Address to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association*). When we compare them with other British local government structures, councils in NI currently have much less control over things like social care, housing, education and local highways.

| Council | Population[25] | Community Makeup[26] | |
		% Catholic	% Protestant
Belfast City	267, 999	47.2	48.6
Lisburn	111,521	33.4	62.8
Derry City	107,296	75.4	23.2
Newry and Mourne	91,572	80.6	18.5
Craigavon	84,679	44.7	52.9
Newtonabbey	80,834	19.4	76.2
North Down	78,272	12.6	80.5
Ards	75,279	12.6	82.5
Down	67436	61.9	35.5
Castlereagh	65,665	18.3	76.9
Ballymena	60,738	21.0	76.3
Fermanagh	59,712	58.7	39.8
Coleraine	56,565	27.2	69.4
Armagh	55,755	48.7	50.0
Dungannon and South Tyrone	50,747	60.8	38.2
Omagh	50,730	69.1	29.7
Antrim	50,530	38.6	56.7
Banbridge	44,778	31.5	66.0
Magherafelt	41,81	64.1	34.8
Carrickfergus	39,175	8.7	85.1
Strabane	38,745	66.2	33.3
Limavady	34,147	56.6	41.6
Cookstown	34,102	65.2	33.6
Larne	31,067	25.2	71.7
Ballymoney	28,730	31.9	66.2
Moyle	16,515	60.3	38.3

Table 6.1 Northern Ireland councils by population, geographical coverage and community makeup

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[25] 2005 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
[26] 2001 Census.

Decision-making in District Councils is the responsibility of both elected representatives and formally appointed council officials. The Local Government Staffing Commission (LGSC), which was also set up under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, provides advice and guidance on human resource issues. The LGSC assists councils on Equality and Employee Relations matters, often holding training events in these areas for nominated council employees. In recent years, themes have included 'Community Cohesion and Integration' and 'Partnership Working'. An overhaul of District Councils and other public authorities is planned following the Review of Public Administration (RPA) launched in 2002. A Public Services Commission (PSC) was created in 2006:

> 'To make recommendations to Government on the guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of Government decisions on the review of public administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' (2006, *Written Ministerial Statement*: p2).

The PSC has issued ten 'guiding principles', one of which is on Equality, with associated recommendations for public authorities when implementing the terms of the RPA. The key principles for councils and other public authorities include the 'promotion of good relations [...] in all decision-making affecting employees throughout the RPA implementation process' (2008 *RPA Circular 5*: para. 4). Representatives of the British and Northern Ireland Assembly governments considered a number of reorganisation options during a consultation period, but following much debate, in March 2008 they announced that eleven Local Government Districts (LGDs) would replace the District Councils. Existing councils with the exception of Belfast (whose boundary may be expanded to accommodate areas of some smaller councils) will be amalgamated with at least one other to form a much larger entity (see Table 6.2) with additional jurisdiction over some elements of planning, rural development, urban regeneration and highways. Because of the changes, the 2009 local elections were postponed to allow adequate time for implementation. Some of the merging District Councils have already started planning for the RPA by sharing good practice and synchronising their WCR policies.

1.	Limavady, Ballymoney, Coleraine and Moyle
2.	Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus
3.	Derry and Strabane
4.	Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon
5.	Newtonabbey and Antrim
6.	Belfast
7.	North Down and Ards
8.	Lisburn and Castlereagh
9.	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon
10.	Omagh and Fermanagh
11.	Down and Newry

Table 6.2: Eleven RPA Local Government Districts

The services provided by councils have remained largely unchanged since the early 1970s. However, the RPA restructuring will lead to re-drawn council boundaries and, it is anticipated, sizeable job losses. Recent screening and EQIA processes considered the potential community relations implications of the RPA. The screening process concluded that the RPA could have positive community relations outcomes as the new public authority structures and locations could increase the numbers of employees from NIA (s75) groups, thus increasing diversity, while there could also be new opportunities for neutral and shared workplaces (RPANI, n.d.: *Implementation Screening Outcomes*). Government has provided further advice in the form of periodic briefings while the PCS has published guiding principles and recommendations for public authorities. In sum, the advice to councils and other public authorities is to ensure they comply at each stage of the RPA process with the legislation and policies outlined in the previous chapter.

In the following sections, I describe each council in turn. This is based on: observations during my research visits, interviews with participants, analyses of community and/or good relations strategies and action plans, workforce monitoring data, annual reports and periodic review reports.

6.3 Case Study Councils

Table 6.3 below summarises key characteristics of the case study councils. As indicated in Chapter Five, given the key research objectives, it is important to consider WCR issues in councils with different ethno-national makeup and geographical location. Other details are incorporated into the table including organisational culture, and WCR policy and practice.

	SDC	TDC	GDC
Geographical Location	Urban	Semi-Rural	Semi-Rural
Community Make-Up (2001 Census)	>40% Protestant and >40% Catholic.	Majority Protestant	Majority Catholic
Organisational Culture	Change Responsive Bureaucratic Evidence of change Reflexive leadership	Formal Heavily bureaucratic Slow to change Entrenched leadership	Informal Laissez-Faire Change Responsive Reflexive Leadership
WCR Policy	Considerable commitment	Minimal compliance	Considerable Commitment
WCR Practice	Some improvement Orange and Green Squads Questions remain A number of examples of good practice	Least Progress Significant Barriers Initiatives Often incomplete Few Examples of Good Practice	Significant Progress Areas for improvement Some examples of good practice

Table 6.3 Summary of Case Study Councils

The following descriptions expand on the details outlined in the table. They explain how the case study councils approach WCR and outline the formal initiatives implemented to meet policy obligations.

6.3.1 SDC

6.3.1.1 Structure and culture

This is the largest of the three councils. There are more than fifty elected councillors, roughly ninety percent of whom come from the major nationalist and unionist parties. An even number of Protestants and Catholics live within the council's boundary while there are also a roughly even number of employees from both communities. Unionists

115

have always controlled the council chamber, but the share of votes received by nationalist parties recently increased to such a degree that unionists lost overall control while a nationalist councillor was for the first time appointed Mayor. Most employees in office environments at SDC work with people from other community backgrounds, but this is not always true for manual grade employees. There is informal segregation of employees in Cleansing Depots, Grounds Maintenance and areas of Leisure Services. This was a response to high level of segregation in local communities and concerns about safety risk for employees. There are seven departments within the council: Chief Executive's Department; Corporate Services; Development; Health and Environmental Services; Improvement Directorate; Legal Services; and, Parks and Leisure. Each of the seven departments has in place a Director while a Chairman and Deputy Chairman preside over each of six committees that work alongside the departments and whose membership includes elected representatives and council officials (see Figure 6.1).
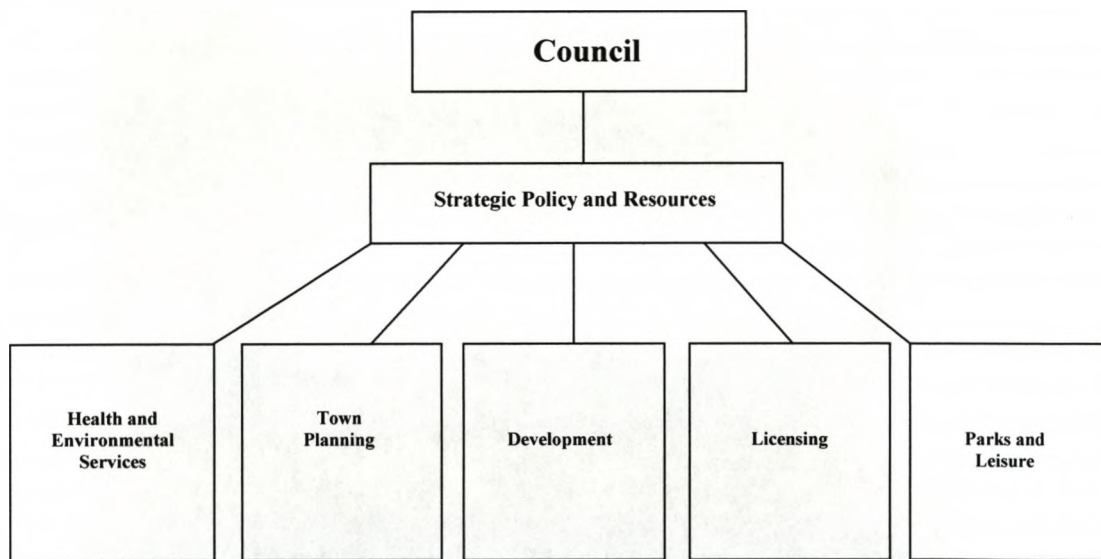
Figure 6.1: SDC Main Committee Structure

'[SDC] used to have a divide and conquer approach. They would bring one union in and then bring another union in to talk to the other union. The trade union official would have done wee deals at that meeting and then the other trade union official would have done their deal' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, TGWU).

Formal organisational structures, traditional approaches to management, and adversarial employee relations predominated until the late 1990s, but since then the

116

council has taken a softer, more people-friendly approach following the introduction of team working in many areas, increased opportunities for communication through team briefings and employee suggestion schemes. Discussions at managerial level emphasise the need to obtain employee consent through more open consultation and, as a result, relationships between the recognised trade unions and managers are currently quite positive.

6.3.1.2 WCR Initiatives

This council has altered its WCR strategy a great deal in recent years following three periods of change: 1970s to mid-1980s; late 1980s to late 1990s; and, late 1990s to the present time. During the first period, the conflict in NI was at its height, causing a high degree of ethno-national tension among employees. Although the current senior management acknowledge there was a need then for an appropriate community relations strategy, because of political infighting among elected representatives they merely complied with the basic requirements of the early legislation (Fair Employment Act 1976). As explained in Chapter Three, the Fair Employment Agency maintained and publicised a Register of Equal Opportunity Employers and so the council refrained from doing business with those companies not on the register while it tightened up on its recruitment and selection procedures.

The second period (late 1980s to late 1990s) saw a more concerted attempt to manage WCR as the council joined the DCCRP and introduced an NWE policy because, as one interviewee put it,

> 'We provided the neutral public service and really that was our kind of, salvation in the days when the bombs were going off and people were being shot' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC).

SDC's main goal during this phase was again to comply with the legislation and they implemented a NWE policy to prevent discrimination or harassment. Council WCR policy placed restrictions on employees such that they had to refrain from discussing politically sensitive issues. Line managers were required to monitor the work environment for prohibited political symbols or graffiti and:

117

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117

A Good Relations Steering Panel (GRSP) and Good Relations Working Group (GRWG) meet regularly to discuss community relations issues and contribute to council policy decisions. The GRWG is comprised of representatives from council departments while members of the GRSP are councillors, trade unionists, business representatives, members of religious groups and council officials. A recently formed 'Bonfire Committee' works in collaboration with these committees and liaises with local communities and the police to reduce anti-social behaviour and environmental damage arising, for example, from 12th July celebrations. Council funded civic and cultural events are organised each year such as the annual St Patrick's Day parade and a competition for the best-managed bonfire during 12th July festivities.

Social enterprises have worked with the council since the early 1990s providing much of its community and good relations training. The community relations training programme is open to all employees but, following consultation with trade unions, this remains voluntary other than for compulsory awareness sessions for new recruits. The council invites employees to attend community relations training events to discuss their views and experiences of conflict. They also facilitate performances by local amateur dramatic societies to help employees overcome their reluctance to speak about sensitive issues:

> 'If you said we're going to have a lunchtime session on sectarianism, nobody's going to come but if you say there's going to be a quick drama that lasts about ten minutes over your lunchtime, people actually go along. A little bit of drama can get people thinking about things, maybe have a discussion afterwards.' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC).

The council's *Management Development Programme* includes a good relations element, but this is limited to awareness training. Future Ways has provided some of the training and, indeed, the council introduced in the late 1990s Future Ways' Equity, Diversity and Interdependence framework. While the goals underpinning Future Ways' initiative, such as the need for transformative individual and collective learning, continue to inform SDC's work, it does not always adhere to them. Furthermore, the council's collaborations with Future Ways have lessened over time largely because their own Good Relations Unit has itself taken on more responsibility for developing effective strategies and policies.

Aspects of WCR activity are considered by a standing Consultation (or Household) Panel. A recent survey suggests that notwithstanding these efforts, ethno-national violence remains a problem. The council makes available commissioned reports on community relations issues and existing strategic plans through a publically available web resource. The council provides detailed information online about funded community relations projects, objectives and mission statement for the community relations unit, and equality policy. It also runs a variety of events to the annual Community Relations Week, including film and talks on community relations issues.

The council's *Good Relations Plan 2007* identified the need to provide more shared organisational space for a range of interest groups. The same plan outlined projects focusing on transformation through learning and a commitment to provide training over a three-year period for council officials and elected representatives. One contentious issue SDC has yet to address is the practice of hanging portraits of Protestant political figures in the council chamber. Although the council has added portraits of nationalist politicians, there are ongoing calls for the council to be more even-handed on these issues.

6.3.1.3 Perceptions of WCR Initiatives

Despite the problems alluded to above, many participants believe the council has progressed its WCR commitments in light of the introduction of new initiatives and efforts made in the last decade to recruit employees from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. The fact that its workforce reflects better the local population demographic reinforces the positive sentiments. Despite a number of recent high profile appointments at senior management level, there are still concerns about a religious/political imbalance in middle and senior management positions. The increased presence of nationalist parties, and particularly Sinn Fein, coincided with a more positive approach to community relations and the allocation of additional time and financial resources to these initiatives. SDC's community relations strategy has improved significantly and, as will be explained in more detail below, some of its peers now view it as one of the more progressive councils. However, the council reviewed its WCR strategy after losing a Fair Employment Tribunal case where it was

accused of not doing enough to prevent 'sectarian harassment' and, therefore, failing to comply with its legal obligations.

SDC is evidently working to establish a culture of tolerance, but it still has some work to do to inculcate fundamental change. The appointment of Catholic senior managers, for example, has been criticised because some employees perceived it a form of 'positive discrimination' for political purposes that disadvantages Protestant applicants. There is also informal segregation of a high proportion of its manual-grade employees who only work in communities where a majority of the local population are of a similar community background. As a senior trade union official explained:

> '[SDC] has what they call the Orange and Green squads. That approach was understandable because during the height of the troubles, if you were identified as being from one community or the other, your life was at great risk. Being aware of that, the council would have deliberately organised their squads into Orange and Green so that their workers were safe' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, *AMICUS*).

Even though employees and managers routinely expressed concerns regarding segregation at work, and particularly the 'Orange and Green squads' policy, this issue remains unresolved:

> In South, East and West [SDC] things aren't as bad. But, see in the North things are different altogether. If there was no sectarianism there tomorrow, we could lose ten men because there's people working in some areas that won't work in other areas. It's so fragmented up there we have to have more men to cover green and orange areas. If that wasn't there, you could take ten men out and cover all of it right away. Because certain people only go into certain areas, the council has to maintain separate depots. Generally speaking, it's still hard to get Protestant people to work in Catholic areas and Catholic people to work in Protestant areas. (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 2, SDC).

6.3.2 TDC District Council

6.3.2.1 Structure and Culture

This is a medium-sized council where more than three quarters of the twenty councillors represent the main unionist parties and their electorate. The level of

support for these parties has ensured unionist control of the council since the early 1970s. Like the other two case study councils, TDC is responsible for environmental health, leisure facilities, births, deaths and marriages, etc. Employees' community backgrounds mirror those for the local population although proportionally higher numbers of Protestants occupy the managerial positions. Consequently, there are limited opportunities at TDC for cross-community contact.

There are five main departments: Town Clerk/Chief Executive; Corporate Services; Leisure Services; Environmental Health; Technical Services and Building Control. As well as the five departments, there are three standing committees (see Figure 6.2) and a number of sub-groups who support the work of the standing committees covering areas such as Community Development, Rural Development and Economic Development.
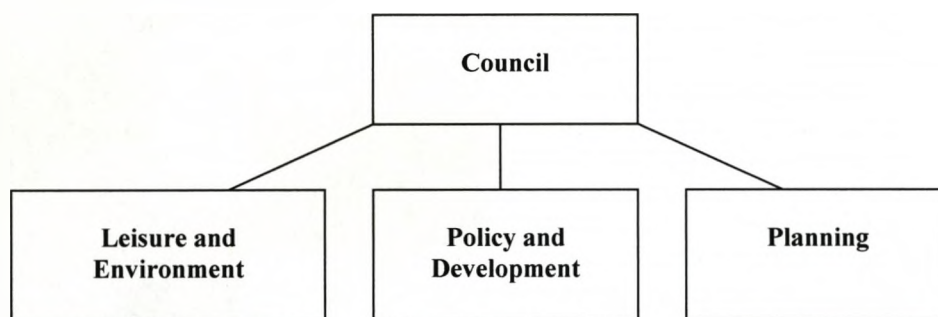
Figure 6.2 TDC Main Committee Structure

TDC has a traditional non-consultative management structure and it favours a top-down decision-making style. While trade unions are recognised, employee relations are not as positive as in the other case study councils. TDC's management structure and employee relations ethos are seen as a barrier to change. Moreover, some interviewees regarded TDC's unwillingness to change their people management approach from Personnel Management to Human Resource Management as evidence of this. As a recently appointed Personnel Manager pointed out:

> 'I think [TDC] is still living in the dark ages and they just did not like that fancy title. They thought it was too fancy for them. And we have stuck with personnel and I think we must be the only council in Northern Ireland that has stuck with it' (Protestant Female Personnel Manager, TDC).

122

6.3.2.2 WCR Initiatives

TDC has based its approach to WCR on compliance with minimum legal requirements. In other words, it makes modifications to its WCR strategy after the introduction of legal and policy frameworks, rarely going beyond these commitments. In the first community relations period (early 1970s to late 1980s), an ad-hoc, reactive style characterised the council's approach with the focus on dealing with matters arising from the Fair Employment Act 1976. During this time, no Community Relations Unit was in place. Between the late 1980s until the early 2000s, TDC joined the DCCRP and appointed a CRO based in the Community Development department. The council also introduced a NWE policy during this time limiting the flags and emblems employees could bring into the work environment and putting restrictions on politically sensitive subjects. However, from the early 2000s, good relations initiatives, which the council established following the introduction of the NIA, supplemented this policy.

TDC's Town Clerk/CEO department is made up of two service areas, Administrative Services and Development Services, with a Community Development Unit in the latter undertaking a key community relations role. This meant TDC maintained a policy of minimum compliance with the legislation. Notwithstanding this, the council now has in place WCR initiatives, including a GRF, 'Flags Forum' and 'Multi-Cultural Forum'. Membership of these forums includes council officials, people from local community groups, businesses and religious groups. Like the other case studies, TDC recently introduced a Bonfire Committee that helps manage 12th July celebrations to reduce violence and environmental damage. These forums have been effective as since their introduction there have been fewer reports of violence and environmental damage and increased dialogue with representatives of local communities.

Future Ways has facilitated meetings for councillors and employees to discuss with colleagues their experiences of conflict in a positive and constructive manner that encouraged mutual learning and understanding. The council invited all employees to attend at least one meeting. A manager from the Leisure Services department described how a meeting he attended had progressed:

'... in that meeting there were people from the Catholic and Protestant and other religions as well, and you could see then whenever certain points were brought up you could see it from their angle and then we brought up different points and they could see it from our angle. You know, sometimes you don't actually realise there are issues there [...] until somebody actually points it out and you think, I must be walking around with my eyes closed or something' (Protestant Male Leisure Services Manager, TDC).

The council in its *Good Relations Strategic Plan 2007-09* outlined proposals for new good relations training initiatives. Its strategic plan also listed priority areas, most of which included a WCR dimension. The priority areas included community relations training for new recruits, managers involved in its good relations programme, as well as the council's elected representatives. It also outlined proposals for a review of its flags and emblems policy.

TDC provides cultural awareness training for frontline staff dealing with the public on a daily basis. Although this training incorporates a community relations element, it focuses more towards educating employees in relation to a variety of cultural and religious traditions. The council publishes on its website information regarding its WCR policies but this provision is limited to basic strategy documents and contact details for staff in the Community Relations Unit. Like the other case study councils, TDC facilitates events for the annual Community Relations Week, but their contribution is limited when compared to that of SDC and GDC.

6.3.2.3 Perceptions of WCR Initiatives

Trade union representatives, staff from social enterprises, as well as CROs, managers and employees from other councils were much less enthusiastic about TDC's approach to WCR. As one interviewee put it:

'It's funny; we'd a member of staff that went to training with other councils and they found out she worked at [TDC and said]: "Oh God help you"' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC).

This interviewee highlighted how her department was trying hard to address community relations issues, but that its efforts were hindered by the council's lack of enthusiasm. TDC undertook a major review of its community relations provision in

2006. The audit highlighted areas of concern such as the council's unofficial policy of permanently flying the Union flag on some council buildings and councillors' apparent lack of enthusiasm for improving community relations. Another concern was that the council's attempts to mainstream good relations was not as successful as hoped and budget-holders remained unconvinced of the economic case for community relations. In light of the audit, its *2007-08 Good Relations Strategy* committed to further WCR training for all employees and councillors although the practice of permanently flying the Union Flag on some council buildings was not addressed.

The WCR strategies have produced some positive results, but my research participants were unconvinced that this went much beyond minimal compliance with the legislation. In short, employees were either unsure of the need for community relations policies or critical of what they viewed as the council's inability or unwillingness to engage fully with the good relations agenda. It remains the case that a small number of people are responsible for WCR and, therefore, the community relations activity and ethos is not integrated in all departments. Research participants from social enterprises and trade unions judged the council negatively and argued it was unlikely to change because senior officials and elected representatives are not convinced by the good relations ethos.

6.3.3 GDC District Council

6.3.3.1 Structure and Culture

GDC is a majority nationalist council reflecting the ethno-national makeup of the local population, which is predominantly Catholic. Over two thirds of the thirty elected representatives are from the main nationalist parties who attracted almost seventy percent of the vote in the 2005 local government elections. The proportion of votes received by the nationalist parties has increased over time while the number of Protestants living within the council boundary is reducing. Given that the majority of GDC's employees are Catholic, there are fewer opportunities for employees to work alongside colleagues from other community backgrounds. GDC has six main departments: Administration; Technical and Leisure Services; Building Control; District Development; Finance; and, Environmental Health. Services include refuse

collection, grounds maintenance, leisure provision, arts facilities, community relations, and economic development. In addition, there are three key committees (see Figure 6.3) supplemented by around twenty local council sub-committees.

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                    │     Council     │
                    └─────────────────┘
                       /           \
            ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
            │ Technical and│   │   District   │
            │ Environmental│   │ Development  │
            │   Services   │   │              │
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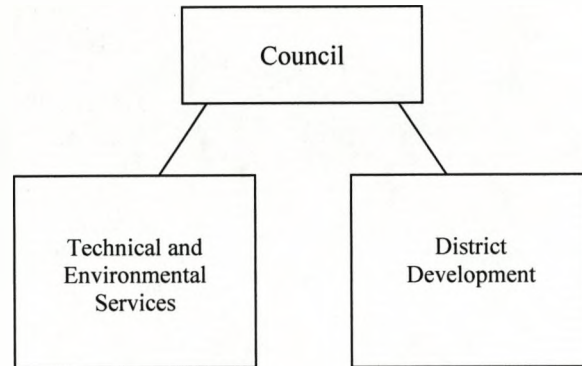
Figure 6.3: GDC Main Committee Structure

There is a variety of communication strategies in place and research participants reported positive relationships between senior management and the trade unions. As I consider in detail below, council officials and elected representatives appear committed to GDC's WCR strategy and CROs in other councils highlighted some areas of good practice in its WCR provision. The council's public support for the minority Protestant community's cultural activities has reinforced this perception. GDC has, for example, offered financial support for the development of Ulster Scots[27] language and heritage while it also funds some aspects of 12th July celebrations. There are, however, some identifiable weaknesses in GDC's WCR strategy and a number of participants were critical of the council.

6.3.3.2 WCR Initiatives

GDC's initial WCR policies, in the period from early 1970s to early 1980s, were limited to compliance with commitments under the Fair Employment Act (1976). During this time, the council's WCR provision was fragmented and less well organised while those responsible were often unsure as to their role. By the time of its

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[27] The Ulster Scots culture, traditions and language is encouraged by the Ulster Scots Agency created following the GFA for this task. It is historically more relevant to members of the Protestant community who make up the vast majority of its constituency. See Stapleton and Wilson (2004) and McCall (2003) for a sample of perspectives on the academic debate.

second phase of development (mid-1980s to mid-1990s), things had begun to improve and the council consulted with recognised trade unions to devise a NWE strategy. Whilst the other two councils also implemented such a strategy, GDC did so earlier and with more enthusiasm. Indeed, the council was one of the first to subscribe officially to the DCCRP and to create a distinct community relations department. A similar pattern emerged in the lead up to the GFA and introduction of the NIA as GDC had already in place some proactive initiatives for enhancing reconciliation efforts, such as the then community relations forum and widely available training events attended by employees. In the latest phase of development (late 1990s to the present), the council began a process of significant structural change such that a dedicated community relations team is now in place:

> 'We're getting the results because today [the CRO] has nothing better to do - it's his job to deal with these issues. The community relations people - that's their job today' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC).

GDC has added Irish Gaeilge to English as an official council language. More recently, it has also allocated financial resources to support Ulster Scots language and traditions. Because of the government policy and legal obligations outlined earlier in Chapter Three, the council committed in its third phase of community relations work to 'mainstreaming' WCR by, for example, delivering good relations training for all staff and defining good relations priorities at a strategic and not just operational level. It also made significant changes to its Community Relations department renaming it a Good Relations department. The new department has in place an Equality Officer supported since 2003 by an internal and external GRO. Responsibility for overseeing implementation of the council's equality scheme lies with the Director and two Assistant Directors of Administration.

The *Good Relations Strategy 2005-09* included objectives on 'Civic Leadership and Pride' and identified GDC's commitment to introducing Civic Leadership training for all councillors. Indeed, this council is at present the only one of the three to address a common concern for people in Northern Ireland; that is, councillors are often criticised for setting a poor example by contradicting in public their council's community relations policies. In keeping with their NIA (s75) commitments, GDC

undertook in 2007 a good relations audit. Findings from the audit highlighted internal and external issues such as negative perceptions of councillors among employees. The audit also noted that not all departments were as engaged with the good relations agenda as is necessary to achieve its aims. The review highlighted five main challenges:

1. Greater dialogue between different communities;
2. More opportunities for people to positively express their community identities;
3. Better linkages with members of Black and Ethnic minority communities;
4. Improved understanding and awareness of good relations issues among internal and external stakeholders; and,
5. Enhancing the contribution of internal and external stakeholders to good relations.

Good Relations Forums have been in place since 1998 operating under 'Chatham House Rules' wherein participants' comments are not formally recorded or publicised (GDC *Public Authority Progress Report on s75 Duties 2006-07*: p9). In its current form, the forum has drawn in a wider pool of participants with council officials, local business representatives, and voluntary organisations among them. As members of the Local Government Statutory Duty Network, GDC representatives attend good practice events in, among other things, community relations initiatives.

The council has also worked closely with social enterprises and especially Future Ways in devising and delivering its WCR commitments. It adopted the Future Ways' *Equity, Diversity and Interdependence* framework and Future Ways continues to assist in its WCR policy implementation. Social enterprises also deliver much of the WCR training at GDC, including those for senior managers and councillors, while they also facilitate the GRFs. Although GDC is the most closely aligned of the three case studies with Future Ways' learning organisation agenda, they like the others have found it difficult to embrace fully the ideological expectations of a learning organisation as defined by Future Ways (Eyben *et al*, 1997). However, the expectation that participating organisations are committed to a constant learning process and are willing to discuss areas of weakness openly is central in much of what this council does.

Consultation processes include periodic surveys of employees and ratepayers on community relations issues. A 'Household Panel' made up of the Senior Management Team and a cross-section of the council population meets every two months to discuss issues that sometimes include community relations policies and practices. The Panel met recently to comment on the implementation of NIA (s75) statutory responsibilities and the statutory five-year review of provision. GDC makes available to the public community relations information via its detailed internet pages that cover most of the council's activities in this area. On the site, there are strategy and policy documents, action plans, results from strategic reviews, community relations staff contact details and copies of the complaints procedure. Like SDC, they also sponsor a considerable number of events during the annual Community Relations Week.

6.3.3.3 Perceptions of WCR Initiatives

> 'I don't want anybody to go away and think, you know, that in some sort of way that I'm sitting here saying '[GDC] is a great place', 'we don't have any problems', 'that all the work has actually sorted out community relations and good relations'; it hasn't; not at all; we've got our problems. But I suppose what we are trying to do is to say, as the issues come up, rather than put them in some dark place, I'm going to put them out on the table and try and address them and if that means we're going to have to have difficult debates about those things, well then we have those difficult debates' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC).

While the initiatives introduced by all the three case study organisations demonstrate a willingness to meet legal obligations, research participants considered GDC to be making good progress in a number of areas. It has a number of strategies in place for managing community relations commitments that in some cases go beyond the minimum standards set out in legislation. A culture of openness to change and ongoing improvement is evident and the council is quick to react when it identifies areas of weakness. Indeed, GDC is usually at the forefront of WCR introducing the latest initiatives before most other councils. Nevertheless, there are a number of unresolved WCR issues at GDC. For example, some employees regard its Irish language policy as a 'chill factor' similar to those discussed in Chapter Two. A Catholic employee argued that the existence of Irish Gaeilge signage was indeed a concern for some:

'I had various people from outside come to see me like salespeople and whatever and a couple of the guys would be from East Belfast. They were Protestant guys and they found it a bit intimidating coming here because of the Irish language and this type of thing. Everything was signed in Irish and they found this a bit, and these were good guys but they just found it a bit daunting and some of them were a bit uncomfortable' (Catholic Male Landfill Site Manager, GDC).

Another interviewee at GDC made a similar point that GAA sports could be problematic because they were 'very much in your face' (Protestant female GRO, GDC). In their attempts to manage these concerns, council NWE policy restricts GAA emblems but because the advocates of GAA sports regard them as relatively unproblematic leisure pursuits, this has resulted in a degree of resentment:

'It got to the stage where with the local GAA teams and that, people would have say, Armagh flags in their car, hanging from the mirror and they were told they were told, "no. Not allowed to have those." Because you're coming to the workplace and you're parking your car in the car park and you might actually annoy somebody by having that in your car, which I felt was totally wrong.' (Catholic Female Administrative Assistant, GDC).

6.4 Conclusion

District Councils in Northern Ireland have a number of WCR obligations arising from legal and policy frameworks. In this chapter, I specified the WCR strategies and associated initiatives implemented by councils to demonstrate how they are meeting their WCR policy commitments and to identify some of the differences in approach each has taken. The early part of the chapter pointed out that the structure of local governance in the province is weaker than in most other countries. Policy-makers hoped that after the GFA and inauguration of the Northern Ireland Assembly government, Westminster would gradually devolve powers, but progress remains slow as local political parties disagree over the nature and timing of more fulsome devolution.

While the case study councils are obliged to enhance community relations and minimise the likelihood of conflict, there are some clear differences in how they go about this. The impression of GDC presented by participants was of a council open to

change and willing to embrace the WCR agenda. SDC was another council viewed positively by most participants and despite some well-publicised WCR problems, the majority of participants believed it was working hard to improve its strategy. Of the three councils, participants argued that TDC was the least effective at meeting its WCR commitments, although it was working to ensure adherence to minimum legal requirements. There was some evidence that the case study councils effectively consulted ratepayers and employees on good relations policy, but the timing and extent of consultation varied. Periodic surveys and consultative groups, such as the Household Panels at SDC and GDC, helped elicit views on council services.

The case study councils' attempts to improve WCR provision has led to ongoing modification as they seek to ensure compliance with legislation and the latest policy frameworks. Nevertheless, some significant barriers to effective implementation remain, such as the less than enthusiastic attitude among some senior managers at TDC for WCR initiatives. In addition, some elected representatives are uncertain of the benefits of the community relations agenda and, therefore, it is difficult to achieve their support for associated initiatives. In the next part of the thesis, Chapter Seven, I explain in more detail how participants from each council receive WCR strategies and why some barriers to effective implementation remain.

Findings: Part 1

7. Attitudes to and Experiences of WCR Initiatives

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Three summarised the major legislative and policy drivers of equality and community relations. It focused particularly on the NIA (s75), FETO and Shared Future while Chapter Six detailed the case study councils' WCR strategies. In this chapter, I further explain how employees, managers, trade union representatives and training providers view councils' WCR interventions. The specific aims are: a) to clarify how at the point of delivery participants perceive WCR initiatives; and b) how and to what extent they achieve desired results. As the previous chapter explained, all three councils have in place Equality Schemes reviewed and agreed by the ECNI. They also participate in the DCCRP. The focus in this chapter, however, is on whether case study councils are making progress on the NIA and Shared Future aims of mainstreaming good relations and promoting 'good and harmonious' work environments. There are three key questions addressed in the chapter:

i.   Do employees believe WCR policies are effective at delivering a harmonious work environment?

ii.   Do WCR policies allow for sharing and dialogue where mutual understanding and respect is central (Graham and Nash, 2006)?

iii.   Do councils effectively support and 'mainstream' WCR?

In addition to statutory duties to, for example, produce equality schemes and undertake EQIAs, all three case study councils use two further practical interventions to help them deliver on their policy aims. These are the NWE policies and GRFs outlined in Chapter Three. The latter part of the chapter evaluates these initiatives because councils allocate a considerable amount of time and resource to them. Further, the former is perceived symptomatic of an anachronistic approach to community relations (the past) while the latter is held up as something of a vanguard strategy embodying recent policy thinking (the future). It is, therefore, helpful to

compare views on them and to examine the extent to which the councils have managed to move toward a more proactive, shared culture as encouraged by the Shared Future framework and NIA s75.

I divide the chapter into four sections to consider these issues. Before discussing WCR policies, the first section presents a synopsis of the training within case study councils and examines, from my participants' perspective, whether this is adequate for achieving WCR aims. This is necessary for two reasons. First, it helps explain some participants' opinions on WCR policies and, second, participants often referred to the training they received when sharing their views on specific aspects of WCR. Generic attitudes to WCR in the councils are summarised in section two, as are the significant barriers to policy implementation. There was evidence of, as one interviewee put it, 'a culture of avoidance' arising from, *inter alia*, perceived intransigence among senior managers and councillors, confusion about WCR policy, employee concerns that relationships with colleagues would be undermined by delving into politically sensitive subjects, and difficulty 'mainstreaming' the good relations agenda. Because of their prevalence in councils and, indeed, in the three case studies, the third section illustrates interviewees' attitudes toward NWE policies. The fourth section examines good relations philosophy and strategy and examines attitudes to GRFs.

7.2 WCR Training and Awareness

Main Findings:

1. All but a handful of participants received initial WCR awareness training at the start of their employment.
2. All GROs and CROs, but fewer than half of other employees had received any cross-community understanding training.
3. *Management Development Programmes* devote little space to WCR issues, but there are plans to change this.
4. Inadequate training for managers and councillors exacerbated community relations disputes and undermined employee confidence in WCR.
5. Poorly delivered training can reduce employee confidence in WCR initiatives.

The first issue considered in this section is the training provision for employees before the provision for managers and finally for elected representatives. GROs and CROs deliver a high proportion of councils' in-house training while good relations networks and forums, social enterprises, and consultancies also act as training providers. Two predominant types of training are common: policy awareness and cross-community understanding (see Chapter Three). District Councils' awareness training focuses on an array of WCR themes such as how NIA s75 responsibilities affect employees and users of public services. It also incorporates such things as religious holidays in Islam and the cultural traditions of the Travelling community. The cross-community understanding training attempts to bring about change in participants' attitudes concentrating mostly on sectarianism and stereotyping. It involves employee attendance at facilitated events where organisers often ask participants to comment on themes designed to enhance cross-community understanding. As will be explored later, WCR training touches on personal issues that employees sometimes prefer not to discuss in a public forum.

Official policy in all case study councils is that employees receive some level of WCR training during their induction period. The previous chapter indicated that the baseline standard is awareness training for new recruits where facilitators inform participants of councils' WCR policy. A more in-depth programme is also available that includes cross-community understanding training with themes explored, for example, through drama performances and workshops. However, the case studies offer this on a voluntary basis only. Successive WCR audits of employees in all three case study councils identified problems with councillors' attitudes to community relations. Respondents argued on a number of occasions that councillors undermined WCR initiatives by making arguments that contravened WCR policies and they, therefore, showed a lack of 'civic leadership'.

All employees interviewed had received WCR awareness training at the beginning of their employment but fewer than half participated in further training after this time. Community Relations Officers attend local government network events and forums, participate in workshops organised by ECNI and NICRC and engage in good practice events with other councils. The extent and effectiveness of WCR training varies across case study councils with GDC taking more time than TDC or SDC to introduce

provision for managers and councillors. As previously stated, only recently has TDC committed to WCR training for its elected representatives whereas the others have had this in place for at least two years. Prior to the introduction of this training, managers and councillors relied on periodic policy updates, discussions with ECNI and NICRC and informal contact with their peers. The level of WCR training received by managers at case study councils is mostly limited to policy awareness because their *Management Development Programmes* concentrate on other organisational imperatives. As with training for employees, awareness training programmes for managers highlight the councils' legal/policy imperatives related to all nine NIA s75 Equality Categories. When WCR is considered, invariably the aim is to increase understanding of policy rather than to equip managers with the ability to enhance reconciliation efforts. A high proportion of participants argued that WCR training for managers is insufficient and leaves them inadequately prepared to deal with WCR problems when they arise:

> 'Our new managers, working here in a mixed depot, they're not able to cope if a sectarian thing comes up. I don't think they're able to cope because they haven't got adequate training. I don't think they were ever trained to deal with this thing. It's above their heads. They go and bury themselves in their offices. We've had that here and in other depots where say you've got a Protestant depot and a Catholic depot. Managers and supervisors run and hide instead of tackling the situation face-on and nipping it in the bud. It's what we always say in the trade union: nip it in the bud or it'll fester and before long, you're looking at depots closing. Management should be able to identify that and nip that in the bud right away' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 1, SDC).

Some cross-community understanding training generated positive WCR outcomes. Participants commented that such events gave them a chance to discuss issues in an open, constructive manner and to hear from other communities about their experiences and attitudes in ways that challenged stereotypical presumptions. Other training can have positive effects if they increase contact between Protestant and Catholic employees. The example given in the quote below, for instance, occurred after Cleansing Depot staff from different community backgrounds completed an English language proficiency programme:

'We went on a training course and when a fella was asked at the end what he thought, he stood up and says: "I learnt that they're as daft as us and we're as daft as them". That was actually an English course. We were turning round and saying to them: "we thought we were getting hard done by but you're just as bad. We thought you were getting everything". That was in the Lord Mayor's parlour – even he was laughing' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 1, SDC).

However, cross-community contact during training events not intended to cover WCR can result in negative experiences for participants. The following example demonstrates this point. A Salaries and Wages Officer at TDC described her experiences during an IT training event where participants spent time discussing WCR issues:

'I went to a training course at one time and the people all in the room, apart from two of us, were of a different persuasion. I thought, "I don't want to be here anymore". They were just talking about things that happened; they were saying that they were being victimised in their jobs. We were all there as a collective group and they were saying, "oh yes. We don't get interviews and we don't get any upgrading". There were small things that they felt that they were being victimised. I think they were making more of, whereas I could laugh it off and say, 'ah well.' I don't feel threatened by that but they obviously felt threatened but they were threatening me because they were more or less saying that it was the other tradition that was doing this to them. And were dwelling on that. It was actually an IT training course and we went that day and the whole day we didn't do a lot of training, it was all talk about that and I thought, 'well I don't really want to go to this training again' (Protestant Female Senior Salaries and Wages Officer, TDC).

There were a number of examples where WCR focused training did not appear to work. It is interesting to note that these examples are all from cross-community understanding training events where employees are asked to reflect on their attitudes to other communities. In the example quoted below, a social enterprise led a WCR training event where they confronted Protestant and Catholic participants using a 'hard-edged' and 'to-the-point' style:

'They brought a boy over to talk about community relations and that. He was a Belfast man and he was effing and blinding and saying he done this and done that. Some of our boys walked out because they felt he was only bringing bother to the council. He was drawing out issues which weren't issues' (Protestant Male Refuse Manager, TDC).

136

In an example considered in more detail later, the Head of Administration (Protestant male) at TDC lamented the fact that another community awareness training programme provided by a social enterprise isolated many of the participants because 'they gave us the impression all the time that we were failing, that we weren't open.' The negative effects of poorly received training can be widely felt and, as the CRO (Catholic female) at GDC argued, 'I think it's good to open up the can of worms, but you have to have the right people to manage it.'

Training provision in the case study councils informs how employees and others perceive WCR work. The examples given above indicate that training can be beneficial in delivering on WCR outcomes, but they also suggest that community relations concerns can affect training initiatives.

7.3 Attitudes to WCR Strategy

Main Findings

1. WCR strategies are in principle regarded necessary and beneficial. However, avoidance of WCR-related subjects is commonplace.
2. All managers argued in favour of WCR strategies. However, there was a widespread perception among other research participants that managers evade WCR problems and that they could show greater support for WCR policy. The reasons given for this view are: the issues are too complex, policy is frequently unenforced, managers see WCR as 'fluffy', 'tea party' work, WCR activity is difficult to quantify, and there is a lack of career progression for those involved in WCR activity.
3. Councillors are unsupportive of WCR because they put party political commitments before WCR and too frequently contradict in public councils' WCR policies.
4. Employees also sidestep WCR issues citing: lack of support from managers, concerns for their personal safety, confusion about and frustration with WCR policy, and concerns about undermining relationships with colleagues.

'Well they tend to look at most policies in this organisation as lip service. I haven't been on the website in ages but I am sure there is a Diversity in the Workplace Policy but it is always seen as pure lip service, window dressing. I mean policies like that never really take tangible effect.' (Catholic Male Procurement Officer, GDC)

'Sometimes in the past it's been very much as if this has almost been like tea party work … it's just 'nicey-nicey' with cucumber sandwiches' (Protestant Female CRO, Council G).

'I think it's seen as 'fluffy' and, you know, tree hugging, sandal wearing type of stuff. There's a lot of that going about' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC).

Before moving on to evaluate participants' experiences of specific WCR initiatives, attitudes toward WCR generally are summarised. Most participants accepted that WCR strategies and practical initiatives are necessary to reduce conflict at work. Employees expressed a desire to work without the fear of violence or harassment where they had no concerns about sharing political perspectives or talking, for example, about the GAA or Rangers match at the weekend. Managers, CEOs and CROs aspire to help create workplaces free from sectarianism and where, if WCR problems arise, open debates and quick resolutions are the norm. Moreover, trade union officials and local representatives looked to ensure adequate protection from sectarianism for employees to work in a safe and secure setting. Directors of social enterprises all had ideas for enhancing WCR initiatives that supported the Shared Future ethos. However, participants also argued that a number of barriers to WCR exist and that WCR avoidance is characteristic of councils.

Notwithstanding the high level of support for WCR policy, there is a perceived lack of commitment at management and councillor level making it difficult to achieve widespread support and to mainstream responsibility throughout councils. As indicated in this section's opening quotes, interviewees accused managers and councillors of regarding WCR as 'fluffy' 'tea party' work. Councillors came in for particular criticism as the research participants frequently chided them for contradicting in public and failing to get behind the agreed principles of WCR and, therefore, for not showing 'civic leadership'. Employees in SDC's Cleansing Depot were unconvinced that WCR policy could be successful in the long-term. This was

because of what they viewed as a reactive, ineffective management approach to policy enforcement:

> 'Audits are done by the manager and the trade union representatives who will go around the depot and check for graffiti, check all the walls and everything else. But, it does get very slack; management do get very slack. It shouldn't be on us as trade union representatives to go to managers and say: 'look is it not about time you did an audit here?' They're getting paid big bloody money to carry out their work and that's part of the agreement. There is graffiti still down in our toilets that still hasn't been removed and we've reported it. We're not going to keep going on and on about it' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 2, SDC).

Managers are sometimes slow or unwilling to respond to WCR incidents and some respondents accused them of trying to avoid directly dealing with sectarian harassment when they should take things more seriously:

> 'One of my members was threatened so he was ... that he was going to get a bullet in the head. There was actually graffiti down in the toilets. I went and reported it to [a manager]. I said to him, "there's graffiti in the toilets there regarding one of my members from Loyalist paramilitaries". His attitude was, "hurry up, we'll rub it out". I says, "no, you're not fucking rubbing that out". I says, "you may bring the police in here. That's a threat to the man's life". I say's: "I want the police involved in this". So, the police had to be brought in and they told him to be careful about his personal safety. The individual kept on getting threats – he was getting them over the (in-vehicle radio system) and everything (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 1, SDC)'.

At TDC, the CRO argued that another reason the council does not address WCR issues is that the majority of employees and the local population are Protestant and, therefore, there is a reluctance to 'upset the majority':

> 'The Union Jack [sic] flies in the depot yard. It's not an official flag; it should have been taken down; it has caused offence to some employees. But the culture in this organisation is to keep the peace. They're not challenging, they do not challenge overt political or cultural expressions [of Protestantism]. So that ... really that flag should be down but they don't want to upset the majority in here. So, it's kind of been hushed. Really, they could have removed it but they haven't. It was put up by the workers.' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC)

A concern both for managers and for employees is that WCR-related incidents at times involve paramilitary organisations. Although these incidents were uncommon, employees considered full implementation of WCR policies difficult in such circumstances as it could lead to threats to their safety:

'If it's an ongoing thing against the member, who is continually being harassed and victimised by certain individuals with regards to sectarian incidents he would then have to hold his hand up and say at the end of the day I'm married here with kids. I have to put the wife and the kids first. Know what I mean? He's being put into a terrible position. Management will turn around and say, "look there's nothing much we can do for you here". He doesn't want to move, Protestant or a Catholic fella, doesn't want to move. But, he must take his family circumstances into account. At the end of the day, putting it bluntly, somebody could be linked to one of the paramilitary organisations. Are you going to turn around and say, "it's him that's doing this?" When you put your head on the chopping block you're in a very vulnerable situation' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 1, SDC).

Interviewees sometimes argued that managers are not as involved in WCR matters as they should be not because of concerns for their safety but because it is difficult to quantify its impact over time and there is little opportunity for career enhancement in this work. On the first point, a CRO from Council F commented, 'we are always trying to persuade people to take on an agenda they don't see as offering them any [career] advantage, [...] there's no big wins.' The CEO at GDC argued that employees and managers sometimes found it difficult to take WCR seriously because of its intangible impact: 'we can very easily monitor our performance in terms of collecting bins per household, but community relations doesn't lend itself to the same sort of approach' (CEO, GDC). A further reason as to why managers are more willing to concentrate on other issues is that they do not want to reveal weaknesses in their systems:

'The attitude is: yes, you can go and do that work in the community but, no we don't want you looking inside at staff training or employment issues or things like that.' (Protestant female CRO, Council D)

A common theme raised during interviews was that, whatever the WCR strategy used, the examples above are typical of a prevailing culture of community relations avoidance that is difficult to counteract partly because 'employers themselves would

140

feel their remit stops within the boundaries of the workplace' (Trade Union Official, AMICUS). The CRO from Council D put it this way:

'There are more discussions going on with colleagues people are close to. But, the overall ethos of this organisation would be to sweep it under the carpet and to pretend nobody had a problem. And, because nobody challenges it, it would be seen as normal not to talk about those things, including the experiences of the minority Catholic workforce we have here. I mean, as I'm sure you know yourself, that sort of talk is frowned upon. The attitude is, why bring these things up? And, we don't want to air those things.' (Protestant Female CRO, Council D).

A desire to portray their organisation as a harmonious environment where managers have helped create a constructive culture also prompted avoidance in some cases. This desire to present a picture of a harmonious workplace led at times to false recording of reasons for disciplinary actions:

'It's very easy for a company to justify [sacking someone] because he was five times late – they can sack him for that. But, you can't say, "aye, he called our manager an Orange bastard". You can't put that down in public records.' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, TGWU)

Employees also sidestepped WCR issues citing: lack of support from managers and councillors, concerns for their personal safety if things go wrong and confusion about how best to adhere to policy guidance. Further, they referred to the potentially damaging impact of WCR issues on relationships with colleagues from different community backgrounds, as a Community Development Officer at Council G explained:

'I've worked with [my friend] now for about 12 or 13 years and we get on extremely well. But I would find it difficult to sit and talk about political issues because I'm frightened of offending and frightened of being offended [...] and that it will alter our relationship. In some ways it's an artificial type of friendship – scrape the veneer and you'll go somewhere you don't want to. I wouldn't want to have too much confrontation because it could alter my thoughts about that person, who I like. It would put a wee seed of doubt in your mind if you didn't like what was being said. If you didn't like it you'd maybe start thinking: "I didn't know that person felt that way; I know they're only being honest, but that hurt".' (Catholic Female Community Development Management, Council G)

Other respondents described instances of self-censorship arguing, for example, that a desire to avoid offending colleagues rather than formal policy guidelines made them guarded at work:

> 'Where I live, the summer time brings out the Orange marches through our predominantly nationalist town and although maybe there has been damage done, vandalism, maybe there has been plastic bullets fired, you don't talk about that simply because there is a Protestant colleague at the table that might be offended by it. So I wouldn't talk about that.' (Catholic Male Procurement Officer, GDC)

Community Relations Officers often contended that, as with council managers, a lack of support from councillors' for WCR policy was problematic. Councillors can impede the work done by Community Relations departments if they focus on party politics at the expense of WCR and behave in a manner that contradicts councils' WCR policies. A GRO (Catholic female) at SDC cited party political divisions between councillors as a hindrance to the council's WCR strategy and said, 'any discussion of identity immediately becomes kind of polarised', while the CRO (Protestant female) at Council D added, 'it is difficult to get [councillors] to grasp the role of civic leadership rather than just vote winning. I've been accused of being a troublemaker [by them] just for bringing up this stuff'. Councillors' actions undermined one interviewee's confidence in a recent WCR initiative devised in collaboration with Future Ways. She engaged in a good relations training programme and came away feeling quite positive until a public argument between councillors appeared to contradict the good relations ethos:

> 'Within a couple of weeks there was a row at the council and they called each other names. [I was thinking,] you were the first ones that signed up to this and you're standing on other side of the council chamber insulting each other".' (Catholic Female Grounds Maintenance Team Leader, GDC)

There is some confusion about what conversation topics and symbols are acceptable under WCR policy. This was especially true of flags and emblems because many employees were unsure of the reasons why councils prohibited some emblems and not others. For example, reprimands for displaying the Union Flag and wearing sports clothing were inconsistent. An employee at GDC explained how for him and some of

142

his colleagues there was confusion as to why the council banned GAA symbols but not those of the Northern Ireland football team:

> 'There have been strange anomalies. There was a guy last year who was chastised. He was pulled for this flag he had in the back of his car, [a GAA] flag. He had to remove it. The guy who works for me is a soccer officer but he is wearing a Northern Ireland tracksuit top. If I can't fly an Armagh flag in my car in the yard, how can this council employee wear the Northern Ireland crest on his tracksuit top?' (Catholic Male Recreation and Sports Development Officer, GDC)

Community Relations Officers invariably argued that these inconsistencies in policy arise across councils because the WCR context is more complex than formal policy allows or, as the CRO of Council D explained, 'you're starting from somewhere that politics is already in place – there's written and unwritten policies' (CRO, Council D).

7.4 'Salvation when the Bombs were Going Off' – Neutral Work Environment Strategies

Main Findings:

1. The vast majority of respondents regarded NWEs as an essential but problematic WCR policy.
2. There is a strong desire for more integrated workplaces where employees can be open about their community backgrounds and where NWE policies are unnecessary.
3. Councils' NWE policies encourage employees to avoid community relations issues; they encourage identity suppression and are insufficient in themselves for enhancing reconciliation in the long-term. Councils apply NWE policies inconsistently and subjectively leading to confusion and frustration for employees.
4. WCR problems remain even when well-thought-out NWE policies are in place.

> 'We provided the neutral public service; and really that was our salvation in the days when the bombs were going off and people were being shot' (Catholic Female CRO, SDC).

143

'When the bombing campaign was at its worst and the murders were at their worst, those people were very sensitised to any suggestion of them being at fault. They felt that they were the minority where they lived. They felt that they were under daily threat and in that situation there, you had to really keep off the subject of politics or religion because they were suffering' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC).

Chapter Three and Six explained that councils adopted NWE policies to make workplaces more welcoming social spaces where employees work without fear. Workplaces are less welcoming for employees when chill factors (Teague, 1997; Shirlow, 2006) such as politically sensitive flags and emblems are in place or where there are reports of sectarianism. The reported benefits of creating a 'sanctuary of neutrality' (Dickson *et al*, 2002) include a reduction in such chill factors, increased employee productivity, and improved social relations among the workforce. Neutral Work Environment strategies are especially important in contexts with high levels of segregation because political tension and conflict tends to be relatively high. A Cleansing Technician at SDC succinctly described this rationale:

'There's fellas from [a unionist area] and [a nationalist area] coming in here working with one another for the first time and they don't like it. They don't know any different and then they're coming in here and they see people working together. In the whole time that they've lived, worked, slept and fed in these areas they've never mixed socially with the other side. We're talking about both sides here' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 4, SDC).

It was also argued that NWE policies in the past provided an opportunity for councils to contemplate further how best to improve community relations in the long-term. A trade union official from AMICUS argued that neutrality gives organisations space to further develop effective WCR strategies:

'In Northern Ireland, it was politics about which flag to fly, what band to walk behind. People had to be told not to bring these issues into work. Employers responded very quickly by banning any flags and emblems from the workplace. I think you've got to go back to a baseline, and that baseline is your neutral environment. From there, you can develop and grow' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, AMICUS).

A majority of interviewees were aware of councils' NWE policies. Although they showed preference for integrated workplaces where employees are open about

community backgrounds, they believed this unlikely in the short-term and, therefore, that NWEs should remain. However, research participants identified three main deficiencies in NWE strategies that I consider in turn. First, NWE encourages employees to suppress aspects of their community background, and because of it, there are limited opportunities for reconciliation. Second, employees are often confused about council NWE policy. Third, the previous deficiencies reveal a further problem – community relations problems continue to occur, even when well-thought-out NWE policies are in place.

7.4.1 NWE Addresses Surface-Level Issues

Most research participants cited NWEs inability to challenge underlying sectarianised attitudes as a major weakness. They argued that these policies encourage a reactionary approach to WCR from councils and that they deal mostly with surface-level issues such as flag-flying, sectarian graffiti and politically sensitive talk. The critics' arguments focus on a similar point – NWE policies are blunt ways of keeping expressions of identity out of the workplace. As noted by the Director of Social Enterprise A (Protestant male), NWEs leave 'a lot of negative, tacit, partisan cultures in public and private workplaces [...] unacknowledged.' GDC's CEO questioned the NWE terminology and ethos for implying that organisations could separate their workplaces from society and for not attempting to address WCR issues at a deeper level:

> 'We don't like the term 'a neutral working environment'. I mean, what is it? Is it a laboratory? I mean, we can stop people from coming into work with Celtic shirts or Rangers shirts or whatever. You could take everybody coming in through the gates of the council facilities and ask them to take off all their clothing and provide them with some sort of 1984 Georgio Armani suit, but that doesn't change what's inside them' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC).

Other interviewees argued that NWEs prevent employees from articulating important aspects of their identities leading to frustration and discouraging self-reflection. Thus, NWE can undermine long-term relationship building. A trade union official from SIPTU (Quote 1) and the CEO of Council G (Quote 2) argued likewise:

Quote 1:

'Neutrality can cause problems. Because if I slag you off about Rangers or Celtic and you take offence then you go to the management and complain. I could take the hump because you made a complaint instead of going directly to me. I could then close off to you and you close off to me' (Catholic Male Trade Union Official, SIPTU).

Quote 2:

'If you try to keep it completely out of the working environment, and if it's part of a person's life, you can push it underground where you can only speak to certain people about these things' (Protestant Male CEO, Council G).

The CRO at Council D highlighted that, in her view, neutrality is subjective anyway and that acceptable norms and behaviours vary from one context to another:

'I think it's absolute nonsense to say you can have a neutral working environment policy. If you believe it's a neutral working environment there's a danger that you'll not question the norms and take them for granted. The norms are different for one side or the other' (Protestant Female CRO, Council D).

A PA at SDC made a similar point. She contended that because NWE policies suppress identity expression, they reduce the prospect of reconciliation when 'there could be a lot more learning done rather than just making it a taboo subject.' One consequence of this is that is that NWE policies can reduce motivation levels:

'I can tell you now that it does impact. It does. It gets to me. Some days it gets to me. There's times I feel like, I'm not getting out of bed today to go in here. It's hard. Some days it's hard work and some days it's grand'. (Catholic Male Labourer, TDC)

For other interviewees, the work environment 'would be terrible' if the principle of neutrality was rigidly enforced:

'If you were to sit there and have to constantly self censor in an office, no matter how good the environment would be at the start, it would be terrible within days I think. The way I see it, if you're going to get to the point where you have to continually watch what you say and who you say it to, then you might as well be living in communist Russia or part of animal farm.' (Protestant Male Landfill Monitoring Assistant, SDC)

7.4.2 Confusion and Frustration about NWE

The empirical research revealed considerable confusion about the detail of NWE policies and especially regarding when the principle of neutrality should apply. Community Relations Officers and managers found it difficult to specify accurately legitimate expressions of identity and, therefore, they often needed to make subjective judgements about them. This caused inconsistency in the application of NWE and confusion about what actions the policy prohibits. At SDC, for example, an interviewee felt that, despite committing to applying NWE in all its workplaces, the council does not do so in highly segregated areas because it receives few complaints from employees there. A senior manager at the council confirmed and clarified this position:

> 'I would now take a more pragmatic view and say, "are they harmonious?" Because neutrality is in the eye of the beholder. Neutrality is everything. If you have a community centre [in a Catholic area] that has an Irish language class in it and you have stuff all round the walls written in Irish, it's quite harmonious as far as I'm concerned. It mightn't be neutral to members of another community if they went in there but they don't need to go in there. They don't frequent that. And it's the same, we have community centres in Protestant areas that have maybe stuff up that I would not call neutral but it's certainly harmonious. Nobody who is there actually is concerned about it. So there's a balance between a big open debate and bringing these things to the fore.' (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC)

GDC's attempts to prevent employees from displaying GAA emblems caused consternation for some interviewees who found it difficult to understand why the council should view these symbols as counterproductive. A Catholic Procurement Officer's line manager told him to take down a GAA car air freshener when he parked in a council car park. When a Catholic Administrative Assistant noticed a poppy sticker on another employees' car, she felt this was evidence of the council's inconsistency and said, 'if you're going to enforce a rule, it has to be for everybody.' The CROs argued that a lack of clarity in NWE policy was the main reason for confusion and inconsistency. A number of them also pointed out that unclear policy guidance meant employees could raise unjustified complaints about symbols in the workplace. These incidents led to frustration because NWE policy contained no provision for constructive debate about the issues. In Council G, for example, a CRO

(Protestant female) recounted two instances where employees claimed the council had breached the NWE policy. On the first occasion, the council received a complaint about green balloons in the staff canteen on St Patrick's Day. On another, an employee asked a line manager to remove the word 'Irish' from the Irish Stew dish displayed on the canteen menu. In both cases, council managers dealt with the complaints by taking down the green balloons and cleaning off the word Irish from the menu. An employee at GDC refused to work with a colleague because of his choice of newspaper. He complained that this breached the NWE policy. The council accepted his complaint and agreed to pair him with another employee:

> 'We'd an issue here one time where a fella took out the Newsletter[28] and a fella wouldn't work with him because he read the Newsletter. They wouldn't go up and say to the fella, "listen you are not allowed to read the Newsletter here", because the first thing the fella is going to turn around and say, "well how come he is allowed to read The Irish News?" And the next minute fighting over newspapers. So they moved him to another cab with somebody else.' (Protestant Male Trade Union Representative, GDC)

All the cases cited above, according to the interviewees quoted, were avoidable if councils had more clearly defined NWE policies. However, they went on to argue that, even then, employees would continue to complain about such matters particularly when NWE policies do not attempt to address the underlying reasons for employee complaints or explain why the councils prohibit some behaviours and not others. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the Union Flag continues to fly each day of the year on some council buildings despite advice that this could contravene their NIA s75 duties. How councils approach this matter was another regular cause of confusion. Respondents often criticised these councils' for banning politically sensitive football shirts yet, officially placing flags on its buildings. There were also accounts of councils ignoring unofficial flags despite what their NWE policy states:

> 'What is more of concern to people, I think really, is the unofficial flag flying at the depot because, you know, it is unofficial but isn't managed. That flag is telling everybody we're an Orange council rather than a more progressive one. By flying the flag, staff are stamping their own authority and management are seen to be not dealing with it.' (Protestant Male Grounds Maintenance Line Manager, TDC)

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[28] This is a local newspaper with a largely Protestant readership.

Another interviewee asserted that, with management's knowledge, employees at TDC repositioned the Union Flag on a Cleansing Depot after he had removed it to complete a roof repair:

> 'We did a roof repair in this yard recently, about two months ago and we had to remove a Union Jack off the roof, just because we were doing the repair at that area and we never remounted it again. And it was two individuals made a big issue of it. It's back up. It's not an issue, if you know what I mean. I'm quite happy to put the flag up. They can fly whatever they want. They can fly a pair of pyjamas for all I care. They have a policy regarding the flying of emblems on the depot but whether they enforce it or not is another thing.' (Catholic Male Charge Hand, TDC)

How managers resolved NWE complaints also led to increased uncertainty and made some reluctant to bring formal complaints. For example, there have been cases where, following a grievance, councils recommended complainants move against their wishes to other work sites. A trade union representative at SDC argued that such decisions have exacerbated WCR problems:

> 'If he was to work down here and somebody was to write graffiti about him saying you're going to get shot by the LVF on the walls, which I got we'd have to go down to the management and their attitude would be to move him – so he gets punished twice. He loves working down in the depot, may have been working in the depot for fifteen years … he then has to move and the individual who did it gets away with it. They would rather deal with the person than deal with the problem. The result of that is that if you don't like anybody in the depot you write something [derogatory] about him and he gets moved' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 2, SDC).

7.4.3 WCR Issues Persist Despite NWE Policies

Even in organisations with longstanding and well-thought-through NWE policies, some employees continue to engage in sectarianised behaviour. This is true for the case study councils who despite having well-established NWE strategies, still experience WCR problems. Participants from SDC, for example, spoke about threats received from paramilitary groups, vandalised cars, graffiti, and sectarian abuse over their internal radio system. There were reports at TDC of ongoing sectarian graffiti, threats of violence, complaints about flags and emblems, and employees refusing to

work with colleagues from other communities. From the examples already cited, it will be clear that WCR issues continue to surface at GDC too. How this happens, however, varies as employees bring aspects of identity to work in many different ways.

A Catholic Labourer at TDC explained how during the 12th July celebrations Protestant colleagues would begin getting into the spirit of the occasion:

> I: It is hard. It is. At this time of the year [near 12th July] too, [interviewee makes drum beat on table[29]]
>
> Q: Do you get that on the table?
>
> I: You get it everywhere and it bugs you. It's right up there with me [interviewee points to his forehead]. It goes right up into the middle of my head. A [Protestant] man sixty years of age is [again interviewee replicates drum beat] on steering wheel of a lorry. It's pathetic.
>
> Q: That would be someone you are in the cab with?
>
> I: Yeah. So what do you do about that? How do you turn around and say to a man like that, 'can you stop that?' He would just look at you as if you had two heads.
>
> Q: Have you ever mentioned it to him?
>
> I: No. Never will as long as I am here. Things like that – it's not worth the hassle.

The interviewee interpreted this incident as deliberate harassment, but there are occasions when employees engage in politically sensitive behaviour without intending to make a political point. Employees talk about their attendance at sporting events where the vast majority of fellow supporters are Protestant or Catholic and they may mention participation in loyalist band parades. This too can be problematic though. The interviewee quoted above also stated that, 'there was a band parade last Friday night in the town. They [Protestant colleagues] were in on Saturday morning standing at the front door talking about it'. He explained that a lack of opportunity to engage in conversations about his cultural traditions causes frustration. He further suggested that because Protestant colleagues may react negatively to stories about his attendance at Irish music events, he routinely lied about them:

> 'I would like to be able to talk openly about life in general, the way my life is, the things I do at the weekend - go and listen to Irish traditional music. I would like to be able to talk about

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[29] The interviewee played with his hands on a table the drum beats from 12th July parades.

that. I wouldn't even talk about that or I wouldn't even say about the places where I would go. I would lie. I would come in and lie to them here about where I've been at the weekend because I wouldn't talk about things like that' (Catholic Male Labourer, TDC).

Workplace Community Relations issues also remain unaddressed because some employees resist council policies. For example, there was much frustration at GDC's prohibition of GAA symbols. Managers often reminded employees that this was necessary because of Protestant colleagues concerns about, and lack of interest in, GAA sports. Nevertheless, one interviewee contended that talking about the GAA was in his view acceptable:

> 'I have to say that in my small group of people that I would have my tea with, the general topic of conversation is the goings on that would happen on the Gaelic football field at the weekend. If anybody is offended by that, I think it's a bit odd. It wouldn't stop me if someone was offended at me talking about Gaelic football. It would not stop me talking about Gaelic football because I think it would be a ludicrous idea. It would be like me being offended by someone talking about hockey. I would never be offended by anybody talking about hockey. So it wouldn't stop me talking.' (Catholic Male Procurement Officer, GDC)

There are also covert ways of introducing political views that involved hiding expressions of identity from management and work colleagues. This occurred when an employee at SDC used the year 1690[30] as his password for accessing the computer network:

> 'I'm just thinking of something a couple of years ago; we discovered that one of the guys, who's now left the council actually, his password on his PC was '1690' and whenever people discovered that it went round the place like wildfire. This was just shocking, you know, this was his, his computer password' (Catholic Female GRO, *SDC*).

Participants argued that Neutral Work Environment policies are necessary for reducing conflict. They remove many of the employment chill factors and can enable employees to work without fear. However, the research evidence suggests that NWE is more effective for addressing surface level issues. It limits politically sensitive flags and emblems but does not attempt to change stereotypical views or sectarianised

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[30] Sixteen-Ninety is the year when Protestant King William III of Orange's was victorious in battle against the Catholic King James II.

attitudes and behaviours. Further, consistent enforcement of NWE is difficult as councils' decisions about what symbols to ban in the workplace depend on subjective judgements and, in any event, most managers avoid dealing with politically sensitive matters unless there is a pressing need. Moreover, NWEs can undermine workplace reconciliation when, as the Director of a Social Enterprise (Protestant male) put it, 'the neutral workplace [...] means that managers and workers will simply not talk [about community relations issues] at least formally or within earshot'. The next section examines participants' views of good relations policy where councils are encouraged to go beyond surface level, reactionary management of WCR.

7.5 Good Relations – 'Pandora's Box' and 'Naive Social Engineering'?

Main Findings:

1. Most interviewees regarded good relations initiatives as potentially positive, particularly for addressing many of the weaknesses with NWE.
2. Participants were in favour of open and constructive dialogue, and the promotion of 'good and harmonious workplaces'.
3. A good relations strategy represents a major culture change that is difficult to implement effectively.
4. The major barriers identified include convincing employees to talk openly about WCR issues, countering the 'silo mentality' apparent in some workplaces and convincing employees that WCR initiatives are not 'naive social engineering'.
5. Community and Good Relations Officers are supportive of GRFs while other research participants shared examples where these initiatives had positive effects. However, as with good relations more broadly, employees often find it difficult in the workplace to discuss openly with colleagues their ethno-national differences.

'I think our problem now is moving from neutrality to inclusion and I'm just not sure that we're mature enough as an organisation or a society for that yet, to be quite honest. People find it easy to say, "you don't talk about these things in the workplace." We're taking a

quantum leap now under good relations to try to say, "yeah but we could do but in a controlled, facilitated environment".' (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC).

Following more than a decade of emphasis on NWE policies, NIA s75 and the later Shared Future framework encouraged a shift in emphasis to the promotion of good relations in the workplace (cf. Chapter Three). The stated intention behind the good relations policy was to enhance relationships between, and the experiences of, all members of society in NI by promoting mutual understanding, fully integrating or mainstreaming responsibility for this work throughout organisations, and creating shared work environments. This reflected a growing feeling that NWE policies were a reaction to the levels of violence experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, and that they encouraged a culture of avoidance in organisations. Consequently, community relations did not improve as much as was hoped (Harbison, 2002). There has been a shift in emphasis and language from NWE to 'good and harmonious work environments' with councils urged to reflect this in their policy statements. The empirical data quoted in the sub-section above, lends support to the view that NWE too often promotes concealment rather than proactive management of identity differences to the detriment of the reconciliation agenda. Most research participants believed good relations philosophy to be more beneficial than NWE because it encourages employees to talk openly and constructively about political perspectives to learn more about the attitudes and experiences of other communities. They argued that until the introduction of an effective good relations strategy things were, as one interviewee explained, 'put into the "too difficult" tray' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC).

Research participants made positive comments about good relations' emphasis on greater openness and mutual understanding. They agreed with the sentiment articulated in the ECNI *Fair Employment Code of Practice* (p16) that councils should 'promote a good and harmonious work environment' and not simply try to suppress expressions of identity. GDC's CEO (Catholic male) explained that his council's good relations strategy was necessary for the same reasons as employees are encouraged to, '[deal with] the issues that come up, rather than put them in some dark place.' Another reason for supporting good relations initiatives is that when it improves

relationships between employees, positive and quantifiable productivity benefits result:

> 'We say this process is about improving relationships internally so they can have a wider impact. If you're happy at your work you get on better with your colleagues, you work better as a team, you're more efficient delivering your service and that affects how people perceive us externally. People are starting to see that that can be beneficial in other more concrete ways.' (Catholic female GRO, SDC)

Although interviewees were usually positive about good relations, they identified some major challenges such as convincing other employees to take seriously good relations issues and getting them to talk openly about their community backgrounds and experiences:

> 'I think that does sit ill at ease perhaps with some of our work colleagues because they can understand neutrality. You don't talk about it, you don't wear a Celtic shirt, you don't come in in your colours, you don't talk about politics in work. Trying to move people from that which we have engrained in them for so long to having this open and inclusive conversation along religious lines is a big step' (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC).

The threat of disciplinary action was also a concern for employees worried that the views they disclose might lead to complaint:

> 'It is not a thing that people want to talk about. They don't want to talk about it in case they are misinterpreted and the next minute they are brought up on a disciplinary charge, "you said this to such and such and such and such overheard you and they are taking you up".' (Protestant Male TU Representative, GDC)

Community Relations Officers often argued that employees from across departments were reluctant to engage fully with the good relations agenda primarily because they did not view it as a core task:

Quote 1:
'If you look at the managers, I think they've been here from the dawn of time like you know. That's a criticism if you look at the makeup of council. We've been criticised for not enough Catholics, not enough women, there's not enough young people. I mean they've been here forever like. I think that when they were employed they probably said, "You know what? My

job is to be in charge of collecting bins, or my job is to be in charge of Environmental Health, or my job is to ..." They're there, they've got a task to do, and they see only that task. They don't see that this is a big cultural shift for a lot of people, an organisational shift I suppose, that this is the way that we must work (Protestant Female CRO, TDC).

Quote 2:
'There's always going to be those who feel their job is just about mowing the lawn or whatever, full stop. One guy came in and said: "I cut grass; I don't speak to people - I just come in and look after the [flower] bed and I don't have a role in this".' (Catholic Female CRO, Council E)

Quote 3:
'There is still a level of scepticism in relation to is this, particularly maybe from somewhere like Finance who would see themselves as an internal service.' (Catholic Female CRO, Council E)

When employees avoid community relations issues it is often because they fear that sharing political opinions and experiences may bring problems to the surface. A Director of a Social Enterprise explained that the training events he facilitates sometimes generate anxiety for managers fearful of 'opening the can of worms.' Indeed, when employees are persuaded to discuss identity-related issues, they are often more comfortable talking about race and disability than ethno-national identity:

> 'Again it's this reluctance in this society, people are happy to talk about race, well not happy, people are willing to talk about the race issue [...] this is a bi-polar society, every time you give the poles a chance to talk to one another they don't quite know how to talk. So they'll rush to race, but avoid the sectarian and religious issues here' (Protestant Male Director, Social Enterprise A).

During a good relations event at TDC facilitators asked cleansing depot participants to share their views on politically sensitive topics such as the council's policy of flying the Union Flag throughout the year and relationships between Catholic and Protestant employees, but they preferred instead to focus on other issues.

> 'We all went to training and nobody talked. Nobody talked about it. Nobody will talk in here unless it's a one-to-one behind closed doors, like me and you now. They talked about disabled people and stuff like that and there was only one wee bit [about WCR] and they glanced over

155

it. I wouldn't go into a training room and sit in front of them and talk. Definitely wouldn't'
(Catholic Male Labourer, TDC).

The Head of HR at SDC made a similar point about councillors:

'Absolutely no doubt about it. Some of our councillors would be polarised down religious
lines, but they find it quite easy to talk about disabled people. If you had an initiative for
disability discrimination or if you were putting in some action to try and address some of the
gender imbalances, very supportive. We still find [ethno-national differences] very hard to
deal with'. (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC)

Interviewees regarded management backing for good relations a key determinant of
its success. Management support increased the chances of effective good relations
mainstreaming and helped overcome what one respondent referred to as a 'silo
mentality':

'This is normally something you give to the Equality Officer or the Human Resources Officer.
But, this is something that links to how a manager manages; how a supervisor supervises; how
the accountant, you know, purchases and procures. We're trying to say this needs to be a
whole organisational thing and most of the organisations we came across, you know, one silo
didn't really want or need to know what the other silo did. So, this wasn't an approach that
fitted a silo mentality and quite a few places we came across had a silo mentality' (Protestant
Male Director, Social Enterprise A).

The 'silo mentality' remains an issue in all the three case study councils, but
particularly so for TDC and SDC where high levels of employee segregation linger
on. Some employees, however, believe there are advantages to segregation. An
interviewee from SDC explained that the informal 'Orange' and 'Green' squads (i.e.
teams made up solely of Protestants or Catholics) mean more jobs are available:

'In South, East and West [SDC] things aren't as bad but see in the North, things are different
altogether. If there was no sectarianism there tomorrow, we could lose ten men. Because
there's people working in some areas that won't work in other areas. It's so fragmented up
there we have to have more men to cover green and orange areas. If that wasn't there you
could take ten men out and cover all of it right away. Because certain people only go into
certain areas, the council has to maintain separate depots'. (Catholic Male Cleansing
Technician 2, SDC)

A senior manager at TDC criticised good relations strategies for proposing that council employees needed to change their attitudes. In his view, when 'you talk about building a better future, the subtext is, "the past was pretty bad and you were responsible for that bad past".' He additionally suggested that employees would not be receptive to the WCR culture envisaged by good relations initiatives:

> If you're in a minority group in our council, if you're a Catholic, I think it would be expected of you not to flout it in a terribly visible sense. I think if you're in a minority you tend to have to duck things a bit. If you're gay, you'd have to be a very strong person to be outrageously camp. In this organisation, you'd be well advised not to make a lot of it' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC).

As Chapter Six explained, all three case studies introduced GRFs to help deliver their good relations strategies. Councils sometimes set targets on, for example, reducing racist and sectarian incidents in the community. Community Relations Officers in the councils hold them in high regard and view them as an indicator of good practice for increasing dialogue and trust building to address the aims of the NIA and Shared Future framework by improving cross-community cohesion and reducing conflict. A Personnel Manager at TDC felt relieved because a GRF gave her the opportunity to discuss WCR issues and to 'acknowledge your label':

> 'I think it clears the air because I mean, you're not even meant to discuss religion or politics - it's neutral. After being allowed to discuss it, it's quite liberating. Actually, we did this and we were sent to Sunday school and it does build tolerance. It definitely does achieve a greater level of respect. You're working alongside these people every day and you learn things about their lives and what's influenced their lives. I find them positive. There's a wee buzz after it because it has broken down some of those barriers. Even to have laughed about them. It's quite a relief to be able to acknowledge your label. I mean you're not meant to talk about it, ever, but people do in those circumstances'. (Protestant Female Personnel Manager, TDC)

The GRFs also offer member councillors the chance to debate community relations issues away from the public gaze and with fewer restrictions than in the council chamber or constituency meetings:

'Suddenly, there was a kind of quiet place where politicians could go and can discuss these things. I mean we don't resolve them all but at least they're aired; at least they're being debated'. (Catholic Female GRO, SDC)

The Director of a Social Enterprise argued that GRFs help achieve good relations aims because, '[they] created a safe place or at least a secure place where other rules applied around listening, respect for one another even though you might hurt with things that were very difficult' (Protestant male Director, Social Enterprise A). Interviewees also provided examples where GRFs had positive outcomes. For example, a Catholic member of staff listened to Protestant colleagues argue that flags and emblems in and around the council were intimidating:

'A moderate nationalist individual was in the GRF and other Protestant members were telling him that parts of [GDC] were intimidating to them. He says, "no, I can't accept that. [GDC's] not like that". He came to the next meeting with a different view. He came in and said, "I've walked in and out of [GDC] all my life and I never noticed some of the flags and things that are there until you pointed them out to me. I can see your point".' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC)

A Leisure Centre Manager/Harassment Officer from TDC held a similar view after attending a GRF meeting where members raised WCR themes he had not reflected upon previously: 'sometimes you don't actually realise there are issues there [...] until somebody actually points it out and you think: I must be walking around with my eyes closed or something.' GDC's CEO summarised the benefits of the increased contact and opportunity to discuss WCR issues afforded to members of GRFs:

'They started to get people to actually stop and listen to what was being said. They really weren't listening to each other before. They thought they'd heard it all before and they were just waiting for you to finish so that they could just say what they'd always said and it took a fair amount of time for people to actually to start to listen and you question' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC).

That said, participants' perspectives on the GRFs varied between councils. While many viewed them as potentially beneficial for debating sensitive subjects, this depended on the council, who was responsible for delivery and what issues participants discussed. Employees at GDC and SDC were more likely to be positive about GRFs. Those interviewed at TDC frequently called into question the value of

talking about violence, discrimination, flags and emblems, and religious beliefs. The Head of Administration commented:

> 'I don't think it worked at all. I think it was naïve social engineering. I sometimes wonder what they were trying to do with us. It was as if they were trying to change us; to illustrate to us that we were at fault and that we had to be better people.' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC)

Even when research participants were positive about GRFs, they sometimes acknowledged that discussing WCR themes in a GRF is not in itself a solution to WCR problems:

> 'I don't want anyone to think we have done something that has actually sorted problems out. I would say we probably opened up a Pandora's Box and there are probably more questions than there are answers; but the fact that people are in there and have been in there for that period of time I think shows that they are committed' (Catholic Male CEO, GDC).

The way in which councils react when community relations problems arise is also significant. At SDC, for example, management reluctance to support a recently formed GRF led to its abandonment and long-term cynicism toward both WCR initiatives and the council's managers. Members of the forum had attempted to quell the tension arising from a WCR incident but did not receive management backing. These issues emerged when a Protestant employee placed an anti-Orange Order poster on the back of a refuse lorry in order to implicate Catholic colleagues in sectarian harassment. Following a review of the CCTV evidence, it became clear that Catholic employees were not involved. The GRF played a role in the investigation but council made the decision to relocate the employee to a 'single identity' depot rather than deal with underlying causes.

Participants' perspectives on the GRFs varied across and within councils. While many interviewees perceived them as potentially beneficial for opening up debate about sensitive subjects, this was often dependent on how the council managed the forums. Employees at GDC and SDC were more likely to be positive about the value of GRFs with those interviewed at TDC less convinced that GRFs are a good thing.

7.6 Conclusion

Following the Harbison (2002) review's conclusions, government introduced the 2005 Shared Future framework to add impetus to the community relations agenda. District Council's WCR activity expanded during this time and they are now accountable for promoting good relations among employees in a proactive manner. The case study councils have implemented good relations strategies and action plans, initiated WCR training programmes, and established a range of GRFs among other things. Policies are widely disseminated to employees, councillors and managers who the councils expect to adhere to WCR principles. When asked about the benefits of WCR strategies, most interviewees agreed that initiatives such as NWE and good relations benefit the workplace. However, there remain some significant barriers to councils' WCR initiatives.

The level of training received by employees, managers and councillors focuses too often on policy awareness issues and not enough on cross-community understanding and reconciliation. When poorly pitched, as it sometime is, training leads participants to question fundamentally the purpose and value of WCR. Interviewees argued that councillors and managers do not commit sufficiently to WCR initiatives instead putting career aspirations and party political matters before 'civic leadership' and workplace reconciliation. This is partly, it is argued, because they view WCR activities as 'fluffy' 'tea party work'. Neutral Work Environment policies call for subjective judgements from managers in terms of not only what issues the policy covers but also when to implement it. This causes further problems as employees accuse councils of inconsistency and appearing unconcerned in relation to community relations problems.

However, research participants viewed NWE policies important for reducing employment chill factors and thus providing for a more welcoming workplace. It was nevertheless concerning for them that NWE policies failed to challenge the underlying assumptions that lead to community relations disagreements. Further, employees and managers were often unsure of the symbols and behaviours proscribed by NWE policies and further argued that these policies are not always enforced. Respondents welcomed in principle the introduction of good relations, and there were some modest

160

successes, but the paradigm shift from neutrality to promoting good and harmonious relations presented additional difficulties. Employees and managers appeared unwilling in some cases to embrace the good relations ethos, which was also true of councillors. Good relations was criticised as 'naive social engineering' that failed to take account of the depth of feeling on ethno-national identity.

Central to the success of good relations is that employees are open about their identities and engage in mutual learning with others. Yet, there was much evidence in the empirical research to suggest that employees find this difficult, as many of them have little previous experience of cross-community contact. Because of NWE policies, they are often discouraged from discussing identity concerns at work while high levels of segregation remain in housing, leisure and schooling. Good Relations Forums are utilised by the case studies to encourage in a constructive setting greater dialogue between Protestants and Catholics. Indeed, a number of interviewees who participated in GRFs agreed that they resulted in a better understanding of WCR issues. Nevertheless, the subject matter considered by GRFs was concerning for some who worried that it would 'open up a can of worms' or a 'Pandora's Box' while others refused to accept the need to reflect in this way on their ethno-national identity.

Findings: Part 2

8. Tacit Norms and Informal Responses to WCR

8.1 Introduction

The earlier chapters demonstrate that when NWE policies are in place, community differences continue to surface in the workplace through, for example, employee talk about politics, sport and cultural activities. Chapter Six identified explicit political/cultural practices in the case study councils such as TDC and SDC's insistence on permanently flying the Union Flag and GDC's Irish language policy. The last chapter mapped out participants' views on whether councils' WCR initiatives are effective. It summarised how they perceive councils' WCR strategies and it highlighted the barriers and limitations from their perspective. This chapter is also concerned with participants' opinions on why WCR policies have had limited success. The emphasis shifts though to a deeper examination of the reasons why longstanding community differences influence the enduring success or failure of WCR policies.

The empirical findings indicate that a significant proportion of participants believe ethno-national identities influential over attitudes to, and the likely success of, WCR in councils. That Protestant and Catholic identities are significant in the workplace was a common theme with most interviewees arguing that even with NWE policies in place, identities emerge in, and shape the social fabric of, the work environment. For example, the Head of HR at TDC suggested that despite its emphasis on neutrality and a cautious attitude toward community relations subjects, 'your personal life is bound to sneak into your workplace because it's who you are.' A trade union official made a similar point in arguing that, 'you have to be allowed to live. You can't switch off who you are when you go to work'. The empirical findings presented thus far show how community differences impact, in various ways, on the work environment. Tacit ethno-national norms were also used to explain attitudinal differences toward WCR initiatives. In examining these issues, I address two key questions:

  i. What role does ethno-national identity play in how participants perceive and respond to WCR?

ii.   How do employees manage community differences and the potential for conflict in light of the identified weaknesses in policy implementation?

The violent and non-violent aspects of conflict examined in Chapter Two, the problems with policy implementation outlined in Chapter Seven and the ethno-national differences summarised in the first part of this chapter have a significant effect on employee responses to WCR. These issues can present considerable barriers to councils' WCR policy commitments. What this also reveals is that there is a significant gap between how in reality employees manage WCR issues and formal organisational policy. The second half of the chapter reviews employee responses to WCR in a context where formal policy cannot always address community relations issues. Interviewees identified three informal responses prevalent in the councils: avoidance, resistance and the pragmatic use of humour.

As Chapter Seven indicated, avoidance occurs when employees, councillors and managers are reluctant to deal with community relations issues because, for example, they disagree with them or are unsure as to how to implement them appropriately. The second common response is resistance. Employees resisted WCR policy implementation when they regarded the issues too complex and/or when they simply wanted to focus on 'core tasks' and not what they viewed as an additional, unwelcome responsibility for WCR. The final practical response is pragmatic humour. This strategy was important because it frequently allowed participants to confront identity concerns in a manner more acceptable than if they adhered strictly to formal policy. Further, WCR procedures sometimes had a stifling effect on relationship building, which humour alleviated and, as a result, it contributed to social cohesion among employees. In that sense, humour when used appropriately can develop and maintain a good and harmonious work environment.

8.2 Tacit Norms

The empirical research pointed to three tacit norms for Catholics and three for Protestants thought to impact on how they interpret and respond to WCR initiatives (see Table 8.1).

Catholics	Protestants
Collectivism	Individualism
Resistance	Acquiescence
Confident	Protectionist
Identity Enhanced	**Identity Under Threat**

Table 8.1 Tacit Norms for Catholics and Protestants

Interviewees portrayed the Catholic community as increasingly confident with a propensity for collective, community-oriented behaviour and a willingness to share views on WCR issues. Catholic employees are, from this viewpoint, comfortable with the ideas underpinning recent WCR initiatives, which they view as 'an agenda for the future' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC). Protestants, on the other hand, were perceived more individualistic with a tendency to acquiesce on organisational issues and to adopt a defensive stance toward WCR. For them, WCR implies detrimental change because it suggests that '[the past] wasn't that good so we're going to correct the mistakes' (ibid.). Indeed, some interviewees felt unionist councils to be against many aspects of WCR for these reasons. As noted by the CRO at TDC:

> 'Unionist dominated councils traditionally would not have been big fans of community relations and I suppose I'm going back to what I said initially and how the kind of work I did in years gone by, I mean, you would be hard pushed to call it community relations in some sense, a lot of it.' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC)

I divide the chapter into three sections that outline and explain the tacit norms. The first section sets out how and why some participants argued that Protestant individualism, protectionism and acquiescence explained many of the negative responses to WCR. A historically derived 'siege mentality', 'protectionism' and 'defence of the Union' were believed important for understanding Protestant defensiveness, as they manifest in employee attitudes toward WCR policies and in some District Councils' reluctance to commit to them.

In section two, I describe how some participants referred to Catholics' 'underdog' status, 'rebellious' nature and historic 'fight for equality' when explaining that they are more open to WCR policies. I examine the degree to which, and why, participants presented these arguments. I provide examples where interviewees from various backgrounds and

occupational groups see these narratives as key reasons as to why councils' WCR strategies succeed or fail of WCR.

Because of the barriers to WCR presented in Chapter Seven, and ongoing community differences, there is a gap in WCR policy and its implementation and effects within councils. For this reason, employees must informally manage their differences. The empirical research highlighted three common informal responses to WCR issues – avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour – section three examines these. One problem highlighted in Chapter Seven is that for policy-makers the practice of avoiding politically sensitive issues can undermine good relations initiatives. Employees' use of humour to introduce sensitive community relations subjects can, on the other hand, help achieve the overall aims of WCR policies because employees often use it to maintain good social relationships with those from different community backgrounds. Another common response to WCR is resistance. This is a reaction to the inconsistent implementation of and lack of support for WCR policy, unwillingness to address difficult subjects, and dissatisfaction with how good relations initiatives presume that employees need to change their views on community relations issues.

8.3 'Siege Mentality', 'Protectionism' and 'Defence of the Union'

As Chapter Two showed, ensuring NI maintains its constitutional link with Britain is central to Protestant identity and traditions (Cairns, 2000; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). Interviewees introduced the argument that Protestant communities must defend and protect 'the Union' and they further argued that this informs employee attitudes to WCR. The empirical research illuminated three tacit norms considered necessary for understanding how Protestant identity affects attitudes toward WCR strategies: individualism, protectionism, and acquiescence. Some participants referred to Protestants' greater concern with family and self-fulfilment than with the idea of community as indicative of their individualism. The Director of Social Enterprise B commented that, 'the Protestant ethos is very much about individuality as opposed to a collective.' A Protestant CRO from TDC made a similar point:

> 'There isn't the same sense of co-dependence and community [among Protestants]. It's very much: "me and my immediate family". There's not that same kind of need to interact locally with each other and support each other; and, I think that's reflective of the workforce. I think it's very much a culture thing' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC).

A Culture and Arts Manager at SDC extended this assessment to unionist councillors who she also believed individualistic. She explained that:

'[They] are more likely to fight on an individual basis. I'm fairly certain it's to do with the fragmentation in the unionist communities.' (Protestant Female Culture and Arts Manager, SDC)

The CEO at Council G suggested that the weaker sense of community among Protestants affects their ability to work together effectively:

'I suppose there was seen as less of a need because on the Roman Catholic nationalist side, there was a, there was a greater community involvement and structure. They, they, they were quite good at setting up structures and community groups and working together whereas the unionist sort of Protestant side was more disparate.' (Protestant Male CEO, Council G)

Some trade union officials used individualism to explain Protestants' attitudes toward the trade union movement, which according to one interviewee, meant that employees preferred Catholic trade union representatives:

'It's a reluctance to be active in the trade union, okay. Between you and I, I have known and with a colleague of mine have discussed, said that usually nationalists would be more willing to be reps in workplaces than those who would be perceived to be unionists. Unfortunately, a lot of Protestants are cynical toward trade unions. I met a school friend from a long time ago and he asked me what I was doing. I said I was working for the trade union and he said, "Oh you're a Commi then?" And, this is an attitude in a lot of the unionist community' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB).

The same interviewee argued that Protestant employees engage in resistance at work, 'but only when it hurts them personally'. Interviewees such as the one quoted below explained that Protestants are 'less vocal' at work and this is gives the impression that they are disinterested in collectivism:

'I tend to think that Protestant people, I don't know whether – it's not even a reluctance to share their views, it's more a time and a place to share your views. There is definitely a less aggressive or vocal ... it's like wait until you're spoken to. It must be that upbringing thing, Protestant thing'. (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC)

One explanation for the individualistic tendencies among Protestants was that they have historically viewed the state and (particularly public sector) employers as synonymous. Other interviewees argued that Protestant employees are reluctant to question council decisions due to such presumptions. To rail against your employer is to undermine the state infrastructure upon which unionists have for so long relied, according to this line of thinking. A trade union official was of this view: 'I was also of the opinion that you don't challenge the system. You don't go against the system because it's our system.' Interviewees sometimes argued that because of this Protestant employees are more willing to acquiesce to management decision-making. Indeed, a Protestant trade union official argued that employees from his community were less likely than Catholics to challenge managerial authority:

> 'I find that Unionists are more like sheep in attitude and are more likely to go along with what the bosses say. Protestants will say, "oh, we can't go against the government; we can't do this; we can't do that. Whereas those with a more rebellious nature say, "oh to hell with it. We have to stand our ground here". I'm not saying the Unionist/Protestant people don't do that at all; there are some in there who would do that, but it's not as, it's not as prevalent as it would be in the Catholic people' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB).

Other respondents argued that a protectionist element within Protestantism explains some of the resistance to WCR in unionist-dominated councils. The GRO at GDC, who also plays an instrument in a marching band and participates in 12th July celebrations, argued that protectionism is central to Protestant identity because 'there always is a level of protection of the self and a fear of loss of culture and identity'. A Catholic interviewee commented that his Protestant family members are 'a bit more entrenched' because of this:

> 'I'm a Catholic but my father's people are Protestant. So, it's a mixed family but I found the Protestants are a bit more entrenched, a bit more frightened in many ways. There's more of a fear there' (Catholic Male Landfill Manager, GDC).

From this perspective, the Protestant fear of loss and protectionism produces a defensive mentality, which in turn is a response to Catholics' recent material gains and many Protestants' concern that this is at their expense. This concern has resulted in a feeling that, 'we're losing everything, you know, it's all going the other way' (Protestant Male CEO, Council G). Some interviewees reasoned that increasing job opportunities for Catholics is one

reason why Protestants are worried. It has also led to conspiratorial allegations that Catholics'
increased social mobility is due to a hidden agenda:

> 'More Catholics are getting the better jobs than if we went back 30 years ago and, of course, a lot of,
> and I mean this is only my perception obviously, a lot of people from the Protestant community are
> saying, "why are all these people getting all these jobs?", and "it has nothing to do with the fact that
> they've all been educated now".' (Catholic Female PA CEO, SDC).

A Protestant trade union official concurred that protectionism is a response to a lack of
confidence in the Protestant community: 'There isn't the confidence [in the Protestant
community]. The attitude is what we have we hold and we have to protect' (Trade Union
Official, TGWU). Catholic research participants also sometimes suggested that the Protestant
fear of loss and 'siege mentality' is reflected in Protestant/unionist councils' 'rigid' stance on
community relations:

> 'I think being kind to them they feel under threat. It's the siege mentality. I think the Catholic
> population are certainly more magnanimous. The nationalist population and councils have been
> amenable, human and fairly pliable organisations whereas the Protestant councils only seem to like
> their own people, to be very rigid. I say this in confidence, rigid Ulster Scots puritanical siege
> mentality. They tend to see the minority population as a threat. The conspiracy theory is always there'
> (Catholic Male Sports and Recreation Manager, GDC).

8.3.1 Impact on Councils and WCR

Those interviewees who linked attitudes to WCR and historic ethno-national differences
suggested that the tacit norms mean Protestant employees are reluctant to embrace change
and, consequently, they resist contemporary WCR initiatives like good relations. The CRO at
Council D, for example, argued that protectionism has a tangible effect on her council's lack
of support for WCR, which is a widespread problem for CROs in unionist councils:

> 'When we work with unionist-dominated councils the attitude is: why should we bother with this stuff?
> That's definitely the case across the board and I know it just seems to be that whenever you look at the
> more nationalist-dominated councils that more work gets done and it has been keener on the agenda.
> When [a Sinn Fein Mayor] was in, he pushed an awful lot of things through which got good relations
> on the agenda long-term. With unionists, they get things blocked as protection.' (Protestant Female
> CRO, Council D)

The tacit norms also contribute to a propensity for formality in Protestant councils and to risk-averse decision-making. According to the CEO of Council G, this was another consequence of Protestant community identity:

> 'If you look at the elected members and what they would expect in a, you know, sort of a predominantly unionist council; they're very into sort of formal procedures and committees and things being done on that sort of basis. They're less comfortable with delegating issues to allow officers to deal with things'. (Protestant Male CEO, Council G)

Other interviewees agreed with this sentiment proposing that the influence of Protestantism in unionist councils permeates throughout the organisation such that they are 'fairly conservative organisations' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC) where 'you keep your head down' (CRO, TDC). The Head of Administration at TDC further argued that the management style in unionist councils is formal. Moreover, they are 'a bit uneasy with some of the concepts and ideas [of WCR].' Some interviewees used this argument to explain why employees at TDC are less confident about the benefits of WCR policies. Indeed, the council's CRO commented that protectionism contributed to a perception that TDC is an 'austere and quite serious' organisation where employees 'deserve pity'. Another point raised by the CRO at Council D is that protectionism means that unionist councils in general are ambivalent about WCR. Indeed, she suggested that this attitude within unionist councils has been longstanding:

> 'Unionist dominated councils traditionally would not have been big fans of community relations and I suppose I'm going back to what I said initially and how the kind of work I did in years gone by ... I mean, you would be hard pushed to call it community relations.' (Protestant Female CRO, Council D)

The first findings chapter explained that WCR initiatives are difficult to implement because some managers do not fully engage with them because they do not offer sufficient career benefits. The CRO at Council D suggested that a less welcoming WCR culture in unionist councils explains a lack of opportunity for career progression for those involved in community relations:

> 'I am quite sure that the awareness around community and race relations is probably huge but it is not admitted so you don't know where the gaps are. We are always trying to persuade people to take on an

agenda they don't see as offering them any [career] advantage. In this completely unionist-dominated council, they're not going to get anywhere. There's no big wins.' (Protestant Female CRO, Council D)

This section explained why research participants contended that tacit norms inform Protestant employees' outlook on the nature of work, employee relations and WCR. Protestants are, according to this view, defensive because increasing Catholic self-confidence and WCR policies threaten to erode their community identity. In response, Protestant employees resist WCR initiatives denying the need to change 'our Britishness and our heritage' (Protestant Male CEO, Council G). Research participants also contended that at District Council level the tacit norms lead to greater formality and a more conservative management style. Furthermore, the tacit norms explain why predominantly unionist councils appear harder to convince of the benefits of WCR and are less open to change due.

8.4 'Underdogs', 'Rebellion' and the 'Fight for Equality'

Chapter Two emphasised the historic struggle to overthrow a British oppressor and fight for equality as among the significant historical narratives in nationalism and republicanism (McGarry an O'Leary, 1995; Ruane and Todd, 1996). The same chapter further explained that the Catholic religion has historically encouraged its congregations to affiliate to one universal Church and that this fosters a strong sense of community (Coulter, 1999a). Interviewees used these arguments to explain Catholics' attitudes to WCR in three significant ways. First, their historic fight for equality as 'underdogs' in NI has made Catholics receptive to WCR and more open to change in the workplace. Second, and following on from the first point, Catholic employees are perceived more willing to participate in collective resistance and to raise problematic issues with managers. Third, because of material gains from their fight for equality, the Catholic community has grown in confidence leading to further demands for improvement.

Catholics are positive about WCR initiatives, as are predominantly Catholic councils, because of their battle for recognition and legitimacy in NI. Ongoing discrimination, historic unfairness in the electoral and housing systems and their subjugation at the hands of successive British and unionist administrations have, some participants argued, ensured Catholics have had to fight for equality. Interviewees used these narratives to explain that

170

Catholics have a reputation for being 'very emotive' and 'very vocal' in the workplace (Head of HR, TDC). The CRO at TDC shared this perspective and reasoned:

> 'With people from a Catholic background there's more of a sense of community and having to fight for rights and fight for equality. That kind of culture is brought into the workforce. People know their rights, they're well clued in about what their rights and responsibilities are, and they're not afraid to vocalise that.' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC)

The CRO of Council G also argued that Catholics have better articulated what they want as a community and are more prepared to 'shout' to achieve it:

> 'There is definitely that feeling out there in terms of the Catholic people are much more ... the capacity is much better, they shout, they know exactly what they're looking for whereas there's this concept that the Protestant community hasn't a clue shall we say.' (Protestant Female CRO, Council G)

The Catholic Director of Social Enterprise B identified an 'underdog' mindset and strong sense of community as the reason why Catholics are more prepared to vocalise their views:

> 'Catholics had a very strong sense of being the underdog; so they also had a strong community bond. Subsequently, they have developed very strong community structures and whatever and they can argue or articulate their needs. Catholics had to struggle; they had to organise people.' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B).

A Protestant trade union official made a similar point in arguing that a history of fighting for civil rights means that Catholics will insist on their rights at work. For him, Catholics are increasingly confident and have a growing pride in their culture:

> 'Catholic people are more confident about challenging for their rights. That is probably from the civil rights days. They are now more proud of their culture and confident in themselves, and confident in displaying that' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, ICTU).

Another issue from the empirical research is that, because of their history of discrimination, Catholics show a propensity for collective resistance. Their self-identity and behaviour in the workplace reflect a history of Irish rebellion dating back to events such as the Easter Rising of 1916. A senior trade union official presented this view and suggested that Catholics question authority at work because of the rebelliousness in Catholic cultural history:

171

'Nationalist people are more willing to kick back at authority. I think the Catholic or nationalist people seem to be more rebellious and then there's just the follow on from that there – it's rebellion in a smaller form' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB).

In this case, the interviewee believed historic narratives of rebellion continue to inform Catholics' sense of self, which in turn makes them more likely to express discontent at work. He went on:

'It's more in them to kick back. I mean, whereas, you know, a lot of nationalist, Catholic members would be willing to fight for their colleagues – I think there's just a wee touch of rebellion' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB).

The Director of Social Enterprise B argued that the fight for equality and history of rebellion emerges in other ways. He believed, for example, that some Protestant employees prefer to elect Catholic trade union representatives because they are 'bolshie':

'In some Protestant places they would elect a Catholic shop steward quicker than a Protestant shop steward for the simple reason that Catholics are bolshie - Catholics will challenge and fight with them. Protestants see to challenge your employer as a challenge to the establishment; challenge to the state' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B).

This thinking informed the arguments presented by other interviewees. For example, the Protestant CRO at TDC contended that the tacit norms were influential in a nationalist council where she used to work. In her experience, Catholic employees were prepared to 'open mouths' and 'challenge' to achieve their aims:

'Where my experience of other councils which would be nationalist run is that there'd be more challenge where people are, I wouldn't say encouraged to, but [they'll] open mouths and say what the issues are and challenge things.' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC)

8.4.1 Impact on Councils and WCR

The fight for equality and a history of rebellion has seen greater confidence and a receptive approach to WCR among the Catholic community, according to the research participants quoted above. They portrayed Catholics as historic underdogs who display a propensity for collectivism and workplace resistance. Consequently, they depict Catholics and nationalist

172

councils as change responsive. Because WCR policies represent a culture change and encourage a more egalitarian work environment, they argue that Catholics are willing to accept and implement WCR policies. The Sports and Recreation Manager at GDC claimed that many Catholic councils take this view because of a greater 'sense of self worth':

> 'I think it permeates down through the whole system. If you walk into the chamber, there is a fantastic sense of self worth there among Catholics who are employed. So maybe it has been a self confidence in the workforce.' (Catholic Male Sports and Recreation Manager, GDC)

A CRO at GDC commented that many of the council's underlying presumptions about how it should approach service delivery and what issues to prioritise reflect the fact that it is a predominantly Catholic council:

> 'This is a Catholic council, it's a Catholic ethos in many respects of how ... there's a lot of a assuming in how we run events and who's invited and who gets to speak and who gets to sit and ... but, at the same time there'll still be a lot of people challenging a lot of the processes.' (Protestant Female CRO 2, GDC)

As a result of their ongoing struggle and the political progress since the late 1960s and early 1970s, research participants argued that Catholics have developed greater self-belief and a propensity for collectivism at work. They cited increasing mobility in the workforce, improvements in the housing and electoral system, and better political representation for Catholics as reasons for this increased self-confidence. Indeed, some participants saw the appointment of a Catholic CEO, inauguration of a Catholic Lord Mayor and the increased proportion of nationalist representatives in the council chamber as evidence of material gains for Catholics at SDC and a sign of their growing self-assurance.

A further outcome of their history and increasing self-confidence is a change responsive ethos in nationalist councils. Indeed, evidence from the empirical research indicated that interviewees view GDC's commitment to WCR as a reflection of this. Both Protestant and Catholic interviewees shared such views, and regarded Catholic councils more receptive to WCR strategies and to good relations. That is, historic development in their history, meant that nationalist councils, managers and employees find the principles of good relations more palatable than do Protestants because, to reiterate a quote made at the beginning of the chapter, it is 'an agenda for the future' with which Catholics are more comfortable.

8.5 Informal Responses to WCR

This part of the chapter explains how employees responded to community relations issues where there is a gap in policy implementation and where political and cultural differences between Catholics and Protestants come to the surface. Although there was general agreement among interviewees that WCR policy is necessary and while employees and managers were mostly supportive of WCR, they pragmatically managed their differences by avoiding, resisting and engaging in humour about WCR issues. Avoidance occurred when respondents were concerned wanted to protect relationships with colleagues and because of a deep-seated culture of avoidance in the workplace. When they were unsure of the value of WCR policy and were concerned that it threatens their community identity, some organisational members resisted WCR. Pragmatic humour was often utilised, for example, to relieve the stifling effects of WCR policy, to improve social bonds between colleagues and to confront difficult community relations issues.

8.5.1 Avoidance of WCR

In many cases participants' responses to WCR involve a degree of avoidance when, for example, they are unclear about whether councils are fully committed to good relations or unconvinced of the need to change. Employees also prefer not to share views on community relations issues because of 'conflict fatigue'. A trade union representative at GDC commented that employees were 'sick of' conflict and that is why they favoured avoidance:

> 'An awful lot of boys here just don't want the aggro. They have lived here all these years and are sick of it more than anything.' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician/TU Representative, GDC)

An interviewee at TDC sometimes lied about what he did in his leisure time to avoid confrontation with colleagues. Another interview said, 'it was always a touchy subject and you're best not talking about it. It's easier glossed over then' (Grounds Maintenance Team Leader A, GDC). Employees avoid WCR issues in order not to strain social relations with colleagues at work. A Clerical Officer at SDC explained her cautiousness with reference to discussing politically sensitive subjects:

'People are very aware and just out of consideration for your colleagues you wouldn't talk about things that are going to make somebody - personally I wouldn't talk about something that could make somebody else feel uncomfortable wherever I worked. Whether that was, you know I have worked in charities and private companies before and that is what I would have done even though there was no formal policy in place' (Protestant Female Clerical Officer, SDC).

Similarly, when in the presence of colleagues from different community backgrounds some employees at GDC evaded discussions about ethno-national violence:

'Where I live, the summer time brings out the Orange marches through our predominantly nationalist town and although maybe there has been damage done, vandalism, maybe there has been plastic bullets fired, you don't talk about that simply because there is a Protestant colleague at the table that might be offended by it. So I wouldn't talk about that.' (Catholic Male Procurement Officer, GDC)

A trade union official noted that employees are more comfortable discussing organisational than WCR issues and, therefore, they build a 'polite wall' or put up a 'protective shield':

'There seems to be a polite wall built between people where they talk about the industrial issues but they avoid the political issues and that would still be the issue today. It's like a protective shield people put up around themselves and it's to protect. They don't want to offend or be seen to offend other people. You can maybe talk about a football game or a Gaelic game or a rugby game.' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, AMICUS)

The desire to avoid WCR problems should they result in further complications was another reason why employees adopted this strategy. As the following example indicates, some managers responded this way because they were concerned that drawing attention to ethno-national undertones could make problems worse. The interviewee quoted below believed this is why trade unions and managers are fearful of tackling known WCR issues:

'I suppose the character of workplaces was: this [sectarianism] was not seen to be something that impacted on the character of the workplace, best to be avoided and ignored. And then it only emerged when we were called into a number of workplaces because things literally boiled over. But it was usually characterised by a lack of policy that paid attention to this. Yes, lack of policy, lack of understanding, lack of management and in many cases, understandably, fearful management and fearful trade unions in the sense that everybody knew there was a sectarian undertone in some situations but people just didn't know how to cope with it.' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B)

For another interviewee, the trade union movement contributed to a culture of avoidance as it encouraged members and representatives to 'ignore' community relations issues. He criticised trade unions for being complicit in 'the collusion of silence' preferring to react only when necessary and usually after 'things literally boiled over':

> 'In some places the trade unions were part of the collusion of silence. I don't think the trade union movement has accommodated or changed its culture to make this work enough. This was not seen to be something that impacted on the character of the workplace, best to be avoided and ignored. And then it only emerged when, when [Social Enterprise B] and ourselves were called into a number of workplaces because things literally boiled over.' (Protestant Male Director, Social Enterprise A)

This interviewee also argued that the trade unions were 'dishonest' for claiming that Protestant and Catholics were working well together while ignoring community relations problems in the workplace:

> '[It's] easier to build the 'all Brothers and Sisters together' myth. That's a huge, that's a transcendent galvaniser, and I think it's very important, but not to ignore or pretend the other issue doesn't exist – that's dishonesty'. (Protestant Male Director, Social Enterprise A)

The empirical research presented in Chapter Seven indicates that formal WCR policy, and particularly NWE, has an effect on whether employees avoid WCR subjects. As that chapter explained, there is some evidence that employees are concerned that sharing politically contentious opinions may lead to formal disciplinary proceedings. The GRO at SDC explained how a 'litigious culture' existed at the council where some employees 'would nearly take a case because their tea was cold'. The Director of Social Enterprise A made a similar point:

> 'People are quite cautious nowadays anyway about all those things. If you are a bit blasé or loose in your language, you could end up being up before them for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. So there is cautiousness with people I suppose. There is a strong level of consciousness in the workforce about equality and equality legislation and about the fact that you can be brought up before the council for any sort of bad behaviour, be it verbal or physical' (Protestant Male Director, Social Enterprise A).

As the first part of the chapter outlined, a number of participants believed unionist councils to be protectionist and defensive due to concerns that the Protestant cultural heritage is under

threat. For this reason, some employees avoid WCR as it represents a challenge to their Protestant identity. Therefore, predominantly unionist councils like TDC 'keep the peace' and 'do not challenge overt political or cultural expressions [of Protestantism]' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC).

Avoidance was a common response by employees when faced with complex WCR issues. Formal policy is limited in its ability to address community relations issues as employees often prefer not to confront politically sensitive subjects and are concerned about undermining relationships with colleagues; thus, a 'polite wall' or 'protective shield' helps them avoid politically sensitive subjects at work. Interviewees argued that a deeply engrained culture of avoidance has developed in councils because, for example, some employees are unconvinced of the benefits of WCR initiatives while others are concerned that good relations strategies are an attempt to erode important aspects of their culture.

8.5.2 Resistance to WCR

Interviewees disclosed a number of examples of resistance to WCR. There were occasions when employees: walked out during training events, resigned en masse from council GRFs, erected unofficial flags on council buildings and stoked political tensions. Some of the reasons for resisting WCR are similar to those for avoidance. For instance, employees resist WCR issues to avoid confrontation. Additionally, resistance is favoured when employees have grown comfortable with neutrality or are reluctant to embrace responsibility for something that was previously in someone else's remit.

Resistance to WCR also occurred when employees disagreed with the underlying presumption in WCR policy that attitudinal change is necessary. For example, the Head of Administration at TDC quoted earlier criticised good relations training for requesting that employees reflect on and be self-critical about their community backgrounds and political assumptions. He contended that asking employees to do this was an attempt at 'naive social engineering' and it was why Protestant employees left a council good relations training event. Further, some Protestants' reaction to these initiatives relates to their negative views of the GFA:

'Nationalists are, perhaps, a bit easier with some of the concepts from the GFA. The unionist approach has been, "there's nothing wrong with our society". They would still view it as, "this is them righting the wrongs of 50 years and blaming us for everything".' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC)

A further explanation for resistance is that some employees and managers view WCR as an add-on responsibility best left for others. This form of resistance emerged at TDC when it asked all managers to help mainstream its WCR initiatives. The CRO at TDC explained that because a high proportion of council managers had a long tenure with the organisation they were disinclined to support or take on additional responsibility for WCR:

'If you look at the managers I think they've been here from the dawn of time like you know. That's a criticism if you look at the makeup of council. We've been criticised for not enough Catholics, not enough women, there's not enough young people. I mean they've been here forever like. I think that when they were employed they probably said, "You know what? My job is to be in charge of collecting bins, or my job is to be in charge of Environmental Health, or my job is to ..." They're there, they've got a task to do, and they see only that task. They don't see that this is a big cultural shift for a lot of people, an organisational shift I suppose, that this is the way that we must work.' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC)

This line of thinking applied in other organisations, according to the Director of Social Enterprise B:

'I work with bus drivers on good relations, diversity and all this. Now, their priority in life is to drive a bus, make their wages and get their drink, whatever. So, I come and speak about these issues, and they're thinking, "for God's sake what's this here? We've got a day in here, listening to this crap" – that's reality'. (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B)

Interviewees frequently commented that resistance to WCR occurs because it brings difficult issues to the fore and that learning about other communities' cultural traditions and holidays was more acceptable than tackling 'harder' issues such as sectarianism:

We've started a series of email alerts on particular notable dates, you know, the Holocaust anniversary, or International Human Rights day or just Easter. People like things like that; they like to know about Ramadan; they like to know about various other religions and things like that. So, from that point of view, there is a general interest in cultural diversity - that's the softer end of things. I mean if you get

into harder sectarianism and racism and things, there's a wee bit of resistance.' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC)

An employee at TDC resisted good relations and the idea of a more open, shared workplace because he was concerned about being marginalised and/or victimised for holding views others in the council disagree with:

'In here, [TDC]/LOL [TDC District Council/Loyal Orange Order] number one. I'm a Catholic. I don't talk about religion. I don't talk about politics. I keep myself to myself where they are concerned. You say anything out of line, you might as well leave the job because you would just be blacklisted.' (Catholic Male Labourer, TDC)

The same interviewee worried that colleagues could respond negatively to any WCR complaints regarding, for example, the unofficial flying of a Union Flag on the council Cleansing Depot: 'my life wouldn't be worth living. I would probably get my windows put in and my car damaged. People would stop speaking to me'. He based his concerns on threats received in the past by other Catholic employees and on a fear that fellow workers had paramilitary connections:

'I was sitting in there [interviewee pointed to the canteen] one day and there was a meeting and they were talking about the paramilitaries in here. I wouldn't be surprised that definitely there are paramilitary connections. They sat in that room [pointed again to the canteen] that day and talked about the police; they wanted to shoot the police'. (Catholic Male Labourer, TDC)

Evidence from the empirical research suggests that there is resistance to WCR in the case study councils. As with the avoidance strategy discussed in the previous sub-section, resistance was a response to concerns that WCR policies may lead to unwanted changes and that dealing with difficult subjects could result in increased community relations tensions. The final recurrent response to WCR issues was pragmatic humour, and this is the subject of the next sub-section.

8.5.3 Pragmatic Humour and WCR

'A bit of craic takes the boredom out of the day, it just gives people a bit of release.' (Catholic Male Trade Union Official, SIPTU)

Humour is another pervasive response to WCR issues that many interviewees regarded as a welcome aspect of working life. As the IT Manager at SDC explained:

> 'I think it helps when you're working with someone you've got something in common with like a sense of humour, which is usually what it is. It 'oils the wheels', as it were. It makes people more open to say if they've got a problem with something, an element of their work or whatever it is, that they'll come to you and say, "I think we shouldn't be doing it this way or that way" instead of just getting on with it and grumbling about it. The channels of communication are open and they're two-way. That's in my experience anyway. I would find that'. (Protestant Male IT Manager, SDC)

The empirical research presented in Chapter Seven highlighted how NWE policies can lead to employee frustration and discourage self-reflection whereby employees close off from one another and 'push underground' their community differences. In these settings, employees found solace in political and religious humour, which improved social cohesion between them when used constructively. CROs argued that humour is a sign of harmonious relations between Protestant and Catholic employees, and is indicative of a high degree of trust and mutuality at work. In one example from the empirical research, a group of GDC employees lampooned their counterparts from a unionist council with the statement 'we give you the right to march' when they walked across a meeting room:

> "One evening in our Good Relations Forum where again you have a lot of people from different backgrounds, and some quite extreme backgrounds as well; we were split into groups and the Unionist group went to walk across to get their tea and we said, "we give you the right to march" [laughter]. When they went to walk across the middle of the room. The whole room ended in uproar: "we give you the right to walk across for your tea" [further laughter]. But, it's because relationships and the whole atmosphere has to be pitched at that kind of tone. Whereas if you compare that ... there was somebody there that evening from [another council] and they says, "ah there's no worries about good relations down here. Sure, look at them they're just joking. We couldn't say that." But, I think it's the way the whole thing has been pitched - serious but at the same time have a bit of craic and banter in the middle of it' (Protestant Female CRO, GDC).

A Protestant trade union official found humour helpful when undertaking casework in predominantly Catholic organisations. His latest icebreaker was a parody of a character from the 'Little Britain' comedy sketch show:

'I would look after a lot of areas [unionist and nationalist] but when I go into the [nationalist areas] I'd say: "I must be the only Prod in the village" like the Little Britain thing. It brings in a little bit of fun'. (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB)

A Cleansing Technician at TDC argued that 'a bit of banter' in the Cleansing Depot was a way of relating to employees from different community backgrounds. This was particularly important, he argued, because in previous years a number of violent incidents and threats had led to internal grievances and two Fair Employment Tribunal cases. During this time, a tense WCR climate developed leaving employees and managers more wary of WCR subjects. Because of this, community relations had come under strain, and mistrust and division was characteristic until things began to improve. In these circumstances, humour proved beneficial for breaking down some of the barriers and helping employees 'to confront and come to terms with the threats and dangers of the world around [them]' (Watson, 1994: p188). The following example is indicative of the satirical humour that surfaced during this time:

'You would get the religious stuff among the boys that have known each other for years. I'd see one of our boys on the 12th [of July] marches when I'm working. I'd shout over at him: 'go on you boy you' and give him the thumbs up. Then he'd come over to me with his mates and all. They'd all start slagging back – that's all right. There was even times when say [Cleansing Technician 2 is] sweeping the roads when the marches are going on and he'd be shouting at some of the boys we normally work with: 'I'm getting double time and you're getting sore feet.' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 5, SDC)

The IT Manager at SDC also described how ethno-national humour strengthened relationships between Catholic and Protestant employees. He provided examples of how employees 'bantered' with one another by playing on ethno-national stereotypes in ways that helped team bonding:

'There's times where the differences - the religious differences - have been a way of having a bit of craic and banter in the office. It's been kind of used in a positive way with that, where you take the two stereotypes and you make jokes about them. I find in certain teams that you can get on like that and it helps I think to make the team work better together.' (Protestant Male IT Manager, SDC)

Humour in some cases appears to have challenged negative perceptions of colleagues. In one other example from SDC's IT department, employees were aware that some of their

181

colleagues were members of the Orange Order. By engaging in reciprocal humour with them, their views changed:

'I think there's the odd one [member of the Orange Order] that I'm aware of and there's Masons as well. In fact, there's one or two who are in the Orange Lodge who are actually, there's a bit of craic out of them. They're not the old … there's this image of the Orange Order and the old staunch guy and no sense of humour. The ones I know are actually, would be quite humorous and would engage in that sort of banter both ways and would take it both ways and would take it as well as give it.' (Protestant Male IT Manager, SDC)

Other participants recounted examples where employees used humour to lampoon political figures. For example, a PA at SDC recounted that following a bank robbery in Belfast there was speculation that Republicans might have been involved. Employees began circulating emails with mocked-up bank notes featuring portraits of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness:

'There were pictures of bank notes that came through the email. They were a mock of bank notes done for the Northern Bank with pictures of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness. They were very funny and you know people were again, very careful who to send them too but actually, I was not there at the time but I happen to know that one of the security guards had shown one of the Councillor's, who then took it laughing and showed it to another Councillor from the other political persuasion and they had a joke about it. They were quite amusing.' (Protestant Female PA, SDC)

Employees were also the subject of much of the humour that had an element of risk attached. In the following example, a Grounds Maintenance Team Leader described an incident where colleagues surreptitiously placed a Sinn Fein election poster on the back of another employee's vehicle:

'One of the guys was driving around and someone came and tied a big poster of Gerry Adams to the back of his trailer. He drove round the whole day. When he came into the yard he went, "the fuckers! It would have been all right if I had been in such and such. I was out in [a Protestant district]". He says, "I didn't even notice! I could've got lynched". But then he was on the outlook for a unionist poster to put on one of the Catholic guys' cabs.' (Catholic Female Grounds Maintenance Team Leader, GDC).

The interviewees quoted thus far viewed these examples as evidence of how ethno-national humour helps employees manage cross-community relationships where WCR avoidance is

182

common. The lampooning of colleagues in appropriate circumstances establishes rapport in ways that official policies fail to do. However, managers can undermine harmonious working relationships by insisting employees stop engaging in politically sensitive humour. The Landfill Manager at GDC criticised the council for its implementation of NWE because it stifled much of the camaraderie between Catholic and Protestant employees:

'I have noticed now, just before, that the canteen breaks have changed an awful lot where some guys would have made a few jokes. And if you can't tell jokes, there's no real feeling of freedom of speech – that is a grandiose comment – but they do feel inhibited and the craic isn't there the way it used to be. [My Protestant friend] could say to me [in the past], "what about you, you Fenian" blah, blah and there's no animosity' (Catholic Male Landfill Manager, GDC).

Another example where a council's WCR policy undermined social cohesion involved two employees at Council E who had established a strong friendship and used ethno-national humour to ridicule one another. They approached their CRO following a reprimand by a line manager:

'There was two guys who had worked together for twenty years - one Catholic, one Protestant, - they said they always bantered and had actually been told by a manager to cut it out, whereas that was part of their working relationship. The two felt that it [the WCR policy] stifled their own working relationship and that attention was being drawn to something they were totally comfortable with. I suppose that manager needed to strike a balance between the needs of the policy and the needs of the workers themselves'. (Catholic Female CRO, Council E)

For work colleagues to participate in political humour a period of familiarization and ground rule setting is necessary and, until they have established this, employees restrict what they say to new recruits:

'You have to know who you're dealing with. If I was 'slagging' somebody, I'd have to know them for about ten years or more. But, if a new fella came in and he's only in the job, you wouldn't. You'd say to yourself, "hold on, I'll not say anything here because I'm not really sure about this fella. I haven't worked with him; I don't know him". But, the like of us … we're old hands here in the council – there's fellas would 'slag' us and we'd 'slag' them back. But, you know them. You know at the end of the day where to draw the line and that they're only keeping you going. But with new people you're careful until you get to know them' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 3, SDC).

An interviewee from TDC made a related point in arguing that, because of a relatively high seasonal staff turnover, there is less time to establish rapport and trust with his colleagues:

> 'It would be accepted more so if the person has been working with them for years – now maybe if somebody just came in here, as we do have seasonal staff that comes in here, they might be only in a couple of weeks and they are having a bit of banter. The other men would take that a bit more seriously, but if it was staff who had been working together for years and years they just know what the mindset is [then we know] they are not doing it in any malice' (Protestant Male Charge Hand, TDC).

When reflecting on humour, employees' sometimes drew comparisons between councils and other organisations concluding that by their nature councils are more restricting. A PA at SDC for instance explained that while working for a private sector employer, reciprocal humour lightened the atmosphere after the Drumcree dispute. She argued that the same interaction would be difficult at SDC:

> 'I was very friendly with one of the guys in my previous post - a Catholic and I'm Protestant. I have never gone to a 12th July march in my life but when I came in one week immediately after the 12th he was keeping me going and he says, "Oh yous [sic] didn't get down Garvaghy Road[31]!" And, I just turned round and went, "yeah but we got through the Ardoyne!" And, it was that sort of banter and the two of us just laughed. But, if you said that in here you'd get told off.' (Protestant Female PA, SDC)

The point made at the end of the above quote indicates how for some employees councils are less welcoming of political humour than other organisations are. The same interviewee put this down to differences in organisational culture:

> 'I think it is the culture and just the way that the Council is. I think that probably here people take themselves too seriously, whereas before it was like, "really? Religion! It doesn't really matter". That would be my view.' (Protestant Female PA, SDC)

Although most employees viewed ethno-national humour positively, it could sometimes be misconstrued because, as one interviewee said, 'there's people who don't know what the craic is' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 4, SDC). Indeed, not all employees welcome jokes about community differences. A Charge Hand at TDC said, 'there are certain people

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[31] The police and army prevent Orange marchers from walking along the Garvaghy Road after the Catholic residents mounted a campaign against it.

who wouldn't joke about the political thing; who would take big offence at that.' Another interviewee made a similar point: 'you have to be very comfortable, or very certain, that the people you're speaking to won't take things the wrong way because it is so easy to offend people who will take umbrage' (Catholic Male Grounds Maintenance Line Manager, TDC). In a similar vein, the community relations staff at GDC were accused by their line manager of 'being quite flippant' in their use of humour. The staff themselves believed the humour acceptable because, as one of them argued, they are 'pretty close and can cope with things in that way' and because their humour was 'a way of relating to each other'. Such incidents added to a general feeling that formal policy and managers' interpretation of how councils should implement it could inhibit employees' in forming and maintaining cohesive cross-community relationships. The Director of Social Enterprise A commented that employees, or 'what everybody used to call the ordinary 5/8ths', invariably find 'quite human ways' of managing their relationships with colleagues from different community backgrounds, but 'it's the managers who are more stiff'.

Humour is an informal strategy used by employees not only to break the monotony of the working day, but also to help them cope with WCR issues at work. Humour can 'oil the wheels' and help keep open channels of communication about WCR issues when policy mechanisms stifle discussion of such subjects. Lampooning and self-deprecation helped maintain social cohesion and reduced tension when WCR problems emerged. Community Relations Officers suggested also that evidence of constructive humour indicates good community relations exist in councils.

8.6 Conclusion

In this, the second findings chapter, I demonstrated that participants often used ethno-national identity to explain employee attitudes to WCR and the extent to which District Councils embrace good relations objectives. They referred to these arguments when describing why there are weaknesses in WCR policy. A number of interviewees referred to differences in attitude between Catholics and Protestants arguing that this explains the varying levels of support for WCR. The first part of the chapter presented three tacit norms in Protestantism and Catholicism that interviewees believe creates and reinforces division. Some interviewees argued that Protestants are averse to WCR initiatives like good relations believing them a potential threat to their community identity. Because of a history of inequality and rebellion,

185

and recent material gains, Catholics were inclined to be confident and open in their views such that they participate more willingly in WCR initiatives.

The responses to WCR considered in the second part of the chapter demonstrate that employees manage community differences at work in ways that fall outside the purview of WCR policy. They responded in this way because of gaps in policy and the complexity of managing identity differences at work. The influence of ethno-national differences and the barriers to successful implementation of WCR, mean that employees must find other ways of managing WCR issues. The empirical research revealed three prevailing approaches: avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour. Avoidance was a common employee response to WCR within the councils. Although some employees disagree with WCR policy, and for this reason did not engage with it, this was not the case for all employees. Some avoided dealing with community relations issues when worried about undermining relationships with colleagues preferring instead to build a 'polite wall' behind which their relationships could be protected. A lack of clarity in WCR policy implementation was another reason for avoidance, as was a degree of 'conflict fatigue'. Employees resisted attempts to draw them into WCR matters for similar reasons while they also opposed WCR policy for unfairly problematising their ethno-national identity and asking them to undertake responsibility for WCR when it was previously someone else's job. The final common response was pragmatic humour that, when carefully managed, allows employees variously to sidestep complex WCR issues, to build rapport across communities and to maintain social cohesion even when tensions are running high.

The next chapter presents the first part of my analysis. It identifies a typology of responses from the empirical material that captures the range of participants' views on WCR.

Analysis: Part 1

9. A Typology of Responses

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a typology of responses from the research findings to demonstrate the complexity and subjective nature of interviewee responses to WCR. One conclusion I could arrive at is that historic ethno-national discourses have an over-bearing effect on council employees' attitudes and behaviours such that Protestants make for entrenched, defensive and protectionist employees and managers unwilling to bend and set against WCR initiatives because of historic ethno-national discourses. I could also deduce that Catholics are receptive to change, that they favour WCR culture change because of increasing confidence, a propensity for collectivism and their preparedness to question council decisions – all of which result from their history of rebellion and the fight for equality.

These discourses are important for understanding the views shared by many of the research participants, but the empirical material also highlighted ways in which respondents from both communities were much more considered and pragmatic about their identity than this implies. There were, for example, instances when Protestant participants rejected the idea that they were less secure as a community than Catholics who sometimes signalled a lack of confidence in WCR issues and were unwilling to talk openly regarding community relations. Indeed, a Protestant Trade Union Representative aware of these arguments rejected the suggestion that he is individualistic or that he has a greater affinity for the state:

> 'I was brought up Protestant but I was never taught never to challenge the state. I was always a rebel; I was at school even I suppose it's in my blood, and I mean, it's not even a case of me challenging authority, I have to challenge Government; I'll challenge anybody.' (Protestant Male Trade Union Representative, GMB)

The chapter introduces and describes a typology of interviewees' responses from the empirical research. The typology demonstrates how employees responded in complex ways to WCR policy and practice based on, for example, their reading of how it would impact upon their relationships and whether it represented a challenge to their identity. Six types were prominent and warrant further consideration: Enthusiast, Pragmatist, Relativist, Optimistic Historicist, Cynical Historicist, and Humorist. My reading of the empirical material suggests that Catholic and Protestant respondents were Enthusiasts and Cynical Historicists, Relativists and Optimistic Historicists, as well as Humorists and Pragmatists.

I do not argue that the typology so accurately defines interviewees' responses that one type neatly describes each respondent. Rather, aspects of interviewees' responses often related to more than one typology, but they normally demonstrated an overriding propensity for one type during the interviews. For example, the Head of HR at SDC spoke of the need for good relations initiatives, but also argued that councils have achieved little significant improvement because the historic differences remain intact. In this case, the overriding impression given is that he was mindful of good relations imperatives as Head of HR, but personally viewed them as largely unworkable. Hence, he is included in the Cynical Historicist typology. Likewise, a Humorist from the Cleansing Depot at TDC shared opinions in keeping with Pragmatist responses, but demonstrated a preference for witticism and non-committal responses to WCR issues. Hence, he was included as a Humorist.

Table 9.1 below highlights representative characteristics of each type by response to: community differences, WCR initiatives and the nature of the council in which they work. It also incorporates participants' informal responses to WCR issues as discussed in the previous chapter. The descriptions include representative examples of interviewee responses rather than a comprehensive summary of all instances where these responses were forthcoming. The thesis has already cited some of these pertinent examples, but they are summarised again where they highlight key aspects of the types.

	Community Differences	WCR	Nature of Council	Informal Response to WCR Issues
Enthusiasts	The reasons for community differences are temporary and will improve in the long-term.	Positive about WCR initiatives at work and their ability to bring about change.	Convinced that the council is committed to improving conditions for employees.	Pragmatic Humour
Pragmatists	Attitudes to community differences and reasons for conflict are context-dependent. Less affected than others by ideological arguments.	Tentative but attitudes highly dependent upon the philosophy of senior managers.	Some willingness to support council as an employer but conditional.	Avoidance and Pragmatic Humour
Relativists	Non-committal on attitudes to community differences and unwilling to apportion blame for conflict.	Appreciative of small successes but unconvinced by claims the workplace can bring about change in the long-term.	Some willingness to support the council as an employer but conditional.	Avoidance and Pragmatic Humour
Optimistic Historicists	Lacking enthusiasm for the view that reconciliation will happen soon but believe it is possible in the longer term and are willing to support change.	Workplace community relations problems considerable but councils can better manage WCR than is currently the case.	Largely supportive of the council's role as an employer.	Pragmatic Humour
Cynical/Intransigent Historicists	Conflict seen as inevitable consequence of historical differences. Reconciliation highly unlikely.	WCR initiatives unworkable given the historical differences.	Unconvinced councils can do more than comply with basic statutory duties.	Avoidance and Resistance
Humorists	Non-committal to reasons for conflict and use humour when entering debate on issues.	Pragmatic about WCR initiatives using jokes and satire to explore sensitive issues.	Usually non-committal but willing to discuss council's track record as an employer using humour to deflect uncomfortable questions.	Pragmatic Humour

Table 9.1 Typology of Reponses to WCR

9.2 Enthusiasts

Those participants most enthusiastic about reconciliation prospects tried to see positive aspects in, and were positive about, their working environment and work colleagues, and wholeheartedly favoured WCR initiatives. They showed a tendency to portray community differences and conflict as temporary, if longstanding aberrations employees are generally coping with well. There was often a marked refusal to lay blame for conflict with any particular group and even when they apportioned blame,

they frequently highlighted signs of conciliation. When WCR barriers got in the way of reconciliation efforts, Enthusiasts invariably had ideas for getting beyond them and they alluded to examples where employees overcame them. They were prepared to support formal WCR policy, but believed also that 'organic' relationships between employees needed encouraging and protecting.

Community and Good Relations Officers from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds were, perhaps because of their role in design and implementation, the most likely interviewees to exhibit Enthusiast tendencies. A significant proportion of the non-managerial administrative employees were also positive about WCR strategies and the possibility of long-term reconciliation. Enthusiasts acknowledged problematic issues but often felt that, in the right circumstances, councils could overcome them. In their view, attempts to implement good and harmonious work environments are invariably successful.

Enthusiasts involved in WCR implementation usually argued that ethno-national differences are deeply engrained in the nature of society and the councils themselves, but felt strongly that WCR policy can bring about change in the workplace and in wider society. They argued that despite the violence and misgivings of the workforce, employees and managers mostly embrace change and work at reconciling their differences. The Protestant male Director of Social Enterprise A was an Enthusiast who suggested that even the most pessimistic employee could be convinced to promote and contribute to a harmonious culture. His social enterprise works with a number of councils and focuses on practical initiatives for removing barriers to policy implementation. Despite highlighting obstacles to WCR, he argued that councils are working hard to get over them and that employees are constructive about WCR.

The Catholic male CEO at GDC was another Enthusiast very positive about the potential advantages of good relations initiatives and confident that employees, even if initially sceptical, could be convinced to support them. For example, employees at GDC expressed cynicism toward good relations initiatives introduced in the late 1990s. The CEO pointed out how this changed as 'over the years the confidence has been built up and people have come to know each other and trust each other'. He was in favour of formal good relations policy initiatives, but also certain that in most cases

employees manage WCR in constructive ways without recourse to policy. Like other Enthusiasts, he identified barriers to WCR success, but recollected examples where employees circumvented the barriers, citing this as evidence that reconciliation is possible. In his time as CEO, GDC has worked closely with other councils and social enterprises to enhance relations between employees and research participants frequently highlighted examples of good practice at GDC.

Many Enthusiasts spoke about how GRFs could benefit community relations in the workplace. They considered constructive debate on WCR issues and opportunities to learn more about other communities as beneficial for promoting reconciliation. GDC's CEO viewed the council's GRFs as a successful mechanism for reducing conflict during the marching season and generally encouraged a reflexive attitude among employees. Even when they identified weaknesses in NWE, Enthusiasts emphasised their positive effects when levels of violence were high. Indeed, the Catholic female GRO at SDC was an Enthusiast in favour of good relations initiatives but described NWE policies as 'our salvation in the days when the bombs were going off'.

A final characteristic of Enthusiasts is a willingness to self-reflect on their approach to WCR initiatives. For example, the Director of Social Enterprise A reflected on areas of improvement for his organisation arguing that 'we're not making huge claims for this'. The quote below is from the beginning of my interview with him and it epitomises the attitudes of Enthusiasts:

> 'I don't want you to go away and think, you know, that in some sort of way that I'm sitting here saying [GDC] is a great place; we don't have any problems; that all the work has actually sorted out community relations and good relations, it hasn't, not at all; we've got our problems. But I suppose what we are trying to do is to say, as the issues come up, rather than put them in some dark place, I'm going to put them out on the table and try and address them and if that means we're going to have to have difficult debates about those things, well then we have those difficult debates'. (Catholic Male CEO, GDC)

Although both respondents quoted above explained that WCR activity is challenging, they continually emphasised the same point - employees from both communities will

reconcile their differences if given the support and opportunity. Indeed, this was typical of the Enthusiasts' outlook on WCR.

Of the responses to WCR discussed in the previous chapter, Enthusiasts showed an inclination for humour. As a result of their positive outlook on WCR they were the least likely of the respondents to resist WCR policy or to avoid engaging in WCR issues. Enthusiasts used humour to demonstrate their reflexivity and to encourage social cohesion with colleagues. Their humour would sometimes focus on community differences, which as the previous chapter demonstrated suggests to onlookers that their workplaces are relatively harmonious environments.

9.3 Pragmatists

This group was receptive to community relations ideas but unconvinced they would work in the long-term and were also reluctant to commit publically to them. How pragmatists read workplace imperatives and the likely job prospects arising from engagement with them are primary influences over their attitudes. When senior figures in councils consistently endorsed WCR policies and designated strategic objectives to them, Pragmatists were more willing to accept them. But when this support was unclear or unforthcoming their support was less likely. Pragmatists' responses to WCR were contingent upon their reading of the context in which it was implemented.

Research participants identified some managers as Pragmatists whose commitment to WCR initiatives was dependent upon whether involvement would benefit their careers. A Protestant Female CRO at Council D indicated how, because it did not provide for any 'big wins', career pragmatism was a significant constraint on her attempts to implement WCR. When Pragmatist managers take on WCR duties, they often do so with a degree of resignation or enforced compliance rather than full commitment. One Pragmatist manager responded in this way when asked what he thought of good relations initiatives:

> 'To be honest with you, it's part of our job. We're employed down here and we just take it as part of the job.' (Catholic Male Parks Department Line Manager, TDC)

Employees adopted a Pragmatist position when they wanted to concentrate on the job at hand rather than WCR issues. A member of Grounds Maintenance from GDC stated that although there are community relations issues among the workforce, he would rather 'cut grass and sort out the [flower] beds' and 'live and let live':

> 'I just come in and do my work and that's it. You know I wouldn't get involved in any other things like that there. There's no point in getting too political. You know, where does it get you? Sure, you have to accept one and other's points of views. That's the way I look at it. Give and take. Live and let live'. (Protestant Male Ground Maintenance, GDC)

Some Pragmatists explained that they are willing to debate community relations issues at work without adopting a political position. On the issue of flags for instance, Pragmatists were non-committal, preferring instead to protect relationships with colleagues and concentrate on core tasks. A Protestant Charge Hand at TDC explained that when asked to replace a Union Flag on a Cleansing Depot he did so to placate colleagues and ignored any political issues: 'It's not an issue, if you know what I mean. I'm quite happy to put the flag up. They can fly whatever they want. They can fly a pair of pyjamas for all I care'. The Protestant Landfill Monitoring Assistant at SDC made a similar point about the controversy surrounding flags. He said, 'I don't get that! [...] If they want to fly an Irish harp, I don't mind'. He went on to explain in a similar vein to other Pragmatists that if WCR problems did occur, he would negotiate his way out of them because, 'I would never have a problem getting on with anybody, so it doesn't affect me'.

Another characteristic of Pragmatist employees is that they often sidestep contentious issues so as not to cause offence to colleagues. As a Placement Student at SDC explained,

> 'What is the point of bringing up something that is going to annoy people? You would rather talk about your favourite type of coffee. Why are you bringing up things, even if there is a slight chance that it is going to offend somebody I wouldn't bring it up. I don't want to give a bad impression of myself by letting prejudices slip out. I don't think I'm that bad but I don't want to be misinterpreted. I think a lot of people are probably scared of offending people of other religions so they just don't go near that.' (Catholic Female Placement Student, SDC)

In another example, a Pragmatist Community Development Manager (Catholic female) from Council G had built a strong friendship with a work colleague from a different community background. She did not want to risk her friendship by introducing viewpoints her colleague might find objectionable and, therefore, avoided these topics. For her, this meant that 'in some ways it's an artificial type of friendship – scrape the veneer and you'll go somewhere you don't want to'.

Interviewees like the Placement Student and Community Development Manager were cautious in public about their attitudes to community relations and on WCR policy. They shared a common tendency to describe examples of impression management where they were less critical of WCR initiatives when the situation demanded it or where colleagues could take offence. The Community Development Manager refrained from debating WCR issues preferring to make anodyne comments only on such matters. The Placement Student highlighted examples where she engaged in impression management. For example, if introducing a conversation topic about GAA sports or local politics, she presented her views in the third person because 'it's easier then to mask opinion and say you don't think something when really you do'. She went on to explain, 'I don't want to give a bad impression of myself by letting prejudices slip out. It just depends on the person and how you think they are going to react'.

Pragmatists were unlikely to criticise or resist WCR policies should colleagues or senior managers view them negatively and, therefore, they showed a propensity for avoidance and impression management often responding humorously when discussing WCR topics or managing community relations incidents. Humorists responded in this way to maintain social cohesion and avoid offering too firm a view on WCR policy. In that respect, the Pragmatists' could satisfy their desire to create and maintain a favourable impression with others.

9.4 Relativists

Encouraged by 'small successes', Relativists believe the legacy of the past significantly hinders community relations and that local victories rather than longer-term societal changes are the most likely outcomes. Whilst they can see value in them,

Relativists do not usually offer outright enthusiasm or commitment to WCR initiatives because they see them as idealistic and unlikely to achieve success beyond the local context. Consequently, they treat with cynicism the long-term, mainstreaming intent behind good relations not because they are enduringly pessimistic, as are the Cynical Historicists described below, but because they are difficult to convince of its merits and believe that in practice a majority of employees effectively manage their relationships with others.

Cleansing Technicians 1 and 2 in the focus group at SDC responded in this way following their experiences dealing with serious WCR incidents. They argued that managers at SDC only listened to their views after Fair Employment Tribunal rulings. They also pointed to the major underlying causes of conflict that, for them, remain unresolved and contribute to ongoing WCR problems. Consequently, they were disinclined to believe that anything more than incremental WCR improvements are possible.

The Protestant female CRO at TDC adopted a Relativist position when reflecting on the likelihood of fundamental change at her council. She drew attention to a prevailing culture whereby a unionist ethos and some longstanding management practices prevented systematic change. She argued, for example, that managers at TDC have 'been there from the dawn of time' not seeing 'that [WCR] is a big cultural shift' required from all groups in the council. Yet, she also noted significant gains achieved through the council's GRFs and training opportunities for employees.

When Relativists reflect on how employees from different community backgrounds interact with one another, they often highlight local successes where differences are apparent, but carefully managed. In the following quote, the interviewee explains how 'the boys' working in a GDC Leisure Centre often discuss sporting rivalries but in a manner everyone is comfortable with. There was, however, a degree of pessimism in his tone because he was sceptical employees in other councils would behave in the same constructive manner:

> 'All the boys are very close knit and they'll head out for a pint and whatever. One of the boys is a season ticket holder over at Ibrox[32] and another one is a season ticket to Park Head[33]. They'll have a laugh and a bit of craic. That's maybe what's wrong with the country at the end of the day, people not sort of respecting each other's diversity. If everybody was able to do that maybe the state of affairs in the province would be a lot better for everybody.' (Catholic Male Leisure Centre Duty Manager, GDC)

If they participated in WCR initiatives, Relativists commonly described them as positive experiences for providing the opportunity to enhance relationships with colleagues. The Protestant female Personnel Manager at TDC, for instance, was enthusiastic about a good relations training event she attended as, 'there's a wee buzz after it because it has broken down some [...] barriers'. However, a less than enthusiastic attitude to WCR at TDC tempered her positivity and made her pessimistic about the possibility of deep-seated change. Relativists often argued employees and managers should handle WCR problems outside formal procedure and in most cases this approach would achieve better results. A Protestant female PA from SDC was, like other Relativists, dubious about the effectiveness of formal policy initiatives instead arguing that 'maybe there are easier ways to deal with it rather than going immediately to policy'.

Relativists value workplace humour for helping maintain harmonious work environments, Relativists place considerable value in workplace humour. The PA quoted above, for example, criticised formal NWE policies for restricting employees' ability to engage in humour, which in her view was to the detriment of harmonious working. Relativists like Pragmatists also favour a degree of WCR avoidance because they believe employees are managing differences fairly well at a local level and, subsequently, there is little need to debate or confront colleagues about sensitive political issues. A trade union official suggested that employees built a 'polite wall' on these matters. For Relativists, the polite wall is necessary not so much to avoid upsetting people but because the WCR climate is relatively harmonious in most instances and employees have established for themselves an acceptable consensus on WCR.

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[32] Glasgow Rangers' football stadium.
[33] Glasgow Celtic's football stadium.

When Relativists questioned how councils manage WCR, their concern was often that policy implementation could be dysfunctional where it destabilises relationships between employees. A Catholic female Administrative Assistant at GDC explained that workforce harmony can be undermined by inconsistent implementation of WCR policy if, for example, councils 'pick and choose' when to act. She also argued, in keeping with other Relativists, that for this reason councils should not 'try and enforce rules that can't be enforced'.

Relativists were, then, less positive about the benefits of WCR initiatives largely because employees, in their view, usually establish for themselves an acceptable equilibrium on WCR issues when at work. They emphasise examples where employees manage relationships with others without the need for policy intervention while they focus less on long-term change preferring instead to concentrate on current issues and how, when conflict emerges, equilibrium between employees can be re-established.

9.5 Optimistic Historicists

Respondents of this type often focus on historic differences but consider reconciliation possible in the longer-term and are more open to ideas for WCR improvement than are most other respondents. When discussing the nature of WCR, Optimistic Historicists like Cynical Historicists refer to ethno-national developments from the past, but are not as pessimistic as Cynical Historicists. Like Relativists, they cite examples where employees establish constructive relationships with one another and organically manage the historical differences. They also draw attention to the commonalities between Protestants and Catholics such as the fact that members of both communities fought together in WWI and that Protestants participated in the fight for Irish independence and in the Civil Rights Movement.

The focus group of Cleansing Technicians at SDC had an Optimistic Historicist among them who despite threats of violence and sectarian vandalism at his Cleansing Depot was sanguine about the prospects for relationship building, in the right circumstances:

'If you've got Catholic in a Catholic workplace or a Protestant in a Protestant workplace they're still going in with that mindset they were brought up with, but if you go into a mixed place then, through time, they'll end up having to work with a Protestant or a Catholic and they have to mix. Through time, they get it into their heads; they'll probably end up going for a drink and asking: what is this all about?' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 3, SDC)

When illustrating their interpretation of WCR in councils, Optimistic Historicists provided many examples where employees informally managed ethno-national differences. For instance, a Protestant male Leisure Services Manager at TDC described how both Catholic and Protestant employees took time out from the working day to view local band parades:

'The band practices have been going on since May so, I mean, whenever there's a band practice outside everybody, if this place is quiet, will go outside and watch it together, you know, and enjoy it; so, there's no restrictions put on it and everybody seems to be well in control.'

Optimistic Historicists regarded these examples as evidence that employees are capable of managing identity differences in spite of the longstanding conflict. They use these examples as justification for arguing that councils should welcome and support WCR policies for increasing cross-community contact and mutual understanding while they see WCR conflict as less problematic than the cynics suggest. When they attend council WCR training events, Optimistic Historicists take a more assuaging tone when participants raise viewpoints they disagree with. For example, the Leisure Services Manager quoted above attended a GRF meeting during which Catholic participants discussed their views on the poppy. Despite finding it difficult to understand why some viewed the poppy as politically sensitive, he listened to their explanation and 'could see their point of view':

'It was well worth going to. You know, I mean sometimes you don't actually realise that there are issues there. You know, the point they were trying to get across there was that they didn't mind people wearing a poppy if it was on the day before, the day of and maybe the day after Remembrance Sunday, not two or three weeks leading up to it and then keeping the poppy on two weeks afterwards. You could see their point of view'

Some trade unionists were Optimistic Historicists who had worked with councils on their WCR initiatives. They were mostly supportive of how councils were trying to deal with these issues and often argued that community relations in the workplace had improved significantly because of legislation and policy initiatives. An Optimistic Historicist from the TGWU regarded formal WCR policy beneficial for ensuring 'the old dinosaurs' are not able to undermine relationship-building:

> 'You can't treat people like this anymore and it'll take a while. It's all culture shocks. People have to change, and society has to change.' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, TGWU)

He further argued that 'they either change or it's the old story of the dinosaurs that are led somewhere to die' to be replaced by younger generations who 'will come through with a different attitude, as they're living with what's happening nowadays'. Another trade unionist was an Optimistic Historicist who argued that employees establish strong cross-community relationships despite their ethno-national differences:

> 'I've worked in an organisation that's both Protestant and Catholic, and I've Protestant friends and, if you work all day with someone, yes those sorts of things are talked about. I've gone drinking in Protestant bars with Protestant friends who maybe went and marched on the 12th July and had very strong views on the nationalist and republican situation. That's where [people] have to give themselves some credit. There's a lot of people out there not bitter.' (Catholic Male Trade Union Official, SIPTU)

Optimistic Historicists often highlighted ways that councils can improve WCR practices. Some went further in contending that even if the cynics remain unconvinced, the policy changes and more conciliatory attitudes of others mean WCR initiatives can work, at least in the short-term. They believed that councils are doing much to bring about positive change in the workplace, but they need additional time and support from the wider community to generate a more sustainable form of reconciliation.

9.6 Cynical Historicists

> 'I don't care what anybody says, for all the money that is being pumped in here to build capacity, I don't know what I built capacity for because I still think those, there may be some

discussions by right thinking people and things like that there, but people are still pretty entrenched.' (Protestant Male Head of HR, SDC)

Defeatism and fatalism are characteristics of Cynical Historicists who argue that community differences are insurmountable and that any attempt to improve things is unworkable. This makes them mostly closed to ideas for change. They treat WCR initiatives with derision because they do not believe they can resolve deep-seated problems in culture and society that often materialise in people's sub-conscious traits. When asked for views on whether councils have made progress on the WCR agenda, Cynical Historicists argue there has been little change and there is little prospect of improvement. The PA to SDC's CEO explained that even with the significant changes in policy, which in her opinion have led to modest improvements, Cynical Historicist employees believe that whatever the political or policy context community relations will remain problematic. She commented on a recent 'whispering campaign' concerning the appointment of Catholics to senior positions:

> 'We're going through all the restructuring and we have a Council Improvement Board but the Unionists are, it's called CIB, so they're calling it the Catholic Improvement Board because our Interim Director is Catholic and a couple of the advisers to him are Catholics.' (Catholic Female PA CEO, SDC)

A Protestant Cynical Historicist who was quoted in Chapter Eight felt that other Protestants were unwilling to challenge and fight for their rights because of an historic affinity with the state and employer. He said, 'I find that unionists are more like sheep in attitude and are more likely to go along with what the bosses say' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB). The Protestant Head of Administration at TDC also exhibited Cynical Historicist tendencies when arguing that reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics was unlikely any time soon. This, he argued, was because employees remain deeply divided despite the GFA and good relations policy changes. The most common issue raised by Cynical Historicists was that historic differences between Protestants and Catholics profoundly affect attitudes to WCR initiatives, making reconciliation unfeasible. This was the view of a Catholic Cynical Historicist who, when reflecting on the impact of the GFA and the introduction of the NIA, commented that 'trouble is never far away' (Catholic Female Administrative Assistant, GDC). A focus group Cynical Historicist from SDC suggested that

reconciliation efforts would always have limited impact when both Catholic and Protestant employees are already 'indoctrinated' before they join the workforce:

> 'You can't tell me that if you have a Catholic coming in here who has been indoctrinated. Do you think if the work environment, if you came here in your twenties, would change you? I don't think so.' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 4, SDC)

The Protestants in this category argued that because of their political gains and recent history of civil rights activity, Catholics are more confident in the workplace. Thus, while Catholics have gained something they are losing out. They offered this as a reason why there is defeatism and/or protectionism within the Protestant community. I cited, in the previous chapter, some typical quotes from interviews with Protestants who adopted this perspective, but other interviewees, such as the CEO of Council G suggested likewise:

> 'I think there was a feeling: "we're losing everything. It's all going the other way and it's going to a minority in our town so we're losing our identity".' (Protestant Male CEO, Council G).

Catholic Cynical Historicists were also critical of WCR initiatives and dubious that any WCR strategy could reconcile differences. A Catholic male Procurement Officer at GDC for example explained that WCR polices are 'pure window dressing' and that they 'never really take tangible effect'. The quote below is from an interview with a Catholic line manager at GDC who argued that because of the aforementioned protectionist ethos Protestant councils are unwilling to change:

> 'Protestant councils only seem to like their own people; to be very rigid. I say this in confidence, [it's the] rigid, Ulster Scots, puritanical siege mentality. They tend to see the minority population as a threat. The conspiracy theory is always there. I think, being kind to them, [Protestant majority councils] feel under threat. It's the siege mentality.' (Catholic Male Recreation and Sports Development Officer, GDC)

A Catholic Labourer from TDC held out little hope that WCR would bring about positive change because colleagues' attitudes were 'entrenched'. He also reflected on a good relations training intervention where participants were unwilling to discuss

community relations issues because they felt there were no major problems. There was also cynicism in the approach taken by a Catholic female Cleansing Technician at TDC who identified community relations issues but refused to discuss the details during interview. This interviewee said that although the council has tried to increase the proportion of Catholic employees, 'you would hear the boys saying, "he or she got it because of their religion".' She concluded that because her colleagues hold these views 'nothing has changed and nothing will change'.

Cynical Historicists hold strong views on issues such as the wearing of a poppy or the Union Flag, arguing for instance that all employees should wear a poppy or that the Union Flag should never appear on council buildings. A Cleaner at SDC was a Cynical Historicist who lamented the fact many of her colleagues did not wear a poppy on Remembrance Sunday:

> 'Catholics don't wear them which I think ... on Remembrance Sunday there was one of our supervisors is a Catholic and the other one is a Protestant which ... I like the both of them and [the Catholic] didn't wear his poppy on Remembrance Sunday and I think he really should have. If they're working and they're doing their job, Remembrance Sunday, I think everybody that's there should wear a poppy because I think it's not nice if they don't.' (Protestant Female Cleaner, SDC)

Like other respondents, Cynical Historicists recounted occasions when conflict occurred. However, they explained these as widespread, inevitable incidents. For example, the interviewee quoted above described instances where colleagues spoke openly about political issues. She explained recent episodes where a Protestant colleague experienced sectarian harassment. Catholic colleagues over-salted his lunch on one occasion. On another, he received a phone call at work from a paramilitary group threatening his life. There were notable differences, however, between the conclusions she drew from these events when compared, for example, to most Cleansing Technicians from SDC who adopted a more conciliatory tone. For Cynical Historicists, events of this nature demonstrated the pointlessness of WCR initiatives.

Cynical Historicists referred regularly to councillors' negative impact on attempts to bring about change arguing that their squabbling is further evidence that deep-rooted WCR culture change is highly unlikely. They also reflected on WCR policies pointing

to the gap between positive policy rhetoric and the day-to-day reality of working in councils. A Grounds Maintenance Team Leader at GDC argued that the reality of working for the council contradicted the messages in its 'glossy' good relations brochure. She also contended that the council was reluctant to address the issues raised by a recent consultation exercise. It indicated areas of weakness in WCR provision where there did not appear to be much follow-up action:

> 'There was a thing a good few years ago where we all got together. We sat down and we talked about what was wrong with the council and the management style. There was a whole document produced and this was handed to them and apparently, some of the directors and management were quite shocked at what had come forward. No matter how good the intentions are, it is not actually workable on the ground regardless of how good it is' (Catholic Female Grounds Maintenance Team Leader, GDC)

Respondents of this type are the least positive about the prospects for reconciliation or the effectiveness of WCR policies. When relationships break down or policy initiatives do not work, they view this as the inevitable outworking of historic conflict and further evidence of how peace-building initiatives cannot bring about change. Owing to their scepticism, Cynical Historicists, like the Head of Administration at TDC, were critical of WCR initiatives such as GRFs and the Shared Future policy, which they portrayed as unwarranted meddling or 'naive social engineering' likely to exacerbate existing problems. Avoidance and resistance were the two primary practical responses to WCR subjects while they rarely regarded community relations a matter deserving humorous treatment. The Head of Administration at TDC, for example, felt that employees take WCR issues too seriously to joke about them, so 'there wouldn't be an awful lot of that here'. When Cynical Historicists discussed humour it was defined as further evidence of misanthropic behaviour or nasty 'piss taking' between employees rather than evidence of social cohesion.

9.7 Humorists

The empirical research identified various instances where participants used humour to manage identity differences at work. However, this was Humorists' primary reaction to WCR issues involving as it did the pragmatic utilisation of satire, teasing and joking to overcome, sidestep or resist WCR issues and/or initiatives. When serious

discussions begin, Humorists ask others to 'lighten up' or, if others admonished them for their frivolity, respond with retorts such as 'sure I'm only having a laugh' or 'wise up'. A participant in the focus group interview with Cleansing Technicians at SDC spent time explaining the importance of humour for 'keeping things ticking over' and 'finding a happy medium' between Catholics and Protestants. Cleansing Technician 5 was a Humorist who, when discussions became too serious, introduced a variety of witticisms during a focus group interview. He also described times when satire helped maintain good working relationships between Protestant and Catholic employees. For example, he explained how he and other Catholics would lampoon Protestant colleagues during the marching season:

Quote 1

'There's even times when say [Niall's[34]] sweeping the roads when the marches are going on and he'd be shouting at some of the boys we normally work with, "I'm getting double time and you're getting sore feet".' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 5, SDC)

Quote 2

'We've an individual in here who every other 12th [of July] does the parades and whatever. Now, up in our stores we've wee white gloves we wear underneath the blue ones. What we've always said to him is, 'see if you give the boys a pound a pair we'll all make a few quid over the 12th'. It's a bit of craic.' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 5, SDC)

Cynical Historicists and Enthusiasts at times excluded Humorists from conversations about political issues when they recurrently introduced humorous non-sequiturs that distracted others from serious political debate. This was particularly true of line managers concerned that ethno-national humour would undermine WCR. Trade unionists involved in casework also found Humorists problematic because their approach sometimes resulted in formal complaints that were difficult to defend. Humorists themselves recognised that some colleagues prefer not to join in with jokes related to community differences. Indeed, a Cleansing Technician from SDC argued that certain employees with 'fiery tempers' deserved to be given a 'wide birth'.

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[34] A pseudonym.

The Director of Social Enterprise B routinely used humour or 'a bit of craic' in his good relations training interventions. He referred to himself as a stand-up comedian who used humour to break the ice in difficult settings where WCR issues had been causing significant problems in the workplace.

'Now at the very start I tell them "now you're here for all day, you know it could be boring – even the best of things can be boring so let's enjoy it, let's have a bit of craic here. I'll give you a health warning: be careful I don't wind you up because I love a bit of craic here". So, it is about breaking down, as quickly as you can break it down those fears in the comfort zone to get them quickly, as quick as you can, to the point where they are going to talk about things. That's the two things [sic] – well I put it down to this. I draw an analogy between doing this work and a stand up comedian. You got to know your audience and it is all about timing. You have to change, you have to be up for the challenge and you got to read the audience – a good stand up comedian reads his audience. In a practical sense, that is how I have found it and that is how I survive no matter where I have been, whether it is in a factory, council or with paramilitaries.' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B)

For Humorists, formal policy mechanisms can be problematic because, as was indicated earlier, others sometimes interpret their joking behaviour as a breach of WCR policy. It can also be disconcerting for those who prefer to have 'serious' discussions about WCR themes or for those who avoid them altogether. Humorists can be contrasted with the Cynical Historicists who argued that community relations issues are too serious for humour. Some of the Relativists and Optimistic Historicists also preferred not to participate in humour should it lead to misunderstandings and/or undermine carefully established friendships. The Catholic female Pragmatist Community Development Manager at Council G, for example, resisted the temptation at work to joke about community relations with her Protestant friend, although she happily did so with other Catholics.

Humorists' attitudes to WCR were difficult to pin down because of their pragmatic and non-committal approach to community relations issues. They used humour strategically to redirect attention from WCR due to their discomfort with these themes. However, the quotes from my empirical research indicate that their humour often had a serious intent given that it helped maintain consensus between employees from different backgrounds and, where problems existed, re-established cohesive

relationships. Humorists also used satire to break down social barriers in difficult situations.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a typology of six common responses to WCR issues. The overriding concern in the chapter was to demonstrate how employees manage WCR in a context where historic ethno-national identities remain influential and where there is a gap between policy design and implementation. The findings highlighted how some interviewees would link historical ethno-national discourses to employee attitudes toward WCR. Interviewees also sometimes argued that these historical discourses affect how councils approach WCR. However, the typology demonstrates that there is a much greater diversity of response from members of both communities and suggests that the role of ethno-national identity is complex.

Enthusiasts and Optimistic Historicists shared much in common. However, the Enthusiasts believed firmly that long-term reconciliation and good relations measures could succeed and that employees and managers should support them. Optimistic Historicists were open to ideas for improvement but were not as positive as Enthusiasts. Pragmatists and Relativists are for different reasons more convinced by short-term, local successes where councils give employees the opportunity and space to manage their differences. Pragmatists are cautious about expressing their views on WCR issues and reflect more carefully on how others will perceive them. Relativists on the other hand tend not to speak too highly of WCR issues and retain a degree of cynicism toward the mainstreaming intent behind good relations strategies. They emphasise the importance of localised and often informal methods of managing WCR citing examples where employees get on with one another without the need for formal interventions. Of the six types, Cynical Historicists are the hardest to convince of the benefits of WCR initiatives because they believe it inevitable that historical ethno-national conflict will continue for a long time to come. Humorists are usually nervous of becoming involved in overly serious debates regarding WCR issues when they arise, favouring instead joking and teasing responses above other strategies. Some Humorists strategically employ humour to break down barriers between colleagues

and, in the case of the Director of Social Enterprise B, to liven up good relations training events where formal policy can have a stifling effect on participants.

Analysis Part 2

10. Evaluating the Research Findings

10.1 Introduction

The aims of this chapter are to summarise the core arguments from the research, to indicate how the findings answer the initial research questions, and to explain how my research contributes to existing literature on WCR. The first section reiterates the main arguments from the empirical research and indicates the initial conclusions we can draw in relation to the case studies' WCR policy implementation. The second section considers how the thesis answers the key research questions by highlighting areas where councils' WCR initiatives work well and describing the barriers to and weaknesses in their approach. In addressing the key aims, the thesis posed nine interrelated questions, which are analysed in turn in section two:

(i) Why did the case study councils implement WCR initiatives?

(ii) How did they address their policy obligations?

(iii) Have the councils achieved their intended objectives?

(iv) What effects do good cross-community relationships in the workplace have on reconciliation beyond the workplace?

(v) To what extent is WCR policy responsible for positive relationships?

(vi) What are the gaps in and barriers to WCR policy?

(vii) What does the empirical research tell us about the prevalence of identity and to what extent does it explain participants' responses to WCR?

(viii) What role does ethno-national identity play in how participants perceive and respond to WCR?

(ix) How do employees informally manage WCR issues when they arise?

The issues raised in the thesis mirror those in Dickson and Hargie's research and, therefore, the third section indicates where the findings concur with their conclusions. However, my research findings and analysis differs in three respects. First, it highlights in greater depth some of the ways in which historic ethno-national discourses inform employees' views on

WCR. Second, the thesis presented a typology of responses that captured and explained the differences in response to WCR. Third, the organisation studies literature on change management and identity is drawn from to analyse interviewees' responses to proposed change in the work environment. Therefore, the analysis attends to the social/political organisational context in which councils introduce policy. As Bloomer and Weinreich (2004) argue in their critique of some SIT studies, when examining identity we must take account of the complex social context in which it develops. This section also draws from the typology to explain how there are subjective differences in how people perceive identities and proposed policy changes (Dickson *et al*, 2008a).

The fourth section analyses the informal responses to WCR initiatives and the role of identity in organisational change. A common concern for organisational members faced with workplace change is whether it will negatively affect their 'sense of identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126). Avoidance/resistance and pragmatic humour are examined as reactions to organisational change in social/political environments where employees and managers are concerned about how change will affect them. These informal responses are 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton, 1997) that help employees and managers deal with the tensions created by a formal/informal culture gap and their identity concerns (Oilila, 1995; cited in Fulop and Linstead, 1999). Further, organisations are political arenas (Mintzberg, 1983) where people must be resourceful and creative when managing the demands upon them (Noon and Blyton, 1997).

10.2 Summary of Findings

10.2.1 Working relationships generally positive

The empirical research demonstrated that in most cases working relationships between Protestants and Catholics are positive. There were examples of employees from both communities establishing strong bonds with one another, engaging in friendly humour and socialising outside work. When cross-community relationships had developed between colleagues, they worked hard to ensure that community differences did not undermine them.

10.2.2 Official WCR policy is necessary

The findings suggest that increasing contact between Catholic and Protestant employees is welcome and can improve relationships, but this must be encouraged through a long-term, iterative process where employees participate voluntarily and progress at their own pace. Most participants view WCR policy initiatives as necessary for minimising conflict at work. The majority believed NWE policies help establish a degree of calm when, particularly in previous decades, a high level of violence increased tensions between employees. They suggested that good relations initiatives were welcome because they could address some of the weaknesses in NWE policy. The CROs and GROs were positive regarding the benefits of WCR initiatives and especially with reference to good relations policies. Official WCR policy and the threat of disciplinary action prevented some interviewees from discussing community relations issues. Although they were sometimes critical of NWE policies, interviewees argued that councils should continue to apply them.

Good relations strategies, if implemented effectively, represent a major culture change for councils and, as such, they can be difficult to implement. The barriers to good relations include what one interviewee referred to as the 'silo mentality' where limited cross-community contact and a fear of the other inhibit policy implementation. Research participants viewed GRFs positively because they encouraged mutual understanding and helped councils address their good relations duties, but they expressed mixed opinions on whether they were currently successful. Some participants found it difficult to discuss politically sensitive subjects in a public forum because they were concerned about offending colleagues and fearful of being misconstrued.

10.2.3 Historic identity differences remain influential

Whilst relationships between employees are mostly cohesive, and WCR policies are in operation, historical differences between Catholic and Protestant employees continue to affect District Councils. Research participants described examples where violent sectarian incidents occurred in the workplace. Even when they do not express political views, employees' community differences may still impact upon their experiences as, for example, the suppression of identity can lead to feelings of frustration particularly when their

colleagues speak openly about aspects of their culture. Where employees suppress identities, as is often the case with NWE, their motivation levels may be detrimentally affected.

On the question of ethno-national identity and its influence, the empirical research indicated that interviewees described different tacit norms for Catholics and Protestants when explaining attitudes toward WCR. They referred to 'collectivism', 'resistance' and 'confidence' when arguing that Catholics are generally more welcoming of WCR initiatives. These norms emerge from Catholics' historic underdog status, rebelliousness and fight for equality. 'Individualism', 'acquiescence' and 'protectionism' are influential norms for Protestants because of an ongoing siege mentality and defence of the union. They concluded that WCR policies pose a threat to their identity. Those interviewees who shared this view also contended that tacit norms explained differences between unionist and nationalist controlled councils.

The way in which employees respond to WCR is, however, more complex than this suggests. Although historical differences and the discourses associated with Protestantism and Catholicism were significant, the empirical research indicated, for example, that respondents from both backgrounds had reservations regarding WCR policies. My analysis of the findings produced a typology of responses that highlight characteristic attitudes toward WCR issues and policy initiatives. There are six typologies in total: Enthusiast, Pragmatist, Relativist, Optimistic Historicist, Cynical Historicist, and Humorist. The typology demonstrates how my research participants' responses and attitudes to WCR were not simply the product of ethno-national discourses.

10.2.4 There are gaps and weaknesses in policy

On the question of WCR policy, the research found gaps and weaknesses in its implementation. While most interviewees received initial WCR awareness training, fewer than half of them participated in training on cross-community mutual understanding while *Management Development Programmes* focused on policy compliance. For some interviewees, a lack of training means they are ill prepared to deal with issues when they arise, which can create further problems and reduce the likelihood of reconciliation. If participants have negative experiences at training events, it can damage their confidence in WCR initiatives in the long-term.

It sometimes appeared that managers and councillors were not as supportive as they could be of WCR. For example, it was argued that managers were unsure whether involvement in WCR initiatives would improve career prospects. Managers also appeared concerned about addressing WCR issues such as sectarian harassment in case they made matters worse. Although interviewees generally felt that NWE policies were effective, there were reports of tension and conflict. The research findings revealed a gap in WCR policy implementation, which led to three common informal responses to WCR: avoidance, resistance and humour.

10.2.5 Informal Responses to Change are Significant

Because of the gaps in WCR policy and community differences, interviewees respond in informal ways to WCR issues. The results of the study show that interviewees avoided sensitive subjects because they did not want to undermine working relationships with others. Employees referred to a lack of support from managers, confusion about WCR policy and a reluctance to cause offence to colleagues when explaining avoidance. For councillors, a commitment to voters sometimes leads to avoidance of WCR issues while they also contradict the good relations ethos in public pronouncements. This lack of civic leadership can result in reduced support from the workforce for WCR policy. Managers also avoided WCR issues and policies for three reasons: councils do not take policy seriously enough, because participation in WCR activity does not enhance career prospects, and because the issues appear too complex. The WCR policies, and particularly NWE, discourage employees from disclosing views about community relations issues thus limiting the possibility of reconciliation, as differences remain unaddressed.

There was overt resistance when WCR initiatives appeared ineffective, unnecessary or threatening. When employees were confused about WCR policy, they withdrew from WCR discussions preferring to concentrate on other jobs. There were also instances where respondents resisted good relations when they felt it threatened their community identity. There was some evidence of employees leaving good relations training events and formally withdrawing from GRFs as a result. Mutual understanding and openness at work posed a threat insofar as sharing politically sensitive views with others could potentially lead to harassment and/or intimidation.

Humour was a widespread informal response to WCR issues that has five purposes: relief from boredom, building rapport and improving social cohesion, releasing cross-community tensions, softening perceptions of others, countering the stifling effects of WCR policy. This was dependent upon the people involved, the context and how those involved used it. Humour was also described as a subjective response that is open to interpretation and that can be misconstrued by those who 'don't know what the craic is'.

10.2.6 There are Differences in Implementation Within and Across Councils

There was variation in how each case study council implemented WCR policy with SDC and GDC showing more enthusiasm for, and being more proactive about, WCR initiatives than TDC. Many of the examples when WCR policy was criticised, where relationships came under strain, and where there was resistance to WCR policy related to TDC. Respondents frequently argued that TDC is not as certain as the other councils of the need for good relations because it is, as a unionist-controlled council, risk averse, conservative and unconvinced of the need to change. There was resistance within individual council departments. The Cleansing Technicians at SDC were sceptical the council was adequately prepared to mainstream good relations. At GDC, the Irish language policy and prevalence of talk about GAA sports led some Protestant and indeed some Catholic interviewees to question whether it could ever become a more welcoming, harmonious organisation.

10.3 Addressing the Main Research Questions

This section explains how the findings answer the key thesis research questions. It incorporates aspects of the literature review and empirical research to summarise the arguments presented. Three issues are introduced briefly here but fuller examination of their significance is provided in later sections of the chapter. These are: how the typology demonstrates that ethno-national identity is subjectively experienced and 'not as pervasive as might be imagined' (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006), why the informal responses are common reactions to organisational change, and how the informal responses can be read as aspects of identity work.

10.3.1 Why did councils introduce WCR initiatives?

The historic differences between Protestants and Catholics have yet to be reconciled and conflict continues to occur despite the introduction of legal and policy initiatives. Religious differences are persistent and inform the self-identities of both communities. Mitchell (2003, 2004, 2006) and others (Bruce, 1985, 1987; Cormack and Osborne, 1991) contend that religion is a key explanatory factor for the conflict. They argue that religion has ongoing sociological effects (cf. Brewer 1998, 2004; Brewer and Higgins, 1999a; Mitchell, 2006) that contribute to a greater sense of community for Catholics than for Protestants. For the former, one universal Church leads to social cohesion whereas for the latter the existence of many different Churches has led to fragmentation (Bruce, 1985; Coulter, 1999a). Religious difference also creates a fear of the other that political figures have sometimes manipulated for their own ends (Brewer and Higgins, 1999a; Mitchell, 2006).

Ideological differences between nationalists and unionists, and republicans and loyalists also maintain division. For nationalists and republicans, the unification of Ireland remains an important goal while they argue that Catholics have experienced discrimination in Ireland because of British/unionist ambivalence toward them. Narratives of subjugation and rebellion remain central to nationalist and republican identity. Loyalists and unionists want NI to retain constitutional and cultural links with Britain The threat of integration with the Republic of Ireland remains a concern particularly for Loyalists and Orange Order members who, according to some commentators at least, continue to experience a 'siege mentality' (Cairns, 2000; Douglas and Shirlow, 1998; Hughes *et al*, 2007; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). A further reason for the conflict is that socio-economic inequality increased the tensions between the two communities (Coulter, 1999a and b; Michie and Sheehan, 1998). Socio-economic arguments describe how material gains for Catholics in recent years have meant their confidence as a community has increased while Protestants have felt a sense of threat and loss (Mitchell, 2003).

Conflict also affects the workplace in a variety of ways with ongoing instances of sectarian violence (Jarman, 2004, 2005), which is in some cases instigated to prevent potential recruits from other communities applying for jobs (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996; Shirlow, 2003; 2006). Employment chill factors (Shirlow, 2006; Teague, 1997) or 'manifestations of separateness' (Hughes *et al*, 2007) such as flags and wall murals also dissuade people from

looking for work in some communities and creates high levels of workforce segregation. Ethno-national violence also results in financial loss to employers (Dickson *et al*, 1999; Hargie *et al*, 2005).

The FEA 1976 and 1989 set out for councils a number of specific obligations such as the need to prevent direct and indirect discrimination. As the political climate improved in the 1990s, the government introduced new legislation - the NIA 1998 and FETO 1998. The emphasis changed to 'proactive' 'mainstreaming' of 'good relations' responsibilities and emphasised the need for councils and other public authorities to take a lead role in delivering WCR improvements.

The government also implemented a number of community relations policy initiatives. The DCCRP was introduced in 1989 followed by further policies in 1991 (TSN) and 1994 (PAFT). The DCCRP provided most of the funding for a CRO post in all councils and for community relations projects in the local community. The Harbison (2002) review of community relations policy concluded that despite the legislation and policy frameworks, organisations needed to do more on community relations. In 2005, and in response to the review's conclusions, the government introduced a new policy – the Shared Framework. It reiterated councils' community relations obligations in FETO and NIA and emphasised the need to establish 'shared' and 'good and harmonious' workplaces.

For District Councils, each subsequent initiative meant increased responsibility for equality and community relations. Indeed, as time moved on, policy-makers came increasingly to view public authority workplaces as one of the more important contexts for reconciliation.

10.3.2 How did the case study councils address their policy obligations?

There were three phases of WCR development in each case study council. In the early phase, GDC focused on complying with equality legislation, and in phase two it agreed to participate in the DCCRP and introduced an official NWE policy. In the final phase (late 1990s to the present time), the council worked toward the good relations duties outlined in the NIA and later Shared Future framework. It produced good relations strategy and action plans and introduced a statutory Equality Scheme where it specifies how it addresses NIA s75 commitments. As part of its compliance responsibility, in 2007 GDC undertook a wide-

ranging audit of its equality and community relations policies and procedures. A NWE policy remains in place although it has established GRFs that give participants the opportunity to discuss and learn more about their community differences.

The other case study councils introduced similar WCR initiatives and they too have complied with their statutory duties. However, there are differences between councils in how they implement WCR initiatives and in interviewees' perceptions of their success. TDC has generally been slower to adapt to the changing community relations agenda than the other case studies. When the government introduced the NIA, for example, the council prevaricated over how and when to establish an effective good relations strategy and, while other councils such as GDC began setting up GRFs and revising their WCR training, TDC was still working on its initial strategy. SDC has also taken longer in the past to introduce WCR initiatives and, for example, it withdrew from the DCCRP for a considerable time but in early 2000, it rejoined the DCCRP and bolstered its WCR strategy by implementing a number of new good relations initiatives and devoting more time and financial resources to this activity.

Of the three councils, the empirical research suggests that GDC and SDC are more responsive to and supportive of the WCR agenda. They were quicker to react to change and generally, interviewees believed them committed to the good relations ethos. Research participants, however, believed TDC to be reactive and less convinced by good relations than the other case studies.

10.3.3 Have the councils achieved their intended WCR objectives?

The study produced mixed results on this question. First, respondents felt that relationships were good between Protestants and Catholics in the councils. They often referred to examples where they had established cohesive cross-community relationships with colleagues. Second, a majority of the research participants argued that when WCR problems arise, they are normally resolved informally without the need to refer to official policy. Interviewees regarded the positive examples of WCR as evidence that council environments are good and harmonious workplaces. Third, employees and managers were invariably cautious about engaging in behaviour that others could perceive as politically contentious. The empirical research suggests that WCR issues are, as one interviewee stated, often 'put in the "too difficult" tray' meaning that problematic issues remain unaddressed.

The Cynical Historicists were critical of councils' attempts to change perceptions through good relations initiatives. The managers or CEOs interviewed also explained that WCR problems remain despite new policy initiatives. For example, the Enthusiast CEO at GDC commented that although the council has implemented various WCR strategies to make improvements, 'we're not making huge claims for this'. Although interviewees highlighted short-term achievements and while the Enthusiasts retained a belief that long-term success was attainable, they were usually unconvinced that WCR policy would reconcile differences any time soon.

10.3.4 What effects do good cross-community relationships at work have on reconciliation beyond the workplace?

The findings reveal varied views on whether differences can be reconciled at work. Enthusiasts, some Relativists and Optimist Historicists found good relations training events and participation in GRFs positive experiences from which they could develop a better understanding of others. Furthermore, this could have some positive effects outside work. Others, however, regarded it unrealistic that WCR initiatives could change underlying attitudes. They argued that workplace reconciliation initiatives were limited in what they could achieve because of segregation in wider society and ideological differences between Protestants and Catholics. Cynical Historicists argued that WCR policies could not reconcile differences at a local level and, therefore, saw no prospect of significant improvement in wider society. Indeed, it was because of the problems in wider society that culture change in the workplace would remain unrealised. Pragmatists also felt that fundamental change was unlikely but this was because councils did not sufficiently support WCR policy.

The case study councils have made some improvements to WCR and have established some of the conditions of possibility for longer-term change. However, it remains to be seen whether these changes will lead to any durable transformation in relationships between Catholics and Protestants.

10.3.5 To what extent is WCR policy responsible for constructive relationships?

Most interviewees were cognisant of the fact that NWE policies were in operation and understood that the policy prevented them from wearing contentious insignia. They were also

217

aware that NWE policies prohibited talk about community relations issues. A majority of interviewees were also alert to councils' good relations strategies and understood that these initiatives included a commitment to enhance relationships between Catholics and Protestants. It can be concluded from these findings that councils had successfully communicated the principles of both policies to their employees and managers. Moreover, the vast majority of interviewees were supportive of initiatives that promoted relationship building and mutual understanding.

The research findings highlighted confusion as to why councils banned some emblems from the workplace and not others. This issue emerged frequently during interviews with GDC staff who questioned the council's decision to include GAA symbols among the prohibited items. They felt aggrieved that while the council considers these things problematic, some of their colleagues wore Northern Ireland football shirts and poppies to work, which they viewed as contentious. The research findings show that there were a number of barriers to good relations policy implementation.

Although there was a high level of awareness that political neutrality was an important principle for their employers and that good relations was about mutuality and openness, interviewees described a variety of gaps and weaknesses in policy. The evidence suggests that although constructive relationships exist in most cases, this is not necessarily because of effective WCR policy.

10.3.6 What are the gaps in and barriers to WCR policy?

Although there is a high degree of awareness of the principles of NWE and good relations policies, there is confusion in relation to the precise expectations of each policy. In addition, some interviewees felt official policy hinders informal relationship building in the work environment. This was particularly true for NWE policies when, for example, managers warned employees not to discuss or 'banter' about politically sensitive subjects, which interviewees often found frustrating. There were also reports of employees using ambiguity in NWE policies to make what CROs and GROs believed were frivolous complaints regarding community relations matters.

A further concern for interviewees was that some District Councils do not take WCR initiatives seriously enough. The CRO at Council G complained that colleagues regarded this work as 'tea party work' while a GRO at SDC made a similar point: 'it's seen as 'fluffy' tree hugging [...] type stuff'. This highlights another finding from the empirical research. Managers and councillors could, by their actions, enhance or weaken WCR policies. Although the managers interviewed were positive about WCR policy, others suggested that they are sometimes unwilling to enforce policy and it is inconsistently applied when they do. This resulted in some disillusionment with WCR initiatives. Councillors were criticised more than any other group because their public pronouncements often contradicted the principles of neutrality and good relations. A recurring theme in the interviews was that councillors should show 'civic leadership' on community relations issues.

The research outlined limitations in councils' WCR training provision. The vast majority of those interviewed had received initial awareness training on WCR policy, although the participation levels in good relations training after their initial induction was much lower. *Management Development Programmes* in all three councils included basic policy awareness training, but there was no provision on enhancing cross-community understanding. Interviewees highlighted weaknesses in training strategies as one reason for the gaps in policy implementation. When they attended cross-community understanding training, this often increased mutual understanding between Protestant and Catholic participants, but if unsuccessful, it undermined long-term confidence in WCR initiatives.

A majority of interviewees indicated a preference for more cross-community contact at work. They believed interacting with those from different community backgrounds helps them understand better their traditions, culture and politics. Nevertheless, there were occasions when increased contact had negative effects. This occurred, for example, during an IT training event where an interviewee from TDC was resentful that Catholic employees used the time to make allegations of discrimination. In another case at TDC, an interviewee criticised official good relations training for unnecessarily bringing contentious issues to the surface.

There were a number of gaps in, and barriers to, policy initiatives. They suffered from systemic problems in their design and implementation that led to confusion, incompatibility

with informal relationship building, counterproductive perceptions among some councillors and managers, and negative experiences of WCR events.

10.3.7 What role does ethno-national identity play in how participants perceive and respond to WCR?

A high proportion of those interviewed identified community differences as an influential factor in how employees received WCR initiatives. They argued that despite NWE policies, ethno-national identities continue to inform perceptions and behaviours. The findings highlighted a number of tacit norms used to explain differences in Protestant and Catholic attitudes toward WCR. The tacit norms for Catholics were collectivism, resistance and confidence that emerged from a history of being the underdog, engaging in rebellion and fighting for equality. The tacit norms for Protestants – individualism, acquiescence and protectionism – developed from an historic siege mentality, protectionism and defence of the union.

For the interviewees making these arguments, Catholic employees and managers are more 'vocal' in the workplace and there is a 'wee touch of rebellion' (Trade Union Official, GMB) in their behaviour. They are also more positive about WCR initiatives because they represent a welcome opportunity for further change. Interviewees referred to Catholic tacit norms to explain why the majority nationalist GDC was deemed proactive in its approach and why it adopted elements of good WCR practice. There was a suggestion that Protestants, on the other hand, avoided and resisted WCR initiatives because of a concern that WCR initiatives would detrimentally affect them.

Identity differences are influential in how organisational members' view WCR initiatives. Some participants believed Catholics were more positive about good relations while Protestants were concerned that these initiatives could have a detrimental effect on them.

10.3.8 What does the empirical research tell us about the prevalence of these tacit norms and to what extent do they explain participants' responses to WCR?

Some interviewees argued that tacit ethno-national norms inform perceptions of WCR issues and initiatives. A belief that they fully explain how and why employees, managers and

councillors resist or support WCR strategy was not widely held. Protestant interviewees were not always cynical about WCR initiatives and nor was it true that Catholics were always in favour of them. My analysis of the empirical findings identified six typologies of response: Enthusiast, Pragmatist, Relativist, Optimistic Historicist, Cynical Historicist, and Humorist. Employees from both communities were among all six types. The typology demonstrates how participants' responses to WCR initiatives and community differences are much more complex than the tacit norms would suggest (see section 10.5).

10.3.9 How do employees informally manage WCR issues when they arise?

The empirical research highlights how informal strategies for managing WCR were particularly important given the gaps in policy implementation. The informal strategies were avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour. There were five main reasons why employees adopted an avoidance strategy. First, they were reluctant to confront WCR issues when unclear about the level of council support for policy initiatives. Second, there was concern that sharing views, as encouraged by good relations initiatives, could lead to further problems. For example, Cleansing Technicians at one of SDC's Cleansing Depots argued that managers were fearful of addressing WCR problems should this 'open a can of worms'. Others were apprehensive about discussing WCR matters in case this led to disciplinary proceedings against them. Third, an element of 'conflict fatigue' meant that some preferred to avoid WCR issues because they were 'sick' of them. Fourth, there were strong friendships between some Protestants and Catholics who worried that expressing political opinions might threaten their relationships. Consequently, avoidance helped them maintain a 'polite wall' or 'protective shield'. Fifth, WCR avoidance was linked to protectionism in the Protestant community who, it was argued, were anxious that WCR represented a threat to their identity and culture.

Resistance was another informal WCR strategy. Research participants gave some similar reasons for WCR resistance as they did for avoidance. They argued, for example, that resistance occurred when managers were confused about how best to deal with WCR issues or when good relations initiatives appeared critical of their norms and values. At TDC, participants left a training event when asked to reflect critically on their attitudes. Some respondents at GDC refused to accept the council's decision to prohibit talk about GAA

sports. There was also resistance to attempts to mainstream WCR policy when employees and managers felt responsibility for it should lie elsewhere.

When frustrated with how WCR policy restricted their actions at work or when community tensions had built up, employees often used humour to relieve the pressure. Friendly banter helped them develop rapport and maintain strong bonds with colleagues. It allowed employees to discuss contentious subjects that they would otherwise suppress. All grades of employee and manager accepted that humour was a positive aspect of organisational life, although most also felt that it could be problematic if inappropriately used or misunderstood.

10.4 Comparability with Existing Research on WCR

This section identifies how the findings compare to Dickson and Hargie's work. The early chapters outlined the main arguments presented in the community relations literature explaining that Dickson and Hargie have produced the only academic studies to examine WCR policy implementation. There are nine hypotheses presented in Dickson and Hargie's work that mirror my research findings in the case study councils. First, my study concurs that people generally maintain cohesive relationships at work and it demonstrates that the workplace can be a constructive social context for relationship building (Dickson and Hargie, 1999; Dickson *et al*, 2002; Hargie *et al*, 2003). Workplaces provide opportunities for Protestant and Catholic employees to establish good relationships and they have 'the *potential* to act as a vehicle for helping to move forward the process of peace and reconciliation' (Dickson *et al*, 2009: p49; emphasis added). It was clear from my findings that interviewees shared this view.

Second, they found, and again in keeping with my research, that although working relationships are invariably cohesive, community differences sometimes negatively affect the work environment with ongoing reports of sectarianism and intimidation (Dickson *et al*, 2002). Furthermore, increased political tensions put a strain on relationships suggesting that they are often quite fragile. The Community Development Manager at TDC commented for instance when describing her friendship with a colleague: 'in some ways it's an artificial type of friendship – scrape the veneer and you'll go somewhere you don't want to'. Third, in their first scoping study, Dickson and Hargie (1999) identified weaknesses in policy and practice that reduced satisfaction levels with WCR policy. Despite the introduction of a number of

new local and national policies since their initial study, gaps in policy and implementation were also apparent, in my case study councils. There was lack of training in some areas, negative perceptions of WCR activity, contradictory messages from managers and councillors, management reluctance to admit to weaknesses, and confusion about how councils should implement policy. Employees and managers were often unsure about how and when to apply WCR policy. In addition, there was a perceived contradiction in NWE and good relations initiatives because the former advocates political neutrality while the latter promotes openness and mutuality.

Fourth, many of Dickson *et al*'s, (2008a; 2009) participants avoided publically disclosing views on community differences – this also corresponds with my findings. One reason for this is that drawing attention to identity differences may lead to further problems, which are difficult to manage (Hargie *et al*, 2003). As the CEO at GDC commented, by introducing good relations initiatives the council 'probably opened a Pandora's Box'. There was also a degree of 'conflict fatigue' and widespread desire to protect social relations with colleagues. For these reasons, my research participants often concluded that WCR issues were 'easier glossed over' (Catholic Female Grounds Maintenance Team Leader, GDC). Fifth, poor management handling of 'subtleties' in working relationships undermines attempts to build a shared future (Dickson *et al*, 2008a; 2009). My empirical research highlighted instances where managers criticised employees for engaging in two-way banter about community relations issues. This led to counter criticism from employees who were dissatisfied with how managers interpreted and implemented WCR policy (see Section 9.4).

Sixth, some organisations are better prepared for implementing WCR initiatives (Dickson *et al*, 2002). My findings indicated a higher level of support at GDC and SDC for good relations initiatives than is the case at TDC. The CRO at TDC, for example, felt that good relations initiatives were necessary but that the council was not committed enough to these initiatives to ensure their success. The Head of Administration there regarded good relations as 'naive social engineering' while an Administrative Assistant reflected critically on her 'prejudices' before concluding that whatever happened they would not change. Some areas within councils were more likely to embrace a good relations ethos than were others. For example, the Cleansing Technicians interviewed at SDC were less certain than other groups that good relations initiatives would work. This was also true of some of the administrative staff at TDC. There was, however, support for good relations initiatives among other administrative

223

employees and manual-grade staff who argued that because relationships were already positive, more relationship building work could prove beneficial.

Seventh, participants in Dickson and Hargie's research strongly endorsed NWE because it has a 'calming effect' in the workplace (Dickson and Hargie, 1999; Dickson *et al*, 2008b, 2009). My respondents argued that attempting to foster a more open WCR climate could result in considerable WCR problems and, therefore, NWE should remain. They did, however, highlight weaknesses in NWE policy not least because judgements about what behaviours to prohibit were often subjective and inconsistent. Although councils could do more to clarify how and when to apply NWE policies, there were inherent problems in NWE. As the CRO at Council G commented, 'the norms are different for one side or the other' and there is a danger that some councils will not question these norms when NWE policies are in place.

Eighth, a theme running through many of Dickson and Hargie's studies is that informal methods of communication regarding WCR issues pervade the workplace. They identified informal approaches such as strategic avoidance (Dickson *et al*, 2002; 2008a; 2009; Hargie and Dickson, 2005; Hargie *et al*, 2003), cross-community contact outside work (Dickson *et al*, 2008a; 2009) and humour/banter (Dickson an Hargie, 1999; Dickson *et al*, 2008a; 2009). Whilst the empirical research for the thesis touched on all these issues, strategic avoidance, humour and another, resistance, were the most prevalent. The previous section reiterated the reasons why employees and managers avoided WCR issues, and they are similar to those highlighted in Dickson and Hargie's research. On the subject of humour/banter, my findings revealed that humour could be a constructive response to WCR issues. Dickson and Hargie's work does not explicitly address resistance to WCR, but my empirical research indicated that participants overtly resisted WCR policies when, for example, they disagreed with their purpose, disliked how councils interpreted them or felt that discussions about community differences are inappropriate in the workplace.

Ninth, another recurring theme in Dickson and Hargie's research is the extent to which a work-based 'contact model' is beneficial for reconciling community differences. My findings on this issue are tentative but they suggest that increased contact with the out-group can be worthwhile for employees. Those who participated in good relations training and GRFs often found them beneficial for enhancing their understanding of the other community. They

224

provided an opportunity for participants to share their views on WCR issues and to listen to others explain their perspectives. For some employees, formal contact initiatives such as GRFs provide one of the few opportunities for inter-group contact. Although GRFs can be difficult to manage effectively, as Dickson *et al* (2009; citing Morrow) point out, increased contact of this kind would help councils achieve their good relations aims, especially when there are high levels of segregation outside work.

The findings highlighted some of the conditions necessary for effective contact initiatives. First, participants have to be open to different viewpoints and willing to reflect on their own perspectives. Second, employers need to be sensitive to local circumstances and the audience present because misjudged initiatives can lead to longer-term problems by weakening employee confidence in WCR. This can be particularly damaging because, as the research demonstrates, the opportunities to attend formal contact events are limited for most employees while some workplaces remain highly segregated. At SDC, where there is a mixed workforce, most employees have at least the opportunity for informal contact with the out-group at work. However, this is not the case at TDC and GDC where many employees work with others from the same community. Even at SDC, some groups, such as the Cleansing Technicians, often worked in segregated 'Orange' and 'Green' depots.

10.5 Informal Responses to Change

Although the empirical findings reinforce many of the conclusions from Dickson and Hargie's work, my research considered more fully how and why employees embrace or resist WCR. Their analysis of 'banter', while mapping out its role in informal communication, did not consider in any great depth why it helps maintain social cohesion or how it is used to introduce contentious subjects (Bradney, 1957; Collinson, 1992; Gabriel, 2000; Grugulis, 2002). In this section, I analyse the significance of resistance and humour as organisational 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton, 1997). In so doing, I draw from debates in the organisation studies literature that have considered how resistance and humour are employee responses to identity concerns. I also analyse further the role of ethno-national identity and explain that while this is influential in how employees respond to WCR, it is 'not as pervasive as might be imagined' (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006: p171).

Bloomer and Weinreich (2004) and Muldoon *et al* (2007) note that the complex social context in which identity exists should be incorporated into research on identity, but it has often been marginalised or ignored in earlier SIT studies. This section addresses this issue by taking account of the social/political context when explaining employee perceptions of WCR. The analysis explores informal responses to WCR as reactions to *workplace* change based on 'situated rationality' whereby research participants' interpret WCR policy 'through their understanding of the world, their interpretations of other people and those things that populate their world' (Clegg *et al*, 2008: p33). The change implied by WCR policy is also a potential threat to 'identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126).

10.5.1 Informal Responses to Change

Some of the responses to WCR identified in the empirical findings arose from a formal/informal culture gap (Oilila, 1995: cited in Fulop and Linstead, 1999) that created tensions for employees and managers who responded in three ways: avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour. These responses are 'survival strategies' for employees when managing community differences and gaps in WCR policy implementation when they have to be resourceful and creative in how they respond (Noon and Blyton, 1997: p140). Resistance and avoidance are analysed together because interviewees gave similar reasons for adopting each approach and because avoidance, or emotional distancing, is a form of resistance.

10.5.1.1 Resistance

The analysis shows how resistance to WCR was a response to a complex mix of ethno-national identity, personal experiences and how councils implemented WCR policy. The empirical research highlighted a number of examples of overt resistance. Participants left a good relations training event, withdrew from a council GRF, continued discussing at work their participation in politically sensitive events outside work, and demanded a colleague re-erect an unofficial Union Flag on a council building in breach of NWE policy. There were also examples of indirect resistance. For example, some employees avoided good relations events because they had become accustomed with NWE policies and did not want to introduce sensitive issues in the workplace. The findings show that resistance to WCR in the case study councils was a response to five barriers (Adams, 1987: cited in Linstead *et al*, 2004): emotional, cultural, cognitive, perceptual and environmental. The findings also

revealed four types of hostile resistance (Markus, 1983; cited in Rollinson *et al*, 1998): people-focused, system-focused, organisation-focused and politics-focused.

First, **emotional** blocks occurred when interviewees perceived WCR policy a threat to their occupational or community identity. There was a degree of fear and anxiety about what WCR policy would mean for each group. This was the case when employees at TDC walked out of a good relations training event because it implied they needed to change their attitudes toward community relations. Employees were also concerned about speaking publically about politically sensitive issues when they felt such issues to be inappropriate in the workplace. In a small number of cases, interviewees feared that communicating views on political subjects would lead to retribution from others.

Second, there were **cultural** blocks to WCR. For example, at TDC there was an accepted way of doing things that meant, as an organisation, it was less willing to embrace change than the other case studies. This was not communicated in any official policy and nor was it publically stated, but it emerged from the history of the council and was reflected in the norms and behaviours of employees, managers and councillors. Cultural barriers were apparent within different areas of the other case study councils too. A history of conflict at the SDC Cleansing Depot continued to inform Cleansing Technicians' attitudes toward reconciliation initiatives. Whilst they felt that local relationships between Protestants and Catholics were mostly positive, they were unconvinced that the depot culture was compatible with good relations. The existing culture in some administrative environments meant that employees put up a 'polite wall' or 'protective shield' in ways not experienced in other environments. In the HR office at SDC for example, many of the HR Officers and Assistants followed the Head of HR's example by leaving at home any politically sensitive emblems (often including the poppy) and avoiding WCR discussions. Cultural blocks such as those described above are problematic for good relations policy implementation because they make it difficult to promote openness and mutuality among employees.

Third, because of a lack of detail on and confusion about how councils should implement it, there were **cognitive** blocks to WCR policy implementation. As Graham and Nash (2006: p260) indicated, the Shared Future framework suffers from 'definitional illusiveness' and, as the empirical research for the thesis has shown, this applies to WCR policies. One consequence of this is that policy implementation appeared inconsistent and contradictory.

Another is that some interviewees accused managers of decision-making bias when the council banned the emblems important to one community but not the others. Employees themselves were often unsure of acceptable behaviours leading them to avoid dealing with community relations issues.

Previous problematic experiences led to **perceptual** blocks for some. This was particularly the case where interviewees had negative experiences of cross-community contact in the past. For example, the interviewee from TDC who attended an IT training event where other participants discussed allegations of discrimination felt perturbed that they had raised such issues. Consequently, she was pessimistic about the prospects of reconciliation. In another instance, an interviewee from GDC was sceptical about the possibility of long-term reconciliation because of how the council managed a community relations consultation process. Respondents to the consultation expressed negative views about some aspects of the councils WCR policies, but it appeared there was no follow-up action from senior management. Hence, some employees concluded that GDC was not as committed to good relations as it claimed.

The above point relates to a final reason for organisational inertia, **environmental** blocks. At all three case studies, participants felt more could be done to remove environmental barriers. At SDC, the Cleansing Technicians highlighted management inaction as the reason why their GRF disbanded. There were other blocks at SDC such as the council's 'Orange' and 'Green' squads who spent limited time at work with the out-group. Although intended to protect employees from the risk of attack, this practice means squad members have less opportunity to build relationships with colleagues. As the early 'contact model' studies suggest, contact in 'favourable' conditions can improve inter-group relationships (cf. Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969), but this opportunity is denied to squad members at SDC. Local paramilitary organisations sometimes presented an external environmental barrier to WCR. The Cleansing Technicians at SDC described how they had received threats from one such group. This parallels Shirlow and McGovern's (1996: p395) research that showed how in East Belfast paramilitary organisations targeted employees from the other community 'as a signal which states "stay out of our community and don't take our jobs"'. The environmental barriers resulted in inertia as employees and managers often decided to 'leave well enough alone' or felt dispirited by a perceived lack of support for good relations initiatives.

The five reasons for inertia discussed above affected how interviewees responded to WCR initiatives. There was also a degree of hostile resistance to WCR issues and initiatives, which are analysed next using a four-type model of organisational resistance (Rollinson *et al*, 1998). There was **people-focused** resistance arising from contrasting attitudes and beliefs among employees and managers. The reactions to people-focused resistance include denial and defensiveness (Linstead *et al*, 2004 p448). In the District Councils, this kind of resistance occurred when employees were concerned about how WCR policy would impact upon them. This was the case for some Protestant employees fearful that good relations policy could lead to a loss of identity. The CEO of Council G suggested that there is resistance to WCR initiatives because it is a threat to 'our Britishness and our heritage'. As the findings demonstrated, interviewees linked defensiveness to the Protestant community's concerns that good relations initiatives signalled detrimental change. Catholic respondents also resisted WCR policy when, for example, councils banned GAA emblems and talk about GAA sports.

System-focused resistance was a response to WCR policy where, because of gaps and weaknesses, and a lack of training, employees and managers were unsure of how to adapt to new initiatives. Hence, one reason for resistance to good relations, and a keenness to retain NWEs, is that councils inadequately introduced and explained good relations policies. Further, the legislation and policy documentation issued by government and ECNI and NICRC was often criticised for not specifying accurately enough how councils should implement effective WCR initiatives that would gain widespread support among the workforce.

Organisation-focused resistance occurred when aspects of the District Councils' structures and cultures were incompatible with good relations. There was a feeling that although some councils were committed to good relations, existing structures and cultures did not lend themselves well to the mainstreaming intent of good relations. For example, the CRO at TDC argued that because there was a traditional management culture, it was difficult to introduce new policies. The CRO at Council E noted that the Finance department within her council would resist WCR because members 'see it as an internal service'. The Grounds Maintenance staff also argued that the isolating nature of their job limits their involvement in WCR initiatives leaving them 'slightly disconnected from the rest of the organisation'. These employees found it hard to interact with other employees and made left some feeling excluded from WCR processes.

Another form of resistance is **politics-focused**, which can have an internal and external dimension. Internal politics-focused resistance emerges when organisational members seek to protect their position and engage in political games to prevent change. The CRO at Council G suggested that because they could see no career gains in WCR activity, managers were reluctant to become involved in it. This was also an issue for councillors who, in protecting their votes, were cautious about committing to good relations. External politics-focused resistance arises because political systems and processes affect organisations' responses to change. As stated earlier in the thesis, good relations policies are linked to the GFA, which some regard as a threat to their community identity (MacGinty and Wilford, 2002; Hughes and Donnelly, 2004; Graham and Nash, 2006; MacGinty and du Toit, 2007). The empirical research identified how identity politics impacted on the councils and on how people respond to WCR change. They commented that Protestants are protectionist and defensive while Catholics are confident and open to change. Thus, ethno-national differences led to politics-focused resistance to WCR.

The overt resistance to WCR identified in the empirical research shows that some employees and managers openly criticise, are cynical about (Gabriel, 2005; Rhodes *et al*, 2007) and reject, official policy when they disagree with it. We could interpret this as irrational behaviour by those who do not understand policy or who will not change whatever WCR initiatives are in operation. Yet, problems often emerged because of weaknesses in policy design and implementation rather than an innate desire to usurp good relations initiatives. The empirical research suggests that resistance is a measured response because of concerns that change may undermine existing relationships and positions (Fineman, 2003). As noted by Knights (1990; cited in Clegg, 2008: p267), resistance in organisations is often a subjective reaction when members are worried about what the change will mean for them. The resistance revealed in the research findings showed that where there is a lack of commitment to WCR policy and concerns about discussing community differences, inertia and hostility can result. The nature of council organisation also seems to have had some effect on how people responded to WCR initiatives. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) argue, the existing culture (formal and informal) and history of any organisation defines acceptable behaviour for employees.

10.5.1.2 Pragmatic Humour

While respondents often stated, initially, that they avoided WCR issues (see also Dickson *et al*, 2008a), and although organisational members 'keep their mouths shut a lot of the time' (Gabriel, 2000: p189) in public, the empirical research uncovered much evidence of political humour. As noted by Noon and Blyton (1997), humour is another of the organisational 'survival strategies' that, as Watson (1994: p188) observed, helps employees 'to confront and come to terms with the threats and dangers of the world around [them]'. Humour can have negative effects in the workplace and can be used to harass and intimidate (see Hargie *et al*, 2006 and Dickson *et al*, 2008a). It seems reasonable to presume this was also true of the case study councils, but the empirical research did not reveal any evidence of this. Nevertheless, there was awareness that humour is subjectively experienced and that colleagues may misconstrue the point of it (Collinson, 2002) or, as one of my interviewees commented: 'there's people who don't know what the craic is' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 4, SDC). However, there was a strong indication that employees often used workplace humour constructively as a form of informal regulation (Noon and Blyton, 1997) of identity differences.

The organisation studies literature demonstrates that humour is widespread in the workplace and serves a number of purposes. First, it helps maintain social group cohesion by gelling relationships and contributing to group identity (Bradney, 1957; Noon and Blyton, 1997; Collinson, 1988). Second, humour reduces boredom at work and makes it easier to 'get the day in' (Bradney,1957; Collinson, 1988; Roy, 1958). Third, when it relieves frustrations with formal organisational constraints, humour is a welcome aspect of organisational life (Fineman, 2003). Fourth, organisational members can use humour to introduce contentious issues in a safer way than would be possible during serious discussions (Gabriel, 2000; Grugulis, 2002). The findings indicated that respondents used political humour at work for all of these reasons, but the analysis concentrates on how humour helps social group cohesion, relieves frustrations with formal policy, and offers an 'escape route' when contentious issues emerge.

There are similarities between the thesis findings and Bradney's (1957) study where humour in a retail organisation helped maintain cohesive relationships by reducing antagonism, 'regulating' interpersonal relationships and relieving tensions. The empirical research

indicated how at the SDC Cleansing Depot humour helped re-build relationships when tensions increased and paramilitary groups threatened employees. In some cases, humour removed social barriers between employees and, according to a line manager at SDC, this helped employee relations in his IT department. He argued that humour 'oils the wheels' and means 'the channels of communication are kept open'. It had another positive effect when employees who were Orange Order members joined in reciprocal political humour. The IT Manager commented that until this time, many employees held pejorative views of their Orange Order colleagues but the humour changed perceptions because there was a degree of 'give and take'.

The finding that humour reduces the stifling effects of NWE policy reflects Fineman's (2003) argument that it is a way of dealing with the constraints of formal organisational policy. Indeed, Noon and Blyton (1997: p157) argue that 'jokes provide an outlet for the expression of frustration and discontent which might otherwise build up unchecked'. A Trade Union Official from SIPTU felt that workplace humour was in this way essential because it gives 'people a bit of release'. The CROs and GROs at GDC explained how lampooning some colleagues at a GRF by saying, 'we give you the right to march' as they crossed the meeting room floor was an effective way to lighten the atmosphere. Other examples of political humour demonstrate similar effects. This was the case when employees at SDC emailed one another following a bank robbery with electronic images of mocked-up banknotes with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuiness on them; or, when a member of the Grounds Maintenance Team placed a Sinn Fein poster on the back of a colleague's vehicle. Some respondents criticised council NWE policies for making political subjects off-limits as in the workplace 'the craic isn't there the way it used to be'. Another interviewee argued that if NWE were to be rigidly enforced, the work environment 'would be terrible'. He further contended:

> 'If you're going to get to the point where you have to continually watch what you say and who you say it to, then you might as well be living in communist Russia or part of animal farm.' (Protestant Male Landfill Monitoring Assistant, SDC)

The thesis has already shown how physical and emotional violence between Catholics and Protestants continues to affect work environments. There were reports of violence and threats of violence in the District Councils that increased tensions and put pressure on relationships. In these circumstances, humour enabled employees and managers to confront difficult

subjects that they might otherwise have suppressed. In a context where the potential to ignite ethno-national tensions remains high, humour provides an amnesty or escape route to the teller (Gabriel, 2000) who, if the point was made seriously, could be the subject of a backlash. In this way, 'humour is used to conceal, defuse or distance [people] from negative emotions' (Grugulis, 2002: p400). Much of the humour previously discussed also serves this purpose. A Protestant GMB Trade Union Official distanced himself from potential negativity by announcing 'I must be the only Prod in the village' when working in Catholic organisations. There was also an element of this when the Cleansing Technicians from SDC joked with Orange Order colleagues during 12th July celebrations. Banter enabled participants to address problematic issues and it encouraged further conversation between them:

> 'You would get the religious stuff among the boys that have known each other for years. I'd see one of our boys on the 12th [of July] marches when I'm working. I'd shout over at him: 'go on you boy you' and give him the thumbs up. Then he'd come over to me with his mates and all. They'd all start slagging back – that's all right.' (Catholic Male Cleansing Technician 5, SDC)

In their research on banter, Dickson *et al* (2008a; 2009) concluded that participants usually avoided controversial topics when engaged in humour. The empirical research for the thesis also revealed that some employees avoided politically sensitive humour, but among trusted colleagues, it was an important means of communication and a way of maintaining social bonds. This kind of humour is particularly beneficial in circumstances where there is limited opportunity for cross-community contact and where formal policy restricts conversation topics. As Gabriel (2000) and Grugulis (2002) argued, humour is a mechanism for introducing sensitive subjects in ways that allow the teller to evade criticism. Managers sometimes misunderstood and/or mishandled community relations humour, which made it more difficult for Catholic and Protestant employees to interact with one another. When the opportunity was denied them, employees argued that something was lost from their relationships. Hence, the findings concur with another of Dickson *et al's* (2008a) findings that poor management handling of what they refer to as 'subtleties', can undermine relationship building.

10.6 Identity and WCR

This section of the chapter further explains the role of identity in how people perceived and responded to WCR. It argues that the responses to WCR are reactions to change in a complex social setting wherein employees and managers interpret identity and change in subjective ways. Resistance, avoidance and humour are forms of identity work (Goffman, 1959; Cohen and Taylor, 1978; Watson, 2007) that protect aspects of identity and enable employees and managers to cope with the tensions and contradictions in policy, and with their own concerns and fears. I refer again to the typology of responses to demonstrate how three additional factors informed interviewees' responses: occupational identity, personal experience of community relations, and councils' implementation of WCR policy. This shows that responses to WCR are not as dependent on the historic enmity as might be presumed. The section summarises four key arguments from the thesis on the role of identity and WCR:

a. WCR policies threaten community identities,

b. identity differences continue to affect life in NI,

c. most SIT studies have treated ethno-national identity as a relatively stable identity, and,

d. the thesis research shows that ethno-identity is subjectively experienced.

10.6.1 WCR - Policies that Threaten Community Identities

Workplace Community Relations policies are strategies for modifying how people relate to one another at work and, therefore, they are attempts to change identities. This parallels some Unionist politicians' argument that the GFA would soften attitudes toward a united Ireland (Graham and Nash, 2006). In addition, people at a local level subjectively interpret policy initiatives and ask whether their community will benefit or lose out as a result (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). Many of the informal responses to WCR analysed in the previous section were based on concerns that WCR policy is a threat to employees' and managers' self-identities. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) argued, employees bring to work expectations and identities that, when they are not satisfied, lead them to 'misbehave'. Thus, respondents resisted and engaged in pragmatic humour in relation to WCR when concerned about whether it would threaten or enhance their identities.

10.6.2 Identity Differences Continue to Affect NI Workplace

Identity differences impact on the workplace in various ways. There are continuing reports of sectarianism (Jarman, 2004, 2005), paramilitary violence (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996), and other 'chill factors' (Teague, 1997; Shirlow; 2006) preventing people from applying for jobs across the community divides and ensuring relatively high levels of segregation between and within organisations (Shirlow, 2006). The empirical research explained how tacit ethno-national norms informed some respondents' views on WCR and explained whether employees support or reject policy. Chapter Two described the reasons why identity differences continue to generate divisions between Protestants and Catholics. There are contrasting religious, political, and cultural ideological 'dimensions of difference' (Ruane and Todd, 1996) that inform how people perceive and respond to changes in society. Catholics have experienced material improvements and are an increasingly confident community prepared to fight for their rights following a history of fighting for equality (McGovern, 2004). Some Protestants on the other hand remain concerned that about policy changes that they perceive may increase the Republic of Ireland's political, cultural and economic influence and, subsequently, are defensive and protectionist (Cairns, 2000; Douglas and Shirlow, 1998; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). These are the reasons given as to why community differences lead to conflict despite the 'peace process' and the GFA, and for introducing the legal and policy frameworks described earlier in the thesis.

10.6.3 SIT studies have treated ethno-national identity as a relatively stable identity

A number of social identity studies have concluded that Catholic and Protestant identities are socially constructed, relatively stable, ascribed (Jenkins, 1996) and 'transgenerational' (Muldoon *et al*, 2007) identities that are difficult to change (Burgess *et al*, 2007). MacGinty and du Toit (2007) suggest that community relations policy has reinforced these ethno-national identities (see also Graham and Nash, 2006; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). The social identity literature suggests, however, that the Catholic community has become increasingly confident because of improved social mobility and increased political representation, but Protestants have experienced increased 'fragmentation and insecurity' (MacGinty and du Toit, 2007: p9).

10.6.4 Ethno-identity is Significant but Subjectively Experienced

The tacit norms show that ethno-national identity is influential over how participants perceive and respond to WCR initiatives. This was similar to MacGinty and du Toit's (2007) finding that ethno-national identity mediates people's perceptions of community relations initiatives. The interviewees referred to tacit norms when describing why people embraced or rejected WCR policy with Catholics perceived more open to change and Protestants defensive about and fearful of what change will mean for them. However, if this were a determining feature of Protestants' responses, we could anticipate that more Protestants than Catholics would be Cynical Historicists pessimistic about the possibility of long-term change, but this was not the case. The findings and typology demonstrated that respondents from both communities presented as each type and it indicated other influential factors in people's responses to WCR:

(i)   occupational identity,

(ii)   previous experience of community relations issues, and

(iii)   how councils implemented WCR policy.

First, occupational identity influenced how interviewees responded to WCR. This was particularly evident for Enthusiast managers, CROs, and GROs responsible for implementing good relations initiatives. None of the managers interviewed were Humorists perhaps reflecting a felt need to maintain a more serious, 'professional' persona at work. There were examples of managers engaging in humour, but this was not their overriding response to WCR. The Head of HR at SDC emphasised the need to remain impartial when explaining why he would not wear a poppy at work, but would do so in his local community. While mindful of ethno-national differences between employees, trade union officials were generally positive that Protestants and Catholics would work well together in most circumstances. They argued that solidarity and collectivism could reconcile differences suggesting that their trade unionist identity was important in how they perceived community relations. Indeed, of the trade unionists interviewed, only one identified as a Cynical Historicist. Even then, he argued that although there are differences between Catholics and Protestants in terms of how they respond to WCR, and that this makes reconciliation unlikely, as a Protestant trade unionist, he would 'challenge anybody' at work.

Second, people's experiences of community relations issues informed their responses. The Cleansing Technicians at SDC, for example, explained that their lack of enthusiasm for WCR was due to how managers responded to issues raised by a GRF. At TDC, the CRO referred to the council's past ambivalence toward community relations when describing her views on whether WCR policy could be successful. Relativists often cited personal experiences where colleagues had built harmonious cross-community relationships. The Relativist Personnel Manager at TDC reflected on the 'buzz' she got from a good relations event where community differences were discussed. In another example, the Leisure Centre Duty Manager at GDC found it encouraging that a Catholic and Protestant colleague covered one another's' shifts to accommodate their respective sports activities. The CROs and GROs were more positive about GRFs and other cross-community contact initiatives because of their experiences implementing them.

Third, how councils approached WCR policy implementation was influential. When they failed to provide adequate training opportunities or appeared slow to react to change, research participants were pessimistic about the chances of success. For Pragmatist managers, if councils appeared unenthusiastic about WCR policy they would be non-committal believing there to be few career gains from their involvement. Indeed, most Pragmatists' responses to WCR policies depended on council support for them. Other types also reflected on the degree of support for WCR policy. The Relativist CRO at TDC alluded to the council's uncertain attitude to WCR, and particularly good relations, when explaining her cautious views on whether workplace initiatives would enhance relationships. While the councils' approach informed participants' responses to WCR, it was not so influential as to override personal experiences of community relations issues or the concerns that WCR might detrimentally affect respective communities. If that were the case, the interviewees at GDC would be fully behind WCR initiatives and more convinced that they would bring about long-term change.

In practice, it was a complex mix of ethno-national and occupational identity, personal experience, and councils' approach to implementation that informed how participants responded to WCR. These findings support Dickson et al's (2008a) argument that although ethno-national identity is important for understanding self-identity, it is not a 'monolithic single identity'. Whilst it informs participants' sense of self and how employees and managers respond to WCR policy, ethno-national identity is subjectively experienced. Occupational identity, personal experiences of community relations issues and councils'

implementation of WCR strategies also shape identities and perceptions of WCR. As the informal responses to WCR in the previous section show, the social/political context of the workplace is significant too.

Many of the responses to WCR were based on concerns that WCR policy could mean detrimental change to their identities. For example, the resistance highlighted in the findings was often a strategic response to the fear that change could negatively affect individuals and groups. Most change, as Fineman (2003: p126) contends, usually generates a degree of anxiety for organisational members as it represents a threat to employees' 'sense of identity, security and self-worth'. There was a strong indication in the findings that Protestant employees were for this reason fearful of the effects of WCR. They worried that good relations policies were a threat to their community identity and resisted it as a result. To reiterate an earlier point, this did not mean Protestants were entirely against change. The analysis of resistance also showed that it was a response, *inter alia*, to systemic, perceptual and environmental barriers. Further, Catholics were also concerned about the consequences of WCR and resisted aspects of policy when it appeared to undermine or problematise important aspects of their identities.

The pragmatic humour was commonly a way of managing identity as, for example, Humorists evaded contentious issues because they did not want to disclose too much about their self-identities. Other respondents used humour to avoid damaging their relationships with colleagues and, therefore, to informally regulate (Noon and Blyton, 1997) identity differences. When humour is used in these ways, it helps protect people by offering an escape route (Gabriel, 2000) should problems emerge. Employees can also use humour to introduce aspects of their identity they would usually keep hidden. For example, humour was used by a Catholic Cleansing Technician to poke fun at Orange Order colleagues, but this would not have been possible during serious discussions.

The organisation studies literature shows that the organisations we work for have some impact on our self-identity (Pullen *et al*, 2007) but that it is much less predictable and resistant to change management strategies than some theorists imply. Rhodes *et al* (2007), for example, argue that employees can resist even the most sophisticated management strategies by using impression management, cynicism and humour to psychologically distance themselves from the prescriptions of their role, while going through the "motions"' (Fineman,

2003: p38). This was evident from my empirical research as it showed how employees and managers cope with the tensions and contradictions in WCR policy. Many of the responses to WCR were forms of identity work (Goffman, 1959; Cohen and Taylor, 1978; Watson, 2007) that provide insights into the subjective nature of identity in the District Councils. For example, impression management as a form of 'distanced self-consciousness' (Clegg, 1994; cited in Clegg *et al*, 2008), enabled employees to appear to be taking organisational policies seriously when not particularly committed to them. When employees strategically avoid, overtly resist, and use humour concerning WCR issues and policies, they are engaging in identity work often involving *protection of the self*. Goffman (1959) showed how we engage in identity work in social contexts by continually differentiating between the front and back stages, idealising traits and behaviours for the situation and audience.

Identity work and impression management helps explain how participants handled the tensions between the expectations of WCR policy and their personal views on WCR issues. The Head of HR at SDC was a pertinent example of this as he thought carefully about how employees would perceive him before deciding not to wear a poppy at work. There was further evidence in the empirical research of how respondents often engaged in identity work and particularly impression management to cope with WCR policy, and the expectations of their occupational identity. Pragmatist employees impression-manage to disguise their reservations regarding the likelihood of long-term change. The Catholic Placement Student at SDC described how she used impression management to avoid appearing negative. She often gave her views in the third person arguing that 'it's easier [...] to mask opinion', which also 'depends on the person and how you think they are going to react'. This interviewee's explanation for 'masking' behaviour suggests that she engaged in 'performance', pragmatically presenting her 'self' to the audience present.

The analysis of identity and WCR has argued that research participants' ethno-national identity affects how they perceive and react to WCR issues and initiatives. Because of this and the gaps and weaknesses in policy, employees must manage cross-community relationships in a number of informal ways. They avoid, resist and engage in humour about contentious issues. This can also be analysed as a reaction to organisational change that threatens employees' and managers' self-identities. In managing the complexities and competing pressures on them, respondents were engaged in ongoing identity work that reveals how there is a subjective dimension to identity.

10.7 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the key arguments from the empirical findings to explain how and why interviewees responded to WCR issues and policies. Nine key research questions were addressed to show: how and why the councils implemented WCR initiatives; how policy affects relationships inside and outside the workplace; whether councils achieved their aims and objectives; why there are barriers to success; and how the influence of ethno-national identity reconciliation efforts. The analysis demonstrated that respondents in all three councils are positive about WCR initiatives, but that there are a number of barriers to reconciliation.

Some of the responses to WCR policies were reactions to organisational change that triggered a degree of fear and anxiety in employees and managers unsure about what the change would mean for them. There was inertia because of emotional, cultural, cognitive, perceptual and environmental blocks (Adams, 1987) to policy implementation while there were examples of more hostile resistance because of people-focused, system-focused, organisation-focused and politics-focused resistance (Rollinson *et al*, 1998). Pragmatic humour was another common response to WCR that helped employees and managers maintain and regulate cohesive relationships, to relieve some of their frustrations with official WCR policy, and to introduce contentious subjects in a relatively safe way. The resistance and humour highlighted in the empirical findings were read as 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton, 1997) for organisational members managing complex and sometimes contradictory demands of official WCR policy, community relations, personal experiences and aspects of occupational identity.

Ethno-national identity was integral to how respondents viewed and reacted to WCR policy. The empirical research identified tacit norms that interviewees referred to when explaining how and why there are differences in Protestants' and Catholics' attitudes toward WCR. The typology indicated that although ethno-national identities were important, they did not determine in themselves how people responded to WCR. It showed, therefore, that how Protestants and Catholics viewed WCR was more complex than the tacit norms suggested. Indeed, other aspects of identity such as occupational identity were also significant, as was previous experiences of community relations issues and the District Councils' approach to WCR.

The findings and analysis demonstrate that identity is a subjective, contextual process and that people in organisational environments engage in a variety of forms of identity work. While employees may be non-committal to WCR as a result of ethno-national differences and/or previous personal experiences, they often impression manage their responses, thus disguising their personal views and appearing enthusiastic about community relations policies. The organisation studies literature has demonstrated how employees find ways of coping with even the most sophisticated of change strategies by, for example, using impression management and humour to put psychological distance between themselves and the aims of organisational policies and practices (Fineman, 2003; Rhodes *et al*, 2007). The analysis argued that interviewees engaged in these behaviours not because they were cynical, although some were, but because of gaps in policy design and implementation, anxieties about how change would affect their identities, and to maintain positive working relationships.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

The key aims of the thesis were, firstly, to examine the purpose of WCR initiatives and, secondly, to determine if these initiatives had any discernible impact on the three case study District Councils. The first aim was addressed by examining why policy-makers argue that councils are beneficial settings for enhancing reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics. The thesis pointed out that community differences contributed to decades of conflict in NI and some of this spilled over into the workplace. Government introduced policy initiatives and legislation to reduce conflict and tackle the structural causes of inequality. By examining how, and to what extent, the councils adopted WCR initiatives and by considering whether they have been successful, the thesis demonstrated the effects of WCR policy on the case study councils.

This chapter explains what the thesis research has shown and how this contributes to our understanding and awareness of WCR policy implementation. The first section summarises key issues such as why conflict emerged and why the District Councils implemented WCR policies and initiatives. The second section provides a synopsis of the main thesis findings. Section three focuses on the key arguments from the analysis and what this tells us about the case study councils' implementation of WCR policy. The limitations of the study are presented in section four where I reflect on four issues: (i) the focus on District Councils, (ii) the concern with ethno-national identity, (iii) the representativeness and size of the sample, and (iv) the community relations climate at the time of the study. The fifth section suggests some policy implications before a final section outlines a number of areas for future research.

11.2 Issues Addressed in the Thesis

The thesis presented and analysed empirical findings from a qualitative, deductive, and interpretive (Silverman, 2000) study of Workplace Community Relations (WCR) initiatives in District Councils in NI. It drew from critical social research to investigate the issues beyond the surface level and took account of historical developments in the wider society (Harvey, 1990; May, 2001). The representational style was realist insofar as participants'

views were transcribed and presented 'straight from the horse's mouth' (Van Maanen, 1988: p49). The empirical research was based on firsthand accounts of interviewee experiences of policy initiatives and community relations issues in three case study councils (Yin, 1981; Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). I undertook more than sixty loosely structured interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) with a cross-section of research participants from each of the three councils, as well as trade unionists and Directors of Social Enterprises who worked with councils on WCR policy.

Chapter Two highlighted different perspectives on how ideologies of unionism and nationalism, loyalism and republicanism and Catholicism and Protestantism affect contemporary attitudes. There are disagreements on the role of the British and Irish states in NI with most Catholics favouring a united Ireland whereas Protestants demonstrate a preference for continued union with Britain. Sociological analyses suggest that these ideological differences influence community identities in contrasting ways. Loyalist Protestants are deemed defensive and protectionist because of concerns that economic, political and cultural changes may detrimentally affect their communities (Cairns, 2000; Douglas and Shirlow, 1998; Hughes *et al*, 2007; McAuley and Tonge, 2007). Catholics on the other hand are perceived as rebellious underdogs in NI who, following the fight for equality and material gains in recent decades, have become an increasingly confident community (Mitchell, 2003). Furthermore, differences in religious philosophy and practice have led to further disjuncture with a universal church providing a central organising force for Catholics while fragmentation in Protestantism has made the Protestant community 'schism-prone' (Bruce, 1985: p592; Coulter, 1999a).

This study examined at a workplace level how interviewees received and understood WCR policies and issues. It has shown that community differences continue to impact on the work environment and on relationships between employees. It also demonstrated that despite the 'peace process' and legal and policy frameworks, there are ongoing reports of physical and emotional violence at work. Thus, the transition from a 'war culture' (Ruane and Todd, 1996: p1) or 'culture of violence' (Jarman, 2004: p435) to a post-conflict society is ongoing. This finding is consistent with other studies showing that although the degree of paramilitary violence has reduced (MacGinty *et al*, 2007), conflict between Protestants and Catholics has continued (Jarman, 2004, 2005) and manifests at work in a number of ways. The District Councils in NI experienced a degree of violence that as noted by Shirlow and Murtagh (2006:

p178) 'militates against the capacity to deliver fair and innovative services'. Paramilitary violence (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996) and other 'chill factors' (Teague, 1997; Shirlow, 2003, 2006) have ensured high levels of workforce segregation in many areas (Osborne, 2003). There are disputes over flags and emblems, or 'manifestations of separateness' (Hughes *et al*, 2007: p48), that legitimise Protestant and Catholic identities (Ruane and Todd, 1996). Each community uses some of these symbols to mark out territory and control space (Graham and Nash, 2006). Like other social environments, the workplace is a space where flags affirm and reaffirm aspects of identity (Cairns, 2000). Paramilitary flags and emblems, the Union Flag and Irish Tricolour in or near the work environment can undermine community relations and generate a threatening atmosphere (Shirlow, 2006). In NI, sporting affiliations can also be problematic because sport is 'bound up with the politics of division' (Sugden and Bairner, 1993: p1); therefore, many of the sporting pursuits enjoyed and teams supported by Catholics and Protestants are popular in one community and not the other. Existing research has also shown how ethno-national conflict has affected shipbuilding (O Murchu, 2005), teaching (Nolan, 2007), social work (e.g. Smyth and Campbell, 1996; Houston and Campbell, 2001; Ramon *et al*, 2006), and leisure centre management (Bairner and Shirlow, 2003).

In a context of historic conflict and high levels of violence and intimidation, consecutive governments introduced legal and policy frameworks to address underlying causes. The early legislation sought to reduce the under-representation of Catholics in the workplace (Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004) and particularly in the public sector (Dixon, 2001). Government policies such as TSN and PAFT addressed social deprivation and inequalities in public service provision (Osborne, 2003). Following the GFA, the government placed new legislation on the statute books – FETO and NIA. The emphasis in these legal frameworks shifted from reactionary community relations to a more proactive 'good relations' ethos. Despite these new legal frameworks, the Harbison Review (2002) concluded that public authorities had not made enough progress on the community relations agenda since the early 1990s, and that more should be done. Subsequently, the 2005 Shared Future framework reinforced the good relations aspects of the GFA identifying District Councils as important organisations 'to hold to account for their responsibilities' (Shared Future Framework, 2005: p50).

The case study District Councils established a number of initiatives to address their legal commitments and limit the impact of ethno-national conflict at work. Each participated in the DCCRP from the late 1980s (although SDC withdrew for a period) and implemented NWE policies to reduce employment chill factors such as flags and emblems and paramilitary activity. The NWE policies also prohibited discussion about politically sensitive subjects and often covered sporting affiliations as well as Orange Order activities and 12th July celebrations. Good relations initiatives such as GRFs encouraged greater contact between Protestant and Catholics to increase mutual understanding and openness to improve relationships and change attitudes. Other WCR initiatives included Equality Impact Assessments, Bonfire Committees and Community Relations Week.

11.3 Summary of the Findings

The thesis findings enhance our understanding of how people at work in District Councils make sense of and respond to community relations issues and policies. They show that despite the high levels of conflict during the contemporary troubles and historical ideological differences, people maintain positive relationships in the workplace. Neutral Working Environment policies were beneficial in that they established calm and provided 'salvation when the bombs were going off' (CRO, SDC). However, these initiatives leave underlying differences unresolved and, therefore, have limited benefit for providing the conditions of possibility for reconciliation.

Public authorities implemented good relations strategies to address some of the weaknesses in NWE policies and to promote mutual understanding among nine Equality Categories. The thesis findings indicated that although most participants were positive about the principles of good relations, their practical implementation has been problematic. On a positive note, respondents were in favour of open dialogue and 'good and harmonious workplaces', and they welcomed initiatives that reduced conflict and helped protect relationships. Nevertheless, there was some concern that good relations strategies could have potentially detrimental consequences for employees and managers. The implications of good relations' emphasis on mutual understanding became apparent for some employees when councils created their first GRFs. The Catholic CEO at GDC commented that when the council introduced these initiatives, 'we probably opened a Pandora's Box'. Asking employees to

critically reflect on their attitudes and behaviours in the hope that they would change was also described as 'naive social engineering' (Protestant Male Head of Administration, TDC).

The findings identified gaps and weaknesses in WCR policy design and implementation. The 'definitional illusiveness' (Graham and Nash, 2006) in the GFA was also apparent in aspects of WCR policy leading to confusion about how to implement policy. A lack of cross-community understanding training in employee and management development programmes and poorly delivered training undermined the promotion of good and harmonious relations. Inadequate levels of training meant that community relations problems were unresolved, which undermined confidence in WCR policies whereas, if the training was poorly pitched, this could lead to overt resistance and reduced commitment to WCR initiatives.

The vast majority of interviewees regarded WCR policies as potentially beneficial for community relations at work. The empirical research showed, however, that in managing the gaps and weaknesses in policy, and their community differences, research participants often responded in three informal ways. They avoided WCR issues because of 'conflict fatigue', to protect relationships, and when they 'didn't know how to cope' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B). Trade unions were reluctant to address WCR issues leading to criticism that they were complicit in a 'collusion of silence' and avoided WCR issues until 'things literally boiled over' (Protestant Male Director, Social Enterprise A). Official policy, and particularly NWE, also limits what employees and managers are prepared to discuss because of a concern that it could result in disciplinary proceedings.

There was overt resistance to WCR such as SDC Cleansing Technicians' resignations from a GRF, walkouts from a good relations training event at TDC and managers' refusal to accept responsibility for good relations. Resistance also occurred because respondents were more comfortable learning about religious holidays and cultural traditions than addressing discrimination and sectarianism. Furthermore, some employees were concerned that debating political issues in a public forum could result in their marginalisation or victimisation. Another informal response highlighted in the findings was pragmatic humour. A majority of interviewees regarded humour as a welcome aspect of working life as it provided 'a bit of release' (Catholic Male Trade Union Official, SIPTU) in what were often stifling work environments. Humour helped build rapport and maintain social bonds with colleagues. It also enabled interviewees to confront difficult subjects that might otherwise be 'put into the

246

"too difficult" tray' (Catholic Female GRO, SDC). While political humour was often positively regarded, interviewees were cautious about using it because it could be misconstrued – some people 'don't know what the craic is' (Protestant Male Cleansing Technician 4, SDC) and 'there are certain people who wouldn't joke about the political thing' (Protestant Male Charge Hand, TDC).

The empirical material suggested that managers could undermine the organic relationship building that occurs in District Councils by misunderstanding the 'subtleties' in these relationships. As the Director of Social Enterprise A noted, employees find 'quite human ways' of maintaining relationships while 'it's the managers who are more stiff'. The CROs and GROs at GDC, for example, were accused of 'being quite flippant' when they bantered about community relations issues. At Council E, the CRO argued that managers in such circumstances 'needed to strike a balance between the needs of the policy and the needs of the workers themselves'.

Community differences informed how interviewees responded to WCR issues and policies. The empirical material suggested that some Protestants are reluctant to engage with the WCR agenda because it represents a threat to their culture and identity. The Head of Administration at TDC made a similar point and argued that any negativity from the Protestant community was because they were less comfortable than Catholics with the concepts embedded in the GFA, as they felt 'there's nothing wrong with our society' and 'this is them righting the wrongs'. Interviewees drew from a number of tacit norms to explain how ethno-national identity differences affect responses to WCR initiatives. Three tacit norms for Catholics were collectivism, resistance and confidence. These were based on a history of rebelliousness among the native Irish Catholic population who, as historic underdogs, had become accustomed to fighting for equality. From this perspective, these discourses informed Catholics' self-identities such that they willingly challenged for their rights in the workplace and were more certain that WCR initiatives are 'an agenda for the future' (Head of Administration, TDC). Some interviewees also referred to the tacit norms when suggesting that Catholics and Protestants hold different attitudes toward trade unions and management authority. They argued that Catholics are 'bolshie' (Catholic Male Director, Social Enterprise B), more prepared to 'kick back' and 'fight for their colleagues' (Protestant Male Trade Union Official, GMB) at work. Nationalist councils were, from this perspective, more open to change and more willing to accept and implement WCR policy.

247

For Protestants, the three tacit norms were individualism, acquiescence and protectionism, which combined to induce a less enthusiastic attitude toward WCR policies, and particularly good relations. An historic concern with the Republic of Ireland's irredentist role in Northern Ireland's affairs and a felt need to maintain the constitutional link between Britain and NI means that they are defensive and protectionist – something that manifests itself in the work environment just as it does in other social environments. As the GRO at GDC explained, 'there is always a level of protection of the self and a fear of loss of culture and identity'. Individualism among some Protestants was also identified; as one interviewee commented, 'there isn't the same sense of co-dependence and community. It's very much: "me and my immediate family"' (Protestant Female CRO, TDC).

11.4 Key Arguments from the Analysis

A typology of responses was developed to demonstrate how interviewees responded in complex ways to WCR issues and policies. The tacit norms suggested that how people responded to WCR was predicated on their community backgrounds. However, the typology shows that responses were more considered and nuanced than this suggests. Occupational identity, previous experience of community relations issues and the councils' approach to implementing policy initiatives were also significant. Protestant research participants could be enthusiastic regarding WCR policy while Catholics were sometimes anxious about how it would affect their community identity. Each 'type' demonstrated a preference for particular informal responses to WCR issues. For example, the Pragmatists relied on avoidance and humour to impression-manage their relationships and views on WCR. The typology also highlighted how previous experience of community relations issues and a reading of whether change would detrimentally affect their relationships with colleagues were further influences. In other words, the typology highlights how experiential and contextual factors informed responses to WCR and that while ethno-national identity is influential, it is 'not as pervasive as might be imagined' (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006: p171).

The research contributes to Dickson and Hargie's groundbreaking work into WCR. Their research highlighted how the workplace can be a constructive context for relationship building and that relationships at work are generally positive but that there is a gap in policy and practice. My research also identified a formal/informal culture gap (Oilila, 1995; cited in Linstead and Fulop, 1999) and examined how interviewees informally manage inter-

248

community relationships. The analysis emphasised the need to examine WCR policy initiatives as change strategies in social/political environments where employees and managers often interpret change as a potential threat to their self-identities. Thus, the workplace remains a *potentially* beneficial setting for enhancing community relations but, employees, managers and councillors resist WCR policy because it proposes changes to self-identity that challenge organisational members' 'sense of identity, security and self-worth' (Fineman, 2003: p126). The thesis explained how participants' self-identities influence how they react to community relations issues and policies, which parallel the conclusions of other studies that examined these issues in different social contexts (cf. Hughes *et al*, 2007; MacGinty, and du Toit, 2007). The implicit aim of WCR is to change aspects of employee identities so that harmony and mutual understanding can replace the historic enmity between Catholics and Protestants. It is predictable, therefore, that there will be resistance to policies such as the GFA (Hughes and Donnelly, 2003, 2004) and the associated WCR initiatives.

Another argument presented in the thesis is that among the informal responses to WCR change, resistance and humour are common. These responses were described as 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton, *op cit.*) for coping with change where there are gaps and weaknesses in WCR policy. There were two types of resistance identified: inertia and hostility. Avoidance or inertia resulted from five barriers to change (Adams, 1987): emotional, cultural, cognitive, perceptual and environmental. The emotional blockages included a fear and anxiety that good relations initiatives posed a threat to employees' community identity. Councils and some of their departments were apathetic toward WCR because they were risk averse and there was a history of conflict leading to cultural blocks. Cognitive block arose from confusion regarding how and why policy should be implemented. This was particularly problematic because in some cases it resulted in inconsistent decision-making and accusations of bias. When employees had previous negative experiences of WCR initiatives, such as when training events were poorly pitched, perceptual blocks generated a high degree of cynicism. There were also environmental blocks such as the segregated squads of Cleansing Technicians at SDC and management inaction in some instances.

The thesis adopted Rollinson *et al's* (1998) four types of hostile resistance to explain the reasons why interviewees resisted WCR. People-focused resistance arises when there are concerns about how change will affect organisational members and whether they would lose out as a result. The 'definitional illusiveness' (Graham and Nash, 2006), lack of training and

other problems added to the likelihood of system-focused resistance. Organisation-focused resistance occurred when District Council structures and cultures are believed incompatible with WCR policies such as good relations. Finally, concerns about how WCR policies could impact on career progression and whether change would affect macro-level political issues triggered internal and external politics-focused resistance.

The resistance described by participants was overt and covert, direct and indirect. The empirical research shows that defining resistance as irrational behaviour would ignore, for example, the environmental and systemic problems inherent in WCR policy that give rise to resistance. Further, and as the organisational change literature demonstrates, resistance is a normal reaction to workplace change initiatives (Coch and French, 1948; cited in Clegg *et al*, 2008). Indeed, the vast majority of interviewees argued that change was needed and when they explained their resistance to WCR policy, it was because, for example, there were environmental barriers and systemic problems that led to confusion and a lack of support. Further, the people-focused resistance was often based on anxieties regarding how change would affect organisational members. As Clegg *et al* (2008: p33) contend, employees respond to change based on a process of 'situated rationality' whereby they interpret what change means for them 'through their understanding of the world, their interpretations of other people and those things that populate their world'.

Dickson *et al* (2008a) describe banter as an indispensible way of communicating with colleagues in the workplace. The thesis findings also suggest that workplace humour is very important for employees. The analysis described humour as purposeful behaviour that invariably enhances relationships with colleagues. It reduces monotony (Collinson 1988; Roy, 1958), helps build rapport and social cohesion (Bradney, 1957), counters the stifling effects of formal policy (Fineman, 2003), and helps employees to confront contentious issues (Gabriel, 2000; Grugulis, 2002; Watson, 1994). When managers admonish employees for participating in ethno-national humour, this undermines relationship building (Dickson *et al*, 2008a).

The arguments presented in the thesis and the empirical findings demonstrate that organisational members engage in identity work (Goffman, 1959; Cohen and Taylor, 1978; Watson, 2007) to protect their identities. Avoidance, resistance and pragmatic humour can be read as strategies for managing the tensions in complex social contexts where change is

250

understood as a potential threat and where a process of 'situated rationality' (Clegg *et al*, 2008) shapes how people respond to WCR change. In some cases, interviewees reflected openly during interviews on how they impression-managed (Goffman, 1959) their feelings on WCR to 'mask' opinions and cope with the competing pressures and expectations of ethno-national identity, occupational identity, organisational policy and experience.

The current findings add to a growing body of literature analysing how WCR initiatives are interpreted, resisted and embraced in organisations. As Dickson *et al* (2008a) contend, workplaces are potentially constructive social spaces where employees can establish strong relationships and enhance mutual understanding with positive effects that ripple out into wider society. For this to happen though, policy-makers and employers must attend to how at a local level employees subjectively interpret WCR policies and take more proactive steps to waylay fears that good relations initiatives will come at a cost to them personally and to their communities.

11.5 Limitations of the Research

There are a number of limitations to the research findings and conclusions. First, the research focused on three public sector organisations and, therefore, did not compare results in other organisational environments. Thus, the findings and conclusions are restricted to a specific organisational context. Second, the current study did not investigate how gender, sexuality, disability or other aspects of identity might inform responses to WCR. Given that recent good relations policy initiatives are designed to enhance the workplace for these groups, studies examining these issues would make for some interesting and worthwhile research. Third, the empirical material was drawn from a limited number of employees and managers in the case study organisations and, therefore, there is a question as to whether the findings would be the same for others in the District Councils.

Fourth, the research was undertaken at a time when violence in NI was at a relatively low ebb, and when perceptions of community relations and a preference for mixed workplaces were at high levels (NILTS 2007, 2008). Consequently, the viewpoints expressed may have reflected a more positive mood in wider society. Indeed, since the empirical research, increased dissident republican activity, the murders of two British Army soldiers and a Constable in the PSNI, and an impasse over devolution of policing and justice powers may

251

have detrimentally affected perceptions of community relations. As Hughes and Donnelly (2004) demonstrate, there is an inverse correlation between levels of violence and attitudes toward community relations. Fifth, a further potential limitation is in the representativeness of the research participants. As Chapter Five explained, key contacts in the District Councils who were either managers or CROs and GROs selected interviewees. Although the empirical research was rich and varied, and positive and negative views were forthcoming, and while councils provided a stratified sample of interviewees, key contacts selected interviewees and this might have influenced the findings.

11.6 Policy Implications

The empirical research revealed some barriers and weaknesses in policy design and implementation. An implication of these findings is that the effectiveness of community relations policy depends on how it is interpreted, supported and implemented at workplace level. The good relations agenda represents a culture change for District Councils with potential consequences for existing power relationships. It also has implications for how Protestants and Catholics relate to one another, yet existing policy documents rarely mention how councils should ensure employees and managers are convinced initiatives are necessary. Like any workplace change strategy, employees are anxious concerning how it will affect them and, therefore, WCR policy implementation requires sensitive handling, and ongoing monitoring and revision attentive to local needs and not just macro-policy concerns. This has been made more difficult by the 'definitional illusiveness' in good relation policy and obfuscation in how organisations should meet their WCR policy obligations.

The findings show that there is a need for more and better training for managers and employees that not only emphasises policy awareness, but also equips them with effective strategies for reconciling differences. The Cleansing Technicians at SDC bemoaned the lack of training for their managers who, when community relations issues emerged, were unsure of how to respond. Simply referring to policy limits what can be achieved, especially given that most employees preferred to avoid formal procedures when addressing problematic issues. The empirical research demonstrates that employees are usually supportive of the principles of good relations initiatives, but apprehensive concerning the impact of policy. These concerns are based on unaddressed anxieties regarding, for example, whether workplace change will undermine what are often carefully established relationships with

colleagues from other communities. There was much evidence of critical reflection in the research indicating that employees have some sense of how their norms and values relate to and differ from others. Even the Cynical Historicists wanted to see improvements in community relations, although how they can be convinced to support specific policies requires further consideration.

Policy-makers should build-in to community relations initiatives elements that take account of the 'subtleties' (Dickson *et al*, 2008a, 2009) in relationship building and provide specific advice on how organisations can manage the structural and cultural changes implied by WCR policy initiatives. The findings highlight a number of gaps and weakness in policy that undermine confidence in community relations initiatives and, therefore, in the possibility of reconciliation. These issues are particularly important in light of the fact that the Assembly Government is currently finalising plans for new WCR policy changes[35] that will emphasise again the key role of District Councils in their implementation.

11.7 Areas for Future Research

The thesis highlighted four areas for further research that would provide more insights into how ethno-national identity affects the workplace, why employees and managers resist and embrace change, and how policy-makers and councillors can enhance reconciliation. First, more work is needed to establish whether increased contact between Catholics and Protestants in the workplace can enhance reconciliation efforts in the wider community in the longer-term. Social identity theory analyses of the 'contact model' demonstrate that although greater opportunity for cross-community interaction can improve relationships between Catholics and Protestants, the extent to which this can help reconcile differences in the long-term is open to debate (see Trew, 1986; Niens *et al*, 2004). Dickson and Hargie have considered the implications of contact at work but, as they also argue, additional research is required to determine whether this improves community relations over time.

Second, further research might investigate the prevalence of avoidance/resistance and pragmatic humour in other organisational environments. Interviewees sometimes argued that

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[35] A new Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is currently being drafted to meet commitments articulated in the Northern Ireland Assembly's 2008-11 Programme for Government. The District Councils will perform a key role in programme implementation.

253

District Councils are particularly stifling environments where opportunities for pragmatic humour are restricted by both policy and a litigious culture. It would be interesting to examine the extent to which official policy affects ethno-national humour in, for example, call/contact centre or manufacturing environments in NI. More research in this area could consider the following questions:

(i)   Is it the case that the nature and extent of pragmatic humour is context dependent?

(ii)   If so, how and why do contextual differences affect humour?

(iii)   How should we conceptualise humour in the work environment?

(iv)   How can policy-makers effectively manage humour without undermining relationship building?

Similarly, more research could consider the extent of, and reasons for, resistance to WCR. The thesis described various forms of direct and indirect resistance in the District Councils and suggested some explanations as to why it occurred; but cross-sector, longitudinal research is needed to investigate the reasons for resistance to WCR. For example, there is a need to examine further the social/political context when studying identity and change while adequate conceptual frameworks are also required to understand and address the reasons for resistance. The following research questions would seem appropriate:

(i)   Why do organisational members resist WCR policy implementation?

(ii)   To what extent is ethno-national difference an explanatory factor?

(iii)   What aspects of policy implementation enhance and/or detract from their effectiveness?

(iv)   What theoretical concepts are most appropriate for analysing resistance when it occurs?

(v)   How can these theoretical concepts assist policy-makers and employers when implementing future WCR policy initiatives?

Third, this study focused on how interviewees subjectively understood WCR policies and the degree to which ethno-national identity affects their responses. Follow-up research could investigate whether the tacit norms highlighted in the thesis are common in other organisational contexts. The typology of responses could also be examined to explore its

veracity in other research settings and whether employees' and managers' attitudes to WCR policy across time by investigating. For example, the typology would help investigate whether better designed and supported initiatives can help convince Cynical Historicists of the possibility of long-term reconciliation. On the other hand, should WCR policies fail in their workplaces, would Enthusiasts become more cynical about the likelihood of reconciliation? It would also be interesting to investigate the extent to which changes in occupational identity (e.g. following promotion) lead to concomitant changes in attitudes to WCR for Relativists.

Fourth, how the changes introduced by the Review of Public Administration will affect community relations is another area for further research. The thesis has already shown that organisational change leads to fear and anxiety for employees worried about what it will mean for them. Given that eleven new Local Government Districts will result in considerable structural and cultural changes (and job losses) for District Councils, the process needs careful managing while considerable thought should go into preparing employees and managers for the change process. Otherwise, emotional, cultural, cognitive, perceptual and environmental barriers revealed in the case study District Councils will lead to further inertia and hostile resistance, sustaining employee and community relations problems in the long-term.
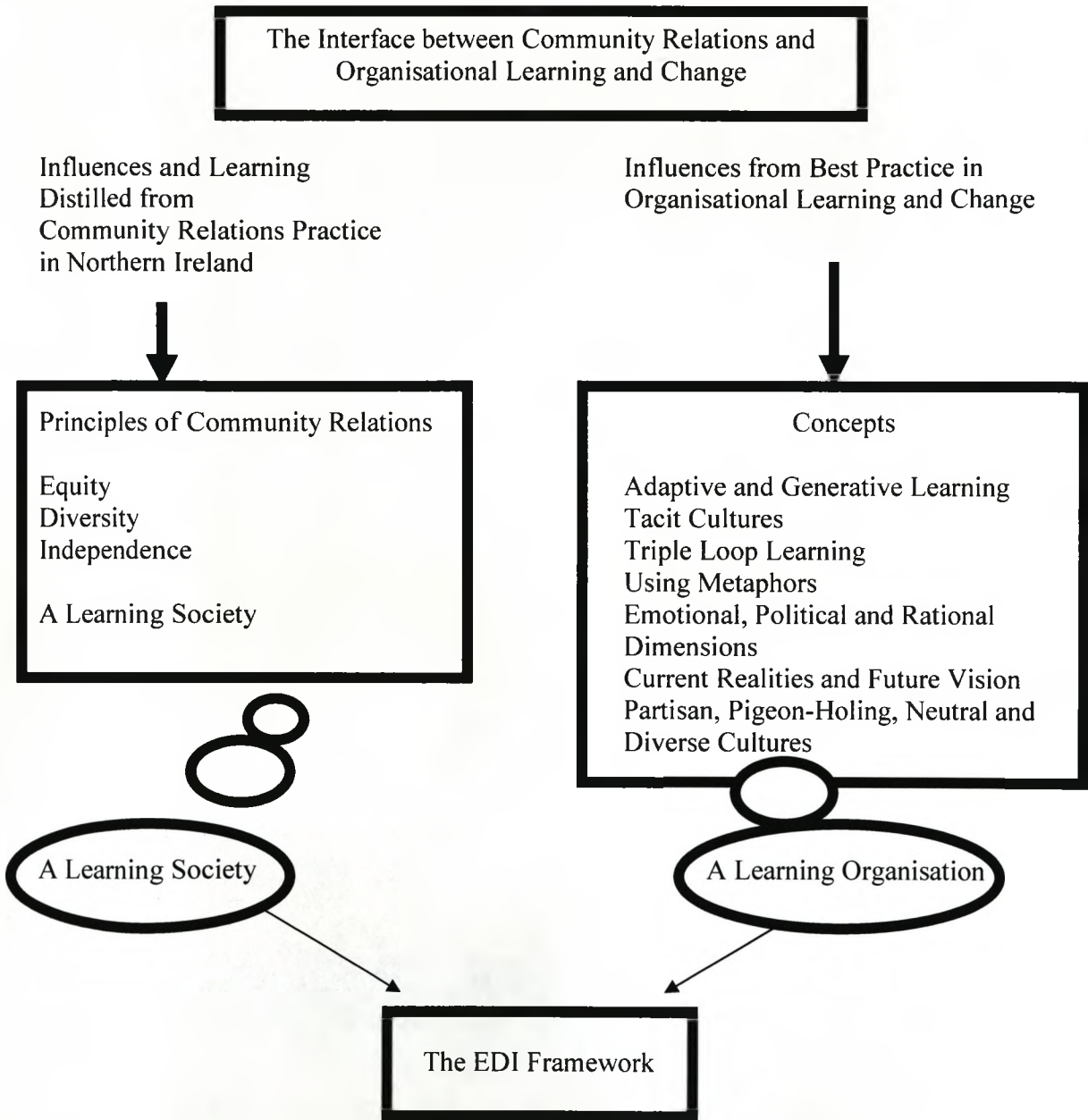
11.8 Conclusion

This study contributes to an under-explored area of research – community relations in the workplace in NI. It has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of WCR in District Councils in showing how and why ethno-national identity informs perceptions of, and responses to, WCR initiatives. The research suggests that given the barriers and weaknesses in policy design and implementation, it is unlikely that the WCR policies analysed in the thesis will translate into reconciliation in wider society any time soon. After all, if the policies face significant barriers in work environments, it seems likely they will face similar obstacles in the wider community, particularly when policies are perceived as a threat to community and self-identity. If introducing good relations policies into work environments is akin to opening Pandora's 'box', as the quote in the title of the thesis suggests, then, following on from the Greek myth, hope is to be found after the other contents of the 'box' have been released. As the rest of the contents of Pandora's 'box' are released,

rather than closing the lid as Pandora did, perhaps it is time to wait long enough for hope to materialise into something more substantial.

The Interface between Community Relations and
Organisational Learning and Change

Influences and Learning
Distilled from
Community Relations Practice
in Northern Ireland

Influences from Best Practice in
Organisational Learning and Change

Principles of Community Relations

Equity
Diversity
Independence

A Learning Society

Concepts

Adaptive and Generative Learning
Tacit Cultures
Triple Loop Learning
Using Metaphors
Emotional, Political and Rational
Dimensions
Current Realities and Future Vision
Partisan, Pigeon-Holing, Neutral and
Diverse Cultures

A Learning Society

A Learning Organisation

The EDI Framework

Stage One: Preparation of an Equality Scheme

Preparation of an Equality Scheme
Consultation by public authority on the draft Equality Scheme
Reconsideration by the public authority of the draft Equality Scheme
Submission of the Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission

Stage Two: Approval of an Equality Scheme

Assessment of Equality Scheme by the Equality Commission – the desk audit
Correspondence to public authority – detailing any improvements needed to ensure approval of the scheme
Re-submission of amended scheme by public authority
Further assessment by the Commission
Approval of scheme by Commission, on basis of assessment or further discussions/correspondence with public authority

Stage Three: Implementation of the Equality Scheme

Consultation in general
Equality impact assessments undertaken in specific situations defined by the Equality Scheme
Consultation on impact assessments
Reconsideration of policies in light of consultation
Decision by public authority
Publication of results of equality impact assessments
Monitoring of adverse impact of policies and publication of results
Complaint?
Investigation?
Directions from Secretary of State?
Annual review of progress on implementation of the Equality Scheme
Five Year Review of the Equality Scheme

Community Background	n=	%
Protestant	31	47.69
Catholic	31	47.69
Undisclosed	3	4.62
Gender	**n=**	**%**
Male	40	61.54
Female	25	38.46
Occupational Group	**n=**	**%**
Manual	13	20.0
Administrative	25	38.462
Management	11	16.923
Trade Union	11	16.923
Consultancy	5	7.692
Age	**n=**	**%**
18-21	1	1.54
22-29	8	12.31
30-39	19	29.23
40-49	27	41.54
50-65	10	15.38
Total	**N=65**	**100%**

Appendix 4:

Interview Thematic Content and Questions

Interview Thematic Content
1. Interpersonal relationships with colleague of different community backgrounds
2. Ethno-national conflict in the workplace
3. Personal views on identity differences
4. Informal management of WCR issues
5. Council WCR policy
6. Management style within and between councils
7. Structural and cultural differences within and between councils

Key Research Questions
i. Why did the case study councils implement WCR initiatives?
ii. How did they address their policy obligations?
iii. Have the councils achieved their intended objectives?
iv. What effects do good cross-community relationships in the workplace have on reconciliation beyond the workplace?
v. To what extent is WCR policy responsible for positive relationships?
vi. What are the gaps in and barriers to WCR policy?
vii. What does the empirical research tell us about the prevalence of identity and to what extent does it explain participants' responses to WCR?
viii. What role does ethno-national identity play in how participants perceive and respond to WCR?
ix. How do employees informally manage WCR issues when they arise?

Common Interview Questions	Thematic Content	Research Question	Groups
Would you say community differences have any bearing on your experiences at work?	3	vii	All participants.
Do you work with people from different community backgrounds?	1 and 4	iii	All employees, managers.
How would you describe relationships between Protestants and Catholics in your workplace?	1, 2, 3	iii	All employees, managers, CROs.
Have there been any incidents of political and/or religious conflict at work? Please describe.	2	i, iii	All employees, managers, CROs.
How do employees manage political and/or religious conflict when it arises?	2 and 4	v, viii, ix	All participants.
Are you comfortable disclosing in work details of your community background? Please explain.	1 and 2	iii	All employees, managers, CROs.
Are you aware of the council's community relations policies and procedures? Please explain.	5	iii,	All employees, managers.
What steps has your employer taken to implement WCR policy?	5	ii	All employees, managers, CROs.
Why did the council introduced WCR initiatives such as Good Relations Forums and Neutral Work Environment policies?	2, 5	i	All employees, managers, CROs.
Would you say your council's WCR strategy is effective?	5	iv, v, vi	All employees, managers, CROs.
Are there any gaps or weaknesses in WCR policy? If so, please describe what they are and why you think they exist?	5,6,7	vi, vii	All participants.
Do you think community background influences how employees perceive and respond to WCR policy?	3	viii	All participants.
Have you received training in community relations? If so, what kind of training did you receive and was it helpful?	5	ii	All employees, managers.
Can you describe your organisation's WCR-related activity with councils?	5	ii	Consultancy.
To what extent and how has your trade union worked with employers to enhance WCR between employees?	5	ii	Trade Union Officials.
How receptive would you say councils have been to WCR policy? Good Relations? Neutral Working Environment?	5,6,7	ii, vi,	Trade Union Officials, Consultancy.

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261

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