An ethnographic study of the work environment of an aid organisation

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

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ABSTRACT

The working environment of an aid organisation generally has fewer benefits than in the commercial sector, so why do well trained and presumably well qualified people work for an aid organisation rather than a corporation which could provide them with better remunerations and a more comfortable work environment? What is it about the work environment of an aid organisation that attracts them? The focus of this study was to answer these questions. This involved examining the social milieu of the work environment in order to identify the dynamics of the work environment that produced a committed and productive team of employees. It also sought to examine the shortfalls that staff members identified as lowering their satisfaction levels with the work environment.

Ten World Vision Australia employees were interviewed and asked about various aspects of their work environment focussing on the interaction between themselves and their work milieu. This included an analysis of their views on management style and practices, conflict resolution, policies of World Vision Australia, and their reasons for applying for a position and continuing to work at World Vision Australia. This analysis provided a picture of the World Vision Australia work environment which was further enhanced by examining research literature into the importance of "culture" in the workplace and employee well being. An important factor to emerge from the literature was the concept of "solidary", which encompasses an employee's desire to subscribe to a particular collective or group identity. Solidary explains how some shortfalls of a work environment are overlooked for the sake of more important aspects of it.

The interviews revealed that some aspects of the work environment of World Vision Australia are healthy and productive, while others require diligence from management particularly as it responds to the changing demands placed on the International Aid sector.

World Vision Australia has a low staff turnover which indicates that employees choose to stay at World Vision Australia despite non-competitive monetary rewards. The results from the analysis indicate that the work environment is healthy and accommodates the emotional, ethical and familial needs of employees. The specific

culture that is engendered by management is a key element in the satisfaction of employees, with "solidary" being an important factor in this.

INTRODUCTION

For many people, work consumes a great deal of their time and energy and for some of them work becomes the focus of their life. Corporations and large organisations spend a significant amount of time and effort in trying to attract hard working committed employees who will help the company fulfil its mission and objectives and attain its goals and targets. Studies have shown that work productivity is a relatively close representation of the work environment (Clements-Croome, 2000; Drucker, 1990; Lorsch & Abdou, 1994a; Lorsch & Abdou, 1994b). By this they mean that the 'quality' of the work environment has a relationship to the level of productivity; a healthy environment will generally have greater outputs than one in which employees are dissatisfied and feel they are poorly treated. Based on research findings like these, management consultants often recommend to companies that they provide a thriving and healthy work environment to encourage productivity and maintain sustainability (Anheier, 2005; Glisson & James, 2002; Parker, 2000). But what are the characteristics of a healthy work environment?

This is a complex issue and involves a variety of interacting factors. However, a few factors stand out and appear in many different kinds of management research reports. One factor which is given much attention states that a healthy work environment involves management being open and clear about the organisation's mission (or missions), its ethos, and the work practices (Glisson & James, 2002; Goffman, 1971; Mahoney, 2007; Parker, 2000). Another equally important factor which has been credited as being the key to organisational success involves creating and maintaining an organisational culture that is both safe and productive. Culture in this context is defined as the normative beliefs and shared behavioural expectations in an organisational unit.

No two organisations would have exactly the same culture, although there may be many similarities. This thesis is concerned with the cultural milieu of an aid organisation. Previous research has indicated that the culture of an aid organisation is communicated and is ascribable to the shared behavioural expectations and normative beliefs of employees (Ashkanasy, et al. 2000; Hofstede, et al. 1990), and not through "deeper" values or assumptions (Glisson & James, 2002 pp.770). By

this, it is claimed that values cannot be imposed by a top down approach but need to be embraced and endorsed by workers because they are integral to the process of creating the cultural milieu. It is often noted that work practices form part of the culture of an organisation and become significantly vital to its employees and their sense of work satisfaction. The employees in turn, also shape and are shaped by the human relations policies, the structure, and the milieu of the organisation. As important as these factors are to the health of any given organisation, they are of even greater importance when the work environment is that of an aid organisation because it needs not only to maintain the goodwill of the employees but also the donors.

An aid organisation must not only have ethical work practices but must also be seen to have them in order to maintain its support base. In this way aid organisations receive special scrutiny from the media and from their volunteers and donors. In other words, their sponsors and the media are constantly on watch for any breaches of ethical standards. Any hint of scandal puts aid organisations at risk of losing their funding base as well as being seen to operate outside their mission statement. An aid organisation, because of its desire to keep administration costs at a minimum, cannot provide or entice its employees with materialistic luxuries that may be available elsewhere in the commercial world or are standard requirements in other welfare organisations. These luxuries/necessities may include high quality furniture, modern technology (computers, upmarket desktop and mobile telephones etc), prestigious location, company cars, company telephones, allocated parking space, to name a few.   An international "aid organisation" like World Vision exists to serve and provide assistance to those who are living under the poverty line. If they wish to maintain the same level of public support they cannot spend their resources carelessly, especially when the money is coming from the public and/or government grants.

Aid organisations such as Care Australia, World Vision Australia, Oxfam and many others that have been operating successfully for a long time and have received public support and large scale government assistance, make claims that they have a productive work environment and dedicated members of staff. For example, Oxfam states "Oxfam Australia is part of a global movement of dedicated people working

hard to fight poverty and injustice" (Oxfam Australia, 2008). One of Care Australia's core values as stated on their website is "We recognise and value the professionalism, skills and experience of our staff, and their contribution to institutional learning and development" (Care Australia, 2008).

It is the staff who drive the organisation; they are the means to the organisation's goals and objectives. It is, or should be, the organisation that sets the tone and provides the background to enable employees to work well and efficiently and in a spirit of good will. This imperative takes place in an environment of fiscal restraint and tight budget and resources (Howarth, 2005).

Having acknowledged earlier that benefits are fewer in an aid organisation, leads me to wonder what strategies managers put in place to obtain and maintain a strong and satisfied workforce. In the sales and marketing professionals, pay rates on average are 30 per cent lower in the non-profit sector than in the corporate sector (Howarth, 2005). Therefore, why do well trained and presumably well qualified people work for an aid organisation rather than a corporation which could provide them with better remunerations and a more comfortable work environment? What is it about the work environment of an aid organisation that attracts them?

One of the largest and most recognised aid organisations in Australia is World Vision Australia. World Vision is a non denominational, Christian humanitarian aid and development agency, founded in the USA during the 1950s and then expanded into Australia in 1966. The well-being of children is World Vision's main focus, and so child sponsorship is its main avenue for fundraising. Sponsorship involves a monthly financial commitment from donors to specific children overseas and the sponsor makes a long term commitment to contribute to community programs that benefit that child, the child's family and the community in which the child resides.

The values that World Vision has been built on are:

We are Christian
We are committed to the poor
We value people
We are stewards

We are partners

We are responsive (World Vision Australia, 2005b)

In 2006, the number of children sponsored by the Australian public through World Vision Australia was 390,374 and 400,000 Australians helped over 12.4 million people through 678 projects in 57 of the world's poorest countries (World Vision Australia, 2006b).

The management of World Vision Australia gave permission for this research project to go ahead and allowed unrestricted access to their staff who chose to participate. They also gave permission for the name of the organisation to appear in this thesis.

This thesis aims to explore the cultural milieu of an aid organisation by examining the distinctive work environment at World Vision Australia and the extent to which its work practices are in line with its mission.

In order to achieve this aim, the work environment at World Vision Australia, the practices and correspondence between staff as well as the physical environment such as furnishings were examined with a view to ascertaining how closely they match the mission of the organisation.

It was felt that studying World Vision Australia's policies and objectives and many of its internal documentation would provide answers and insights into how the organisation functions, recruits employees and interacts with them. However, this information will inevitably have a positive 'spin' on it, so I decided to examine the official policies and practices of World Vision Australia and compare this data with that obtained from people who work there.

Interviews were conducted with ten employees who were asked about their work life and work experiences and the ways in which these have impacted on their personal and professional lives. The results from this study are not transferable to other sections of World Vision Australia or to other organisations. Participants were recruited on a wholly voluntary base which was my agreement with World Vision Australia's management and therefore I chose to work with these numbers rather than missing out on an important opportunity of getting an insight into how some employees perceive the World Vision Australia work environment.

This research project looked at the work experiences of people within a particular social milieu, namely an aid organisation. Patton (1990) claims that this approach produces a wealth of detailed information even with a small number of people (Patton, 1990). Berg (1995) adds that 'qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives' (Berg, 1995, pp 7). So even a small sample of ten can provide a great deal of rich data and which can be used for theory development.

This research has adopted a qualitative methodology, based on symbolic interactionism, because this approach is able to capture the complex nuances and meanings of people's lives, their emotions and experiences (Berg, 1995).

An employee who remains with an organisation for at least a year or longer (applicable criteria to all participants involved) is not necessarily indicative of a good working environment. Length of time spent in an organisation may or may not equate to level of satisfaction of the work environment or well being in the job. Many reasons could be at play such as convenience (close to home, flexible hours), being in a comfort zone (knows the role and staff very well, resistance to change to new role/workplace), indolence (job is easy, not demanding) or simply that they are unable to obtain another position elsewhere.

I sought to gain information from the participants about how they experienced working at World Vision Australia and how they perceived the environment and the degree to which the environment either excludes them or embraces them. The participants were asked to describe the differences that they found between working at World Vision Australia and working in a corporate environment. They were asked to identify differences between the work environment at World Vision Australia and their previous places of employment. I was interested in discovering their responses to a number of key questions. How are tensions and conflicts resolved in previous and present employment situations? What do they consider to be the fundamental values of World Vision Australia? Are they consistent with their own values? What was it about World Vision Australia that led them to want to work there? Did it live up to the expectations, why or why not?

Being a large aid organisation, there is a great deal of marketing material available, much of which I consulted to determine how the image of World Vision Australia is constructed. This includes examining various web sites on which World Vision Australia features and advertises, including the World Vision Australia website, newspaper articles promoting the cause of World Vision Australia and the visual material normally accompanying these releases. There are also televised advertisements which are usually filmed in third world countries and feature a well known Australian personality encouraging viewers to sponsor a child. These also were examined for any impact they had on participants' decision to work at World Vision Australia. Do potential employees apply for a job at World Vision Australia simply because they are moved to help poor malnourished children? If they are motivated by altruism, to what extent are they willing to accept less salubrious working conditions in order to assist World Vision Australia achieving it?

The staff turnover at World Vision Australia's customer service centre is significantly better than many other call centres. A senior manager at the customer service centre stated "we have a 16% turnover per year whereas an average customer service centre has between 30% and 50%" (Brian)[1]. What is it about the work environment of World Vision Australia that makes it worth their while and efforts?

Aims

This thesis aims to explore, identify and examine:

1. The dynamics and cultural milieu of the work environment of World Vision Australia's customer service centre.

2. How and if the work practices at World Vision Australia are in line with its mission.

3. Workers' reactions to the values and mission of World Vision Australia.

4. The reasons why they chose and continue to work at World Vision Australia.

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[1] Brian was one of the participants interviewed for this study.

5. Reaction of workers to the work site and milieu.

These aims address the following research question and subsidiary research questions:

1. What are the dynamics of the social milieu of the work environment of the customer service centre at World Vision Australia?

    a. How do staff perceive their relationship with management?

    b. To what extent is the workplace family friendly and to what degree does it meet workers' familial and social needs?

The first chapter of this thesis is the Literature Review which looks at the history of all the documents I have studied to gather the theoretical aspect of my research. From here the thesis will proceed to the Methodology chapter to discuss and explore the theories which arose as a result of the literature consulted and the information gained from the participants. The Methodology chapter consists of the practical research undertaken to deduce the results of the data collated. This chapter also addresses the interviewing process and the recruitment of participants. Chapter 3 will provide a brief history of World Vision and an overview of World Vision Australia as well as the organisation's missions and values. This chapter will also discuss the organisation's projects in Australia and its work overseas. Chapter 4 examines the data obtained from the interviews with the World Vision Australia employees followed by a discussion of these findings. And finally Chapter 5 will reflect on the conclusions and what insight they might provide for World Vision Australia management. It also provides recommendations for the management of World Vision Australia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Presently, there is a stronger focus on how to provide an encouraging work environment for employees to enable them to perform at their optimum level, than there was in past generations. This is due to recent research studies both in the US and in Australia which have found that the culture of the organisation plays a significant role in the productivity and well being of employees (Clements-Croome, 2000; Glisson & James, 2002). "There is a recognition that the daily rhythms of daily life need to be appreciated: there is also a need to understand how we think and under what conditions our performance diminishes or improves" (Clements-Croome, 2000 pp. xx). When dealing with people, it is important to acknowledge that there is never one solution nor is there a right solution that applies to all employees in determining what improves or hinders their performance and productivity at work. The solutions vary and depend on the type of work, the background of the employees, their beliefs and outlook on life, the location of the work premises, the financial/marital/educational status of employees and the list goes on. Each of these variables is thought to contribute to the organisational environment which in turn feeds into the culture of the organisation (Clements-Croome, 2000; Glisson & James, 2002).

The ways in which the characteristics of employees, the nature of the work environment and the organisational culture interact to produce positive outcomes for the employer and the employee are frequently not clearly established. This interplay between the various parties and structures is complex and the impact on all parties of the handling of these issues warrants further investigation. For example, does a not-for-profit organisation operate under the same cultural imperatives as a commercial venture? How does a not-for-profit organisation 'manage' a worker who consistently under-performs, particularly if he or she has personal difficulties? How does an aid organisation that is based on humanist principles balance the needs of recalcitrant employees against the imperative to meet deadlines and targets that benefit those who are greatly disadvantaged? Foucault argues that there will always be tension between official policies and practices because practices operate under their own logic which is often juxtaposed with principles (Foucault, 1991). Foucault claimed that practices possess, "their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-

evidence, and 'reason'" (Chambon, 1999, pp 56). Culture and the resulting climate influence both policies and practices which in turn are influenced by them. This is a circular rather than a linear reaction.

Although the concepts of culture and climate are used to explain how organisations influence the behaviours, attitudes and well being of employees, culture and climate have often been used indiscriminately. An inability to distinguish between the two constructs has become widespread in the academic literature (Glisson & James, 2002). Some researchers use the two terms interchangeably (e.g. Schneider 2000) while others argue that culture and climate encompass one another (e.g. Denison 1996), and others argue they are very distinct (e.g. Schein, 1983). Schein has researched extensively the field of organisational performance. A major factor underlying his work is the identification of culture(s) in organisations and the importance of organisational culture.

According to Schein (1983), culture is a dominant force within an organisation and is a permutation of the following: a) organisational rules, procedures, and processes, b) fundamental values and philosophies enforced by the organisation and therefore management, and c) observed behaviour of the employees' interaction among each other. In contrast, climate portrays organisational environments to be rooted with the organisations' value system, and the data is presented in static terms "limiting those aspects of the social environment that are consciously perceived by organisational members" (Denison, 1996 pp 623).

This thesis acknowledges the various definitions outlined above and sees culture and climate as two inter-related but distinct concepts. It is argued here that values that seem to be the central part of definitions of climate are not static in an organisation but over time are subject to change and adjustment. In this thesis those aspects of climate that encompass organisational values have been incorporated under the heading of 'culture' to simplify the reporting of the results.

An examination of the literature on organisational culture reveals that it has a relatively short history with the result that the culture and climate in some not-for-profit organisations such as international aid organisations are under-researched (Glisson, 2002). This thesis aims to add to the body of knowledge in this area.

Definitions of Culture

While previous research has established firmly the magnitude of the role of culture in organisations, it appears that the meaning of the word culture, particularly in respect to not-for-profit organisations has not been universally accepted. There are definitional issues associated with the use of "culture" in the organisational context – it means different things to different people. "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language", (Williams 1983 cited in Parker, 2000 pp.1). Schein's definition provides a useful overview of the underlying assumptions behind discussions about culture. He writes:

> …culture is not the overt behaviour of visible artefacts that one might observe if one were to visit the company. It is not even the philosophy or value system which the founder may articulate or write down in various 'charters'. Rather it is the assumptions which lie behind the values and which determine the behaviour patterns and the visible artefacts such as architecture, office layout, dress codes and so on (Schein, 1983 pp.14).

His insight provides a useful way of unpacking the various threads of culture that theorists address.

However when studying a culture, one cannot look past some of the work of Mary Douglas whose approach gives significance to the relationship of ordinary symbols, rituals, objects and activities and their contribution to social life (Douglas, 1970; Douglas, 1973; Wuthnow et al., 1986). In contrast to Foucault (1991) who places great emphasis on the general assumptions of the social sciences, Mary Douglas prefers to draw from her own examples and inductions. She questions the cultural distinctions that are vital for the functioning and performance of whole groups, as well as the means which contribute to the development of these distinctions. Her methods and approach reflect those of Durkheim (1858-1917) who examined the nature of classification systems. As a cultural anthropologist, Douglas has advanced that aspect of Durkheim's work, focusing mainly on culture and its internal patterns. From this perspective, she also explored the work of Levi-Strauss who looked at structuring as an experience that comes about as a system of paired opposites: male/female, black/white, good/evil, purity/dirt. "It is these distinctions that let us know when we have encountered a symbolic boundary" (Wuthnow et al., 1986 pp.80).

For Douglas however, classification systems are not always made up of paired opposites as Levi-Strauss suggested nor does the secret of comprehending these systems lie in identifying parallel patterns among these opposites. In forging her own path, she also distanced herself from structuralist assumptions that paired-symbolic opposites interrelate to physiologically determined patterns in the human brain. While it may well be that the brain operates on binary impulses, this does not provide an understanding as to why cultures actually get structured the way they do. Rejecting the "brain" analogy, Douglas instead referrd to the nature of social groups whereby the relationship of frequent interaction among groups of people and the messages necessary for coordinating group activity, are likely to manifest in behaviour itself, and require "only minimal articulation to speech or ritual" (Douglas, 1992 pp. 126). Douglas wrote that in some cases "adjustments are made so smoothly that one is hardly aware of the shifts of angle" or that a gradual conversion had taken place (Douglas, 1973 pp. 179). On the other hand, for a loosely knit group of people, the infrequency and diversity of activities may cause a disrupted effect and require a more concentrated effort to produce a system of articulated symbols.

Like Durkheim before her who sought to understand how seemingly non significant objects such as carved sticks or stones were in fact sacred particles (he subsequently discovered it was the key to understanding not only Australian Aboriginal art but the elementary grounds of all religious life), Douglas wanted to develop an understanding of the innermost secrets of the moral order itself. For example the concept of "dirt"; it is not earth per se that is dirty, but earth on the carpet, it is not mud per se that is dirty but mud on a chair. The point to which Douglas is leading to is that the definition of clean or dirty depends on a system of classification and the location of the matter within the system. Douglas wrote "our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classification" (Wuthnow et al., 1986 pp.88). This notion supports society's normative rules, the do's and do not's that standardise behaviour but more importantly divide reality into forms and structures, the shapes which make up the basis of human thought (a point Durkheim repeatedly emphasised on primitive classification systems as did Levi-Strauss on the logical basis of primitive thought).

Berger (Wuthnow et al., 1986 pp.88) expands on Mary Douglas' approach that dirtiness or cleanliness in not just a matter of factual location. Scraps of food on the table are dirty whereas left on the plate they are not. It is because we are socially conditioned (due to social structuring, i.e. food should be on a plate) to perceive food not on a plate as unclean that predetermines our perception and judgment. This also preludes to a moral and cognitive dimension of our constructed reality of classification (and misclassification) and our questioning of what is wrong or right. Douglas realised from this point that these tedious activities are something of a social ritual and a result of ordered relations.

From this perspective we then create what Peter Berger calls "symbolic universes" by which he meant that our reality is socially constructed and by which we define our existence. In her work *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas related our practices of cleanliness to that of primitive societies; we kill germs, they ward off spirits (Wuthnow et al., 1986 pp.88). Her point is that our fear of modern pollution is as much magic and ritual to those primitive societies. "The modern propensity to identify pollution rituals with hygiene reflects our use of conceptions of ultimate reality (science and medicine) to justify and legitimate social order. Fear of pollution is like fear of moral deviance" (Wuthnow et al., 1986 pp.88).

Our reaction to daily events is a basic social mechanism which allows us to renew and redefine social rules and boundaries. On a daily basis we discover 'what is what' by our own reaction and the reaction of others to the defiance of social rules. A simple discussion of dirt by Douglas led to a scheme linking the axial features of whole cultural systems in their social organisation. It also provided an insight to how social construction inadvertently affects and shapes the way we observe our environment.

Dirt may have no relevance to other cultural groups, but a researcher needs to examine the cultural equivalent to 'dirt' in order to gain a full understanding. This might take some ferreting, as taken-for-granted norms and symbols become reified and thus not taken out and examined, unless some crisis occurs. What then is the cultural and symbolic equivalent to 'dirt' for an aid organisation like World Vision Australia? What are the cultural norms, and how are they maintained and adopted? The desire to find how workers at World Vision Australia understand the issues

around these questions drives this thesis.

Foucault in contrast to Douglas draws attention to issues of power and resistance in institutions and organisations. He understands power through analysing resistance to it and with the theoretical recognition of 'where there is power there is resistance', (Foucault, 2002 pp.329). He saw citizens as a central target and resource for authorities. Rose (1998) taking up this theme talks about the ways in which people are subjectified and treated differently according to the situation. The tension between treating people with respect and the desire to use subjectifying techniques in order to meet targets and goals is seen to exist in all facets of life including organisations. "Techniques relating to oneself as a subject of unique capacities worthy of respect run up against practices of relating to oneself as the target of discipline, duty, and docility', (Rose, 1998 pp. 35). Rose goes on to argue that organisational goals can be met "not through the crushing of subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, by seeking to align political, social, and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfilment of the self', (Rose, 1998 pp.261).

While issues of power and the use of subjectifying techniques are important in understanding a work environment, this thesis tries to address these issues by looking at how the workers themselves see their work environment and the degree to which they believe they are treated with or without respect. I am interested to see the degree to which aligning the worker's interests with the organisation's interests is seen to occur at World Vision Australia.

The Culture of an Aid Organisation

To what extent do different criteria arise when the goal of an organisation is to help those who are disadvantaged rather than making profit for share holders? Do the same normative expectations apply? Is it the personal comforts such as an air conditioned building or a hi-tech office with all the latest equipment and the like, that creates a thriving productive employee culture? Or could it be the intangible factors, like altruism that may be spiritually up-lifting, which trigger employees to peak performance? Or perhaps it is a combination of both. This study examines the work culture of employees of a not for profit aid organisation in particular. It aims to

identify the dynamics of the work environment of World Vision Australia and the degree to which it influences the way that employees work and are committed to the values and missions of the organisation given that their skills could be better rewarded (financially and otherwise) elsewhere.

A major difference between for profit organisations and non-profit organisations is that the former is guided by equity considerations and the latter is much more guided by values (Anheier, 2005).

As noted earlier in the literature review, culture involves the normative beliefs and shared behavioural expectations in an organisational unit (Glisson & James, 2002). There is research data which indicates (Ashkanasy, et al., 2000; Hofstede, et al., 1990) that the culture of an aid organisation is communicated and is ascribable to the shared behavioural expectations and normative beliefs of employees, and not through "deeper" values or assumptions (Glisson & James, 2002 pp.770). What this means is that employees are aware of behavioural expectations and are internalizing the values and assumptions at the core of these expectations. "The assumptions and values that shape the shared expectations and norms give meaning to the dimensions of the culture they compose and explain their influence on the work environment" (Glisson & James, 2002 pp.770).

The study by Glisson and James (2002) provided empirical data that (1) culture and climate are unique factors, (2) culture and climate are "shared" within work teams and vary between work teams and (3) culture is multidimensional. Overall, the findings of their study of child welfare and juvenile justice case management teams "link team level culture and climate to individual-level job satisfaction and commitment, perceptions of service quality, and turnover" (Glisson & James, 2002 pp. 767). This may well relate to the employees of World Vision Australia who continue to work at World Vision Australia despite being able to earn more money elsewhere. This study examines whether the culture they are part of and to which they are contributing, is immersing them at a level that allows them to perhaps overlook their own personal comfort which they could gain if they were at a different job in a different workplace.

The 1980s welcomed the conceptual nascence of organisational culture and since

then there has been an increase in the literature on "organisational culture", (Parker, 2000 .pp 1). Osborne and Gaebler's findings and recommendations on the importance of culture to the performance of government agencies were adopted by several federal agencies and a number of state governments in the United States (Glisson & James, 2002 pp.768).

The importance of taking account of organisational culture has been endorsed by organisational training literature. Mahoney (2007) listed culture as the most important component to organisational success from amongst a list of seven. The remaining six C's are Cause, Cash, Capacity, Champions, Communications and Commitment. Each element is interdependent however the central nexus is "culture". Culture affects all aspects of the work environment and is a useful tool of delivering organisational benefits. Mahoney argued that a supportive culture will attract recognition and "support by way of governance, budget, resource and communications support from senior management level down" (Mahoney, 2007 pp.7), whereas an ambivalent culture will hinder organisational and environmental factors and jeopardise team and project successes. This work draws on the importance of culture and the benefits a positive culture infiltrates into the environment of an organisation.

Incentives

Part of the satisfaction of engaging in an activity is that there are intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Organisations recognise this and attempt to meet this need by providing incentives. There are three types of incentives concerning work participation. These are material, solidary[2] (characterised by or involving a community of responsibilities and interests) and purposive. Material incentives in the form of monetary rewards dominate in business firms. Government agencies attract participants that are more interested in purposive incentives, that is goal related intangible rewards and the same applies to employees of non-profit organisations in addition to the solidary incentives which result from the act of association itself. A

▪   [2] Solidary benefits involve a desire to subscribe to a particular collective or group identity

study across 11 countries found that the non-profit organisations performed a distinctive role as service providers in terms of showing more interest in the client or donor, and that the study "profoundly demonstrates the importance of values behind the functions performed by non-profit organisations" (Anheier, 2005 pp.176).

According to Clark and Wilson, solidary benefits "derive in the main from the acts of association" and include such rewards as socialising, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification, the status resulting from the membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions, and so on" (Clarke & Wilson, 1961 pp. 133). Their common characteristic is the tendency to be independent of the precise ends of the association.

Not for profit organisations not only need to meet the needs of the employees, they also need to provide the services for which they were established in addition to keeping the donors 'happy'. This can create tension as the organisations try to balance these sometimes competing needs. In a series of studies undertaken by Weisbrod (1998) it was found that non-profit organisations such as child care centres and nursing homes provided better care than for-profit organisations. For example, a comparison on the use of sedatives in nursing homes found that the church owned non-profit nursing homes used four times less the amount of sedatives than the for-profit nursing homes. The finding suggests that the for-profit homes used sedatives to control their patients because it is less costly than labour.

In the case of World Vision Australia which is accountable to its donating members, the money collected is to be used to help the poor and establish projects for struggling communities. Management is faced with conflicting priorities in instances where a staff member is not productive and is unwilling or unable to be re-trained. If it is decided that to keep on an unproductive worker is not an effective use of donors' money, how does management terminate the employment of a person from a company that states "we value people" as part of its mission statement?

This can often prove challenging for an aid organisation that wants to maintain its service provision and values and at the same time be efficient and make the most of its resources. This study will also look at the competing needs of the ideology of World Vision Australia and the financial imperative for efficient management and how

this impacts on the culture of World Vision Australia and how this translates into workplace practices. The role of management here is vital in creating a balance or strategy that ensures employees perform to the best of their ability without compromising the values and policies of the organisation or diverting too much money away from its core business.

Clements-Croome (2000) analysed many studies that have shown how productivity at work is dependent on the work environment. Based on this analysis, he identified the most important factors behind this phenomenon and set out steps "providing creative work environments which are conducive to productivity" (Clements-Croome, 2000 pp. xx). It also covered and analysed the multi-dimensional factors that affect productivity in the workplace whether they be architectural/materialistic contributors (e.g. chapters 1, 2, 3 & 4) or emotive related factors (e.g. chapters 3, 5 and 7). It also conflates many of the areas of study relevant to this thesis.

The Physical Work Environment

At World Vision Australia and like other aid organisations where space may be limited and budgets may not be flexible, working desks are placed very close to each other, with the result that most employees are aware of movements and conversations taking place around them. This can be distracting and can cause personal confinement in physical movement and actions. Clements-Croome (2000) refered to the nature of consciousness and the relationship between well being and productivity. Even though people produce less when they are tired, when they have personal issues, are stressed and dissatisfied with aspects of their job or workplace, their physical work environment can help to overcome or combat these issues or it can have the opposite effect if the environment is unsatisfactory. What is important to note here, is that in an international aid organisation, the physical environment can include images such as children in extreme poverty that are identified as visual stimulation but may also serve to make employees feel better about their own problems/situations. It could hypothetically have the reverse effect and lead to the workers becoming desensitised to the plight of the poor. The effect of such visual stimulation on workers needs to be further examined. This topic was explored during my interviews with the World Vision Australia employees.

How do neural processes occurring in our brains while we think and act in the world relate to our subjective thinking? Crick and Koch (1997) believe that the answer to this question is a central mystery of human life but stress the importance of understanding the relationship between the mind and the brain. Our consciousness and levels of concentration are aroused by the stimuli from our environment, which means that our work surroundings are inevitably going to have an effect on the way we work and on the level of our performance. Positive stimuli include clean air ventilation, personal work space, moderate room temperature (not too cold, not too hot), absence of certain odours (e.g. sewerage), a clean work area, visual stimulation (windows), sufficient light, etc… However, having an overcrowded work space, excess noise, confined personal movement (desks/workstations too close to each other), lack of fresh air, are negative stimuli which hinder performance. Are these negative stimuli reduced if the mission of the organisation is considered to be highly worthy by the employees?

Research indicates that a healthy physical environment is not enough on its own to produce a healthy working environment (Clements-Croome, 2000) especially when stress or lack of well being play a major role in lowering productivity in the workforce and in other aspects of a person's life. It has been consistently found by researchers that improved productivity and better performance also require a nourishing and encouraging environment but not in the materialistic sense, rather a good relationship with management or positive feedback are considered more important (Anheier, 2005; Parker, 2000). This point is addressed by Clements-Croome who stated that this is especially significant as "human responses are partly physiological and partly psychological" (Clements-Croome, 2000 pp. 30). Stress at work results from dissatisfaction whether it be from the work environment, the surroundings, the conditions, from employees and/or management or from some other factor. Overall stress is created from a sense of unhappiness and discontentment. On the physiological side, stress decreases the body's defence and immunity to illness, "stress acts on the mind and brain to which the hypothalamus reacts and the hormone ACTH is released, and then the hormone cortisol in the blood increases to a damaging level" (Clements-Croome, 2000 pp. 32). However on an emotional level, it can affect self confidence, morale and overall well being.

Clements-Croome and Kaluarachchi (2000) explored the critical factors in producing a work environment that is conductive to good health in employees as health, well being and quality of work life are associated with performance and productivity. Clement-Croome sought to move the debate towards practical outcomes in order to find ways that can link productivity with a healthy work environment by concentrating on ways to measure productivity even though there is very little information or assessment procedures that have been established within organisations. Clements-Croome (2000) focused on exploring the effects of emotional and behavioural well being on productivity and ways to identify these factors. While Clements-Croome's main interest is on the productivity aspect, this differs from the focus of this research which is on the workers and their wellbeing, however his work is most useful in providing the concepts and the background as a basis for this thesis.

Workplace Stress and Well Being

Generally speaking, stress or lack of well being at work, is a response to situations and events that place special demands on an individual which can have outcomes for both the workers and employers (Clements-Croome, 2000). Cooper and Robertson (1990) stated that when identifying stress levels in the workplace, one would find that the people who are discontented with the indoor environment would be the same people that expressed high job dissatisfaction or a low mental well being (Clements-Croome, 2000). The big question however is: how can workplace stress be measured? Ilgen and Schneider (1991) identified three categories for the methods of performance measurement; these are physiological, objective and subjective. Chapter 10 explores these methods in detail, however these will be discussed briefly because out of the three, only one is applicable to this study, namely the subjective method. The physiological method is concerned with measuring the increased activity or arousal in the nervous system which is linked to the level of stress of the operator. Cardiovascular measures (heart rate, blood pressure), respiratory system (respiration rate, oxygen consumption), nervous system (brain activity, muscle tension, pupil size), are among the common methods used for physiological measurements. However, Meister (1986) questions the validity of these tests. Criticisms are based on the lack of evidence, and his belief that the measures are "highly sensitive to contaminating conditions" (Clements-

Croome, 2000 pp.130). Meister also found that the tests are intrusive such as the method of measuring pupil dilation which changes with concentration, and impractical as job restrictions can limit the number of physiological measures used at the one time. This thesis does not use this method.

The second category to measure mental workload is referred to as objective measures (O'Donnell and Eggemeier, 1986) or task performance. Task performance is used to deduce the amount of both mental and physical workload. This is achieved by manipulating a single task and evaluating the performance. Variations are assumed to reflect change in the workplace (this is referred to as a primary task performance measurement) or it is achieved by presenting one task to the person and then a second task is added or performance is compared across two different tasks and changes in performance are noted (this is known as secondary task performance measurement). The advantages of task based measurement are that it has high face validity, and is proficient for use in quantitative and empirical research. However there are also disadvantages in that "conclusions based on task performance allude to the limited resource model, namely that individuals have a finite pool of resources which can be devoted to one task or distributed among tasks" (Clements-Croome, 2000 pp.130). Therefore it is remarkably difficult to attempt to cross calibrate diverse measures across tasks. If this model does not hold, then conclusions from this method are deemed void. This method was not deemed appropriate for my study.

The third category is subjective measures which are used to extract from the subject's perception the level of load he or she is facing in task performance. Rating scales, questionnaires, and face-to-face interviews are used to collect views of workload. While these methods do not have the empirical appeal of physiological or objective measures, many have argued, such as Harvey and Denton (1999) and O'Donnell and Eggemeier (1986), that subjective measures are the most appropriate as individuals are more likely to work with their feelings, without thought to what physiological or behavioural performance measures may imply. O'Donnell and Eggemeier (1986) stated that the advantages of subjective measures include: easy to perform and implement, non intrusive, low cost, sensitive to workload variations and offer a variety of techniques (Clements-Croome, 2000). Thus the use of face-to-

face interviews to gather subjective data was deemed most appropriate for this study.

Studies, such as the one conducted by Harvey and Denton (1999) who interviewed sixty six employees about their work environment, and the Maidenhead UK case study examining productivity and the workplace (Clements-Croome and Kaluarachchi 1997) where 100 participants were interviewed, have shown that emotional and behavioural effects relating to the environment can be assessed much more easily by interviews compared with physiological measurements. Their research endorses the findings of previous researchers (Clements-Croome, 2000; Quinn Patton, 2002) and confirms the essential link between employee satisfaction and an improved workplace environment, whereby the relationship between employees and management leads to organisational learning and creativity.

These findings are very important and relevant to this thesis considering that this is a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews are the main source of data used to assess the dynamics of the World Vision Australia work environment as perceived through its employees. More importantly, if well being or lack of it in the workplace attributes so significantly to performance, then the interviews conducted with World Vision Australia employees are a vital measurement tool to the aims of this thesis. The interviews were also used to identify the culture in the World Vision Australia work environment.

In the following chapters, the issues raised here will be explored in the context of the research project and its findings.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore and examine the main components of the work environment of an aid organisation as it related to its employees. The experiences of participants and their stories of work related incidents formed a central part of the study.

A qualitative research approach was adopted in which individuals were interviewed and asked to describe and reflect on their experiences as an employee of World Vision Australia.

There are two main methodological approaches used in research, namely quantitative and qualitative. The difference between these two methods is that quantitative research is usually based on a particular theory, carried out with a hypothesis and is driven by statistics and the need to carefully address measurement requirements. In contrast qualitative research is less concerned, if at all, with hypotheses and statistical analysis; instead this approach frequently focuses on understanding lived experiences and ideals. Despite the contrast between these two approaches, Stiles (1993) suggests that both methods need not be classified as oppositional: "Accepting qualitative research as viable need not deny the value of traditional experimental design, quantitative measurement, and statistical analysis… accounting for the range and depth of human experience" (Stiles, 1993).

What is increasingly gaining popularity in recent times is the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in specific areas of study (Tan, 2000). Although some researchers have claimed that they are quite distinct and not easily combined, this view has been challenged recently as mixed methods approaches have been found to be extremely useful and practical (Bazeley, 2004). The option to use both methods for this study was a consideration however after carefully studying the data, it was deemed more appropriate to use a qualitative methodology because this was an exploratory study and was focussed on obtaining rich data that could access some of the nuances of the work environment at World Vision Australia. It should be noted that the method of research chosen should be determined in terms of

suitability for the area of study and not which approach is seen to have more scientific validity, because conclusions from both methods can yield useful and valid results. "Where only statistics, experimental designs, and survey research once stood, researchers have opened up to ethnography, unstructured interviews, textual analysis and historical studies" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Connelly (1998) best described the positive element of each of the above methods by claiming that "quantitative work aims to produce generalisations but can tell us little about causal relations, whereas qualitative work can help to identify relations of causality but is unable to generalise from these", (Gomm et al., 2000 pp.236).

While acknowledging the advantages of using both approaches, this study which is also about theory management seemed to be best suited to a qualitative approach due to the epistemological nature of this project. The qualitative approach provided the opportunity to explore at greater depth the culture of an aid organisation and to tease out some of the complexities surrounding it.

Within a qualitative methodology, there are many approaches, methods and techniques such as ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, case studies, survey research etc… (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Case studies

Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, health, education and economics have employed and adapted the case study approach in qualitative research. A case study can be simple or complex; it can be used to research an individual, group, organisation, specific culture, community or country. Case studies serve to educate and enlighten.

Case studies have often focused on exploring unusual and unique cases. However, they also allow the researcher to study phenomenon in their real life context and maintain a holistic approach to understanding the events, organisations, relationships and individuals associated with the phenomenon and focus on understanding the dynamics of the event (Yin 2003).

A case study is a combination of both the process of learning about a case and the

product of our learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It has a conceptual structure organised around specific issues rather than predetermined questions. Yin (2003) found four common elements of the case study approach after analysing three well crafted research efforts. These common elements are: to grasp and bring expert knowledge upon the phenomena studied, to collate all relevant data, to examine rival interpretations and finally to ponder and probe the implications the findings may have elsewhere. He concluded that most naturalistic, phenomenological or ethnographic case studies require accurate description and disciplined interpretation. Importantly, they require respect and curiosity for difference. Thus the case study approach requires the discipline to engage in meticulous and careful analysis of the data followed by a careful auditing process.

The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey described any case study involving humans as a method to "capitalise upon the natural powers of people to experience and understand" (Gomm et al., 2000 pp. 20). The purpose of a case study is to study a particular group or institution, rarely is one case study used to draw conclusion for a whole population. William Blake in 1808 wrote "To generalise is to be an idiot. To particularise is the lone distinction of merit" (Gomm et al., 2000 pp.22). While this assessment may be a little harsh, the point is taken. In some instances, like the analysis of a particular organisation, generalisations do not seem the appropriate course to take.

There are three dominant types of case studies and each has its own underlying assumptions about the intention and focus of the project. The first is called *intrinsic case study* and is chosen by a researcher because he or she has a personal interest in the study and is striving to understand a particular case. Examples of intrinsic case studies are: teenage prostitution, single mothers, children coping with the divorce of their parents, the role of a school principal and so on… An intrinsic case study begins with an intrinsic interest and develops into a research (Gomm et al., 2000). The second type is the *instrumental case study*. In this instance the case is used as evidence or support to a specific theory. A researcher would select an instrumental case study to develop a further understanding of something else in which he/she has an interest so as to pursue insight into an issue. Therefore in this instance, the case study plays a supportive secondary role. Grbich refers to Arona

Ragins who in 1995 interviewed and observed 25 low income, Afro-Americans who attended a sickle cell clinic (sickle cell disease is an inherited blood disorder that affects red blood cells) as an example of the instrumental approach, emphasising that "it extends beyond individual cases and explores social context, joining micro and macro structures to identify the factors that may be self inhibiting self-care" (Grbich, 1999 pp. 189).

Next is the *collective case study.* This type of case study involves the comparison or contrast of different locations whereby the researcher studies a number of cases collectively in order to understand a phenomenon. For example, this might have been appropriate if this research had wanted to compare how World Vision operates in Australia in contrast to how it operates in other countries.

World Vision Australia was the case study selected and the views of a number of its employees were sought. This research adopts the intrinsic case study due to my personal interest in the matter, a result of having previously worked at World Vision Australia and becoming intrigued with the dynamics of the work environment.

Ethnography

An ethnographic case study was chosen as most applicable to the data collated and the aim of this thesis. I had a long history as an employee at World Vision Australia and so I had the opportunity to observe it from the inside out. I also had access to data and to people who still worked there and an opportunity to spend time observing the cultural milieu.

Ethnography is concerned with the study of culture and more specifically cultural anthropology. It is a process of actively and comprehensively understanding a group of people and discovering the meanings people give to particular issues (Webber & Bessant, 2001 pp. 38). This requires researchers to observe the setting of their study, immerse themselves in the culture of the setting and collect data in a systematic manner (Brewer, 2000). "The ethnographer eats with the group, works with them, relaxes with them, and hopefully comes to understand them" (Agar, 1996 pp.6). The desired outcome of any ethnographic research undertaken is to obtain and make known the understandings and meanings constructed by people as they

go about their daily life. Woods (1972) stated after completing an ethnographic study of fire fighters, "it has alerted me to the fact that there are significant differences in the cultural knowledge of various people, even though they may live in the same town only a few blocks apart" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972 pp.129).

Ethnography is a demanding exercise for a researcher who chooses to become involved in a certain environment for a considerable period of time. It is a long term involvement with participants in their own territory with the purpose of viewing reality through their eyes. Hence this is the reason why ethnography is often termed "naturalism" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 pp. 6), meaning studying the world in its "natural" state.

There are three main approaches of ethnographic studies. These are: classical ethnography, critical ethnography and postmodern/poststructural ethnography. Classical ethnography is predominately underpinned by theories of structural functionalism or interaction (Grbich, 1999). In this instance the researcher tries to be neutral in that he or she does not have a vested interest in the outcomes and seeks to have a minimal impact on the setting or the participants. The main objective of the researcher is to obtain a thorough observational analysis over time and to make sound and reflective observations. This approach requires working on minimal a priori assumptions which is necessary for the success and execution of classical ethnography cases.

Critical ethnography is based on the perspectives of Karl Marx, Max Horkheimer and Jurgen Habermas which require the researcher to address the distribution of power and work on the assumptions that 1) people have false ideologies regarding the hierarchies of power, 2) people in every society are dissatisfied, and 3) society is dominated by certain powerful hegemonic practices which serve to maintain a specific world view (May, 1997 pp. 198) . The researcher's role is to be actively involved and critical during the research and while analysing the study.

Postmodern/poststructural ethnography focuses on the dialogue of power relations within which both the researcher and researched have been constructed. Researchers do not speak for others but rather display participants' voices as well as their own, in revealing the setting's realities and complexities (Grbich, 1999).

For this study, classical ethnography was chosen as being the most appropriate. My experience of working at World Vision Australia left me intrigued, wanting to know more about the people at World Vision Australia and the environment of World Vision Australia. However, I must acknowledge that without a doubt, I had many taken-for-granted assumptions about the organisation and the workers' views about the organisation and to the best of my ability I have tried to examine them and put them to one side.

When observing data collated through an ethnographic study, the process of observation specific to classical and critical ethnography usually falls under three categories; (1) *descriptive observation* whereby the researcher covers the whole setting in a broad dissecting manner, (2) *focused observation* which involves comprehensive imploration into a specific part of the domain, and (3) when *selective dimensions of contrast* are sought for known categories (Grbich, 1999). From the data collated, there were certain areas/themes that surfaced more often than others which led to the method of *focused observation* when looking for theories and cases relevant to the information gained from the interviews. This helped narrow the search dramatically specific to the areas of relevance.

A constant concern associated with ethnographic research is the matter of representation whereby the data is seen as a product of the researcher's perception instead of a factual observation of the domain (Grbich, 1999). There have been many cases where an area of study was undertaken by two researchers with completely different outcomes. A famous disagreement is that of Oscar Lewis and Robert Redfield, who both studied a Mexican town with contrasting accounts of observation. Another example is that of Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune who disagreed over the male role in the Arapesh community of New Guinea. There are many such instances in recent times of two people studying the same phenomenon although until a few years ago it was uncommon for an anthropologist to conduct a re-study. The disagreements noted above demonstrate that an ethnographic study places a great deal of responsibility, trust and power at the fingertips of the researcher who needs to be extremely careful about the interpretation of the data. It is very important with any ethnographic study for the researcher to allow issues to arise or eventuate in their due course rather than attempt to control any proceedings

for the sake of proving or disproving a predetermined hypothesis.

Narrative

When people describe their environment and social milieu it is often fruitful to allow them to tell stories about incidents that have occurred as a way of illustrating certain points. "The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world… both phenomenon and method" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 pp. 3). Narrative inquiry involves composition and written presentation of the interpretations from events, human actions and experiential accounts (Laverty, 2003). Narrative allows the respondent to tell stories about their experiences, rather than answer specific questions. Narrators either directly or indirectly give their own interpretation and evaluation of events. However, these accounts take place within historical, political and economic settings that provide a necessary backdrop to understanding a situation. The study of narrative is about people and it is an important structure for human experience which is juxtaposed with many of the social sciences. For this reason, the use of narratives was adopted for this research project.

Narratology is used across many disciplines of research such as literary theory, history, anthropology, drama, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, education, as well as aspects of evolutionary biological science. "Narrative analysis gives a researcher access to the textual interpretative world of the teller, which presumably in some way mediates or manages reality" (Cortazzi, 2002 pp.385). Cortazzi goes on to point out that the cultural conventions and the context within which they occur together with the teller's motive and intention, all need to be considered. Thus researchers have the task of re-storying the stories they have collated for the purpose of their research. Elbow (1986) called the process of narrative "the believing game" whereby "the central event is the act of affirming or entering into someone's thinking or perceiving" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 pp. 4). It involves forming a relationship with the participants that is both cooperative and collaborative. It is very important when adopting the process of narrative research that all participants feel equal to each other and also feel that their stories are of value to the researcher.

Data for narrative research can be collated in various means some of which are: journal records, field notes, interview transcripts, other's observations, story telling,

letter writing, autobiographical writing and documents such as newsletters. However, researchers do need to be careful when reading and/or listening to narratives because they are drawn to stories that are bizarre, exotic, dramatic and may disregard particular attention to "mundane" rituals that may be vital to their research (Fine et al., 2003 pp.185).

Reliability and validity are questioned when narrative is used as a scientific tool in the quantitative paradigm. In many instances narrative has different aims from quantitative research and in some instances this is also true for some types of qualitative research which require tests for reliability. According to Cohen and Manion "reliability and validity become redundant notions for every interpersonal situation that may be said to be valid" (Peterson, 2001 pp.5). In this sense, it is the views and interpretations of the actors that are of interest not some so-called objective measure. When a researcher identifies with the protagonist of a story and is then able to relay it in its essence, we are able to experience their life situation, giving a new insight to the human condition (Peterson, 2001). This gives their story life and provides valuable insights.

Participants

There were 10 participants, 5 male and 5 female with ages ranging from 18 to 60 in this study. They hold varying positions and responsibilities at World Vision Australia with 7 at the customer service level in the customer service centre and 3 at a senior management level within the customer service centre. A senior manager distributed an email to World Vision Australia employees advising of my study and my request for volunteers. Those interested were asked to provide their details to the sender who then passed this information to me and I then contacted the participants and arranged a time for the interview. I had informed the participants that the duration of each interview would be approximately 20 minutes, however many interviews stretched for much longer than anticipated because the participants shared a great deal of information with me and were willing to discuss their issues/concerns relating to my questions in great detail. Participation was wholly voluntary and participants were from various religious upbringings, some from non religious backgrounds, some practising Christians. None of the participants identified themselves as

atheists or non spiritual.

Many of the employees were from diverse ethnic groups such as Indian, Sri Lankan, South African, Italian, and English. Some had worked there for at least a year while some had been there for 5 years and more. All participants were from the Customer Service Centre however some had previously worked in other departments such as Marketing and Information Technology.

The interviews were completed over a period of six months. Participants were very candid and assisted the research immensely by sharing their professional and personal views of World Vision Australia's work environment, ethics and policies.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was sought and obtained from the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) which is formed with the provisions of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999). See Appendix A for copy of letter of approval.

An application was completed and submitted to the HREC. The application required information about the research topic and its aim, the method of recruiting participants, the questions that will be asked during interviewing, how the information will be noted and where it will be stored. Also, required was a copy of the consent letters and forms that each participant and organisation must read and sign prior to any interviews being conducted. This process was quite lengthy and involved a few resubmissions as the application was rejected on two occasions due to lack of explicit information required by the HREC. Once that was completed, participants were sought and interviews were conducted.

All subjects were assured of strict confidentiality and informed that all study details supplied by them and the information gathered would be retained in a password-protected file. Hard copies are stored under lock and key in a filing cabinet at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Research Centre.

Interviews

The interviewing process has two specific purposes; to gather experiential material to be used in narrative so as to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon, and to create a conversational relationship with the interviewee (Peterson, 2001 pp.5). If the researcher is able to establish trust with the participants, it is more likely the interview will resemble a normal conversation, tapping into the participants' personal experiences.

Babbie (1998) highlights many advantages of using interviews such as better response rate than written surveys, respondent willingness to participate, enhanced opportunity to address all questions, and very importantly, the opportunity to explore issues as they arise. The opportunity to gather rich data was realised in the interviews conducted with the World Vision Australia participants. The one on one interviews allowed for issues and themes to be further explored during the interview, a luxury not afforded in questionnaires or surveys. And due to the sensitivity of some of these issues and themes, respondents were able to express themselves freely perhaps due to the anonymity of their identity and/or due to the absence of other World Vision Australia employees. Babbie (1998) does acknowledge that while there may be some concerns with reliability, validity is enhanced with personal interviews, particularly if coding is meticulously done and analysis is conducted in an orderly manner that allows for checks to be in place. Once a participant had raised an issue, the next participant was probed to see what his or her experiences were in respect to the matter raised.

This thesis is studying the way in which the employees view their work environment which makes face-to-face interviews a highly appropriate research method. The serious problem involved in drawing inferences from responses under experimental conditions, or from what is said in interviews, to what people do in everyday life, have come to be listed under the heading of "ecological validity" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 pp. 10). Chemical substances, for example, do not usually behave differently inside and outside the walls of laboratories but human subjects do behave differently according to context (research settings versus everyday settings). Hammersley and Atkinson believe that the problem with ecological validity lies in the

procedures researchers use to interpret the responses of subjects and also consider there to be serious difficulties involved in interpreting the responses of the participants which result in inaccurate and misleading conclusions. "Naturalism proposes that the social world should be studied in its natural state and should not be disturbed by the researcher" and therefore "natural" not "artificial" settings such as formal interviews should be the primary source of data" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 pp. 6).

It is acknowledged that any disturbance into a social scene does have some impact on the environment itself, but mechanisms can be put into place to ensure that this is minimalised. This involves disturbing the routine or the work environment as little as possible, being low key and non-intrusive. The interviews conducted for the purpose of this study did not appear to disturb the "natural state" of the World Vision Australia work environment. Responses of participants were taped and transcribed and the tone of the voice and visual nuances were noted and interpreted.

Data collection involved a semi-structured interview technique, using a number of probing questions about the work place environment as well as some open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe their experiences in the way they saw fit. The general types of questions are listed in Appendix B. These centred on a few themes such as personal satisfaction with the work environment, issues with management and/or colleagues, cause/lack of motivation at work, religion at work, as well as harmony within the work environment.

Data analysis

Qualitative researchers use thematic, semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, and phonemic analysis. Some are suited better to a particular methodology. The experiences and perceptions of the participants were rich in information which needed to be categorised in a way that would make it possible to discover the meanings underlying their accounts of working in an aid organisation and to find interpretations which were congruent with their perceptions. This project used thematic analysis because it seemed to be the most appropriate to the task at hand. The aim of this analysis was to discover what recurring themes the employees presented in regard to their work environment and their satisfaction with

it. This was then taken one step further in order to situate the employees' stories of their work experiences within the formal mission of this organisation. In this way contradictions as well as consistencies between the two were explored.

Straus and Corbin (1989) describe a way of categorising data from interviews and suggest that in order to give an authentic account of the dialogue, each of the concepts which appear in the data should be identified and summarised with a word or a phrase of several key words. Phrases and words which are related to similar themes are then grouped together under a label which describes the common or similar theme. Most of the initial coding was done by hand written notes of the transcripts and by shuffling transcripts sheets and notes around. Often this was a messy task with me chasing trails that didn't lead anywhere or where I had difficulty systematising the coding and retrieving vital points. After coming to accept that coding can be a messy business and that some views are outliers while others are consistent with other participants, I was able to move forward. I also found that I needed to be reflexive, to take time out and let my unconscious work for me. Helen Marshall's (2002) article on coding was immensely helpful to me in this process.

How do we know that our findings are representative of the study phenomena? In a study based on symbolic interactionism, the research question must be related to the research aims, be appropriate for the research phenomenon and data collection must follow the logical direction of analysis. The researcher needs to demonstrate that analytic decisions follow directly from the analysis which is grounded in empirical data (Strauss, 1987). Tracking this process allows the researcher to explain to colleagues and supervisors why particular theoretical decisions were made and how the analysis directed the researcher to ask particular questions of particular participants. Participants are also important for feedback about the study findings. A researcher using this framework is aiming to understand and explain the processes that participants use in their everyday life. A rigorous and well-executed case study will demonstrate how the participants see their world and how they make sense of it.

Based on the interviews, themes were identified around aspects of the work environment and participants' responses to it, which are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter:

The methods and methodologies applied in this study are fundamental in bringing the data into perspective and "to life". The collecting of data and the subsequent analysis was constructed out of the stories and examples that the participants told as they tried to make sense of their working life at World Vision Australia. The interviews were carefully coded line by line to extract out the themes and to develop an understanding of the workings of an aid organisation from the viewpoint of the employees. It also allowed me to group ideas and to categorise themes as I went along. Because the analysis was done in progression, new questions could emerge as a new theme emerged. The careful coding and analysis enabled me as the researcher to see why certain behaviours or policies either implicitly or explicitly endorsed by World Vision Australia appeared to work even though they may not necessarily do so in a commercial setting as opposed to a welfare setting.

ABOUT WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA

"World Vision is committed to the poor because we are Christian. We work with people of all cultures, faiths and genders to achieve transformation.

Our vision is a world that no longer tolerates poverty".

World Vision Australia

"A report in Britain by the Charities Aid Foundation has compared the giving of individuals in the world's wealthiest countries. On overall private giving to those in need, at home and overseas, Australians are fourth after the US, Canada and Britain. But we know from other studies that Australia rises even higher when its private giving to overseas aid is compared. Australians rank only second to the Irish when it comes to giving to the 1 billion people on the planet who live in extreme poverty".

Tim Costello 2007
CEO of World Vision Australia

This chapter describes World Vision's mission, role and history as it appears in their official literature, website and other publications. It also examines some other material about World Vision Australia that is readily available to the public. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a backdrop against which the participants' views can be measured. In other words, to identify if the loving, caring and Christian image World Vision Australia portrays to the public is reflected within its work environment and also if World Vision Australia does what it claims to do in respect to its employees and in the way it conducts its business.

What is World Vision and what does it do?

World Vision is a global non-denominational, Christian humanitarian aid and development agency, founded in the USA during the 1950s before expanding into

Australia in 1966. Initially World Vision raised money for poor malnourished children however, "in the 1970s World Vision's focus broadened from assisting the individual child to include community development" (World Vision Australia, 2001 pp. 2). The well-being of children is World Vision's main focus and always has been, and so child sponsorship is its main avenue for fundraising. Sponsorship involves a monthly financial commitment from donors to specific children overseas and the sponsor makes a long term commitment to contribute to community programs that benefit that child, the child's family and the community.

World Vision embraces the term community because through its vision and work, its aim is to create long term solutions for communities that are poverty stricken. Its mission is not just to provide food and water and clothes for the sponsored children which it claims is only a short term solution but to provide avenues that allow for long term sustainability. While education, health and nutrition are the immediate priorities of many sponsorship projects, there are other ways that World Vision helps families, such as agriculture, adult literacy and income generation in order for them to become more self-reliant. Along with attending to these essential needs, World Vision uses the money raised for each child for use by the wider community to either set up a school, build a well for water, plant a garden of vegetables, teach parents skills to look for work etc… World Vision aims to "build sustainable communities" through these long term solutions which will hopefully ensure that the family will have food to eat tomorrow (not just today), and the day after (World Vision Australia, 2001).

World Vision places great emphasis on building schools within disadvantaged communities. A school means education, so if the parents have not been able to get a good job due to their inability to read or write, the child will learn these vital skills at school and have a better chance at getting a job when they are older. The aim is to improve the lifestyles of these disadvantaged communities whose members are living in such poverty and in an environment that lacks vital resources. Through its work with these projects, World Vision believes the sponsored children and their families benefit and so too will the whole community.

World Vision Australia

World Vision Australia is known to many Australians through various means,

predominantly through its marketing programs. Advertisements by World Vision Australia requesting donors for child sponsorship are very frequent and constant on Australian television. Many of their advertisements for child sponsorship have featured a famous Australian identity promoting the benefits of child sponsorship. More recently, footage of children and their families in poverty stricken countries feature strongly in the advertisements to show Australians the conditions and the poverty these children and their families endure and how by sponsoring we can help create a better environment for them. No doubt their marketing department will have advised that this is an effective way to gain sympathy and therefore donations. There are advertisements on television asking for donations by World Vision Australia whenever a crisis/disaster in the world occurs. For example, if an earthquake hits China, within a short time World Vision Australia would have organised and readied itself to take calls and collect donations to assist those affected by the disaster through advertising.

World Vision Australia also conducts programs within the Australian community such as the "40 Hour Famine" which many schools, children and families participate in and contribute to (World Vision Australia, 2005a). The 40 Hour Famine is an annual event whereby participants seek sponsors to give them money if they abstain from food for 40 hours and the money raised is then donated to World Vision Australia. The 40 Hour Famine is very popular and through this program, many children and families become familiar with World Vision Australia and the work it does.

Other ways World Vision Australia seeks to become well known and 'trusted' within Australian culture is through open communication with the Australian public. Whether it is via the release of annual reports that show how much funding (from the government and the public) World Vision Australia has received and how it has been distributed (freely available to view on their website), or via the media reports that detail the work of the employees of World Vision Australia overseas and how the sponsors' contributions is making this world a better place. World Vision Australia also publishes many newsletters, project updates and discussion papers (Project Freedom Trade for Development, Pulse, Women of Vision,) that are available free of charge via their website or head office (Parris, 1999; Volunteers with Vision, 2004; World Vision Australia, 2005c; World Vision Women of Vision, 2005).

To complement the open communication approach noted earlier, World Vision Australia has a policy of directly linking a child with a sponsor through correspondence between the sponsor and the child via mail. If the child can write, a copy of the original letter and the translation letter written by the World Vision field officer are sent to the sponsor. If the sponsored child cannot write, the field officer writes the letter on behalf of the child. This allows the sponsor to be advised of what changes/benefits/improvements their money is making to their sponsored child's life. Sponsors may also apply to visit the child. These options serve to increase the trust of the Australian public in World Vision Australia and give credibility to the work it does.

Activities of World Vision Australia

World Vision Australia also runs a volunteers program with a department of over 2500 volunteer members who contribute over 75000 hours annually to World Vision Australia's work. The National Volunteer Program has been so successful that it now has a quarterly magazine called Pulse (Volunteers with Vision, 2004), and trained volunteer supervisors in charge of the quality control aspect of the work. Volunteers at the National Office are joined by volunteers from The Body Shop, National Australia Bank and the ANZ Bank as part of their paid community work. Students are also encouraged to volunteer as part of the Community Service and Work Experience programs. Suffice to say, World Vision Australia does encourage and invite community participation and involvement.

It has been consistently found that highly religious people are more likely to be involved in volunteering and give a greater amount of time and money than non religious people (Gibson, 2008; Regnerus et al., 2003; Smith, 2005). Research by World Vision Australia (World Vision Australia, 2004) has shown that those who attend church regularly or have a leadership role, are more likely to help others from developing countries and 89% of church-goers say that helping people overseas is important to their faith. And considering that 68% of the Australian population identified themselves as Christian in the 2001 Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001), it is not surprising that many Christian bodies would be willing to support and donate to World Vision Australia.

In Australia, World Vision has become an icon of humanity and charity through its image and through the work it does. It also has many affiliations with various Christian bodies and churches such as the Christian City Church in Melbourne and Hillsong Church (World Vision Australia, 2003 pp. 26). Hillsong is Australia's largest non denominational Christian organisation with over 15000 followers in NSW. Their website features an advertisement for World Vision Australia which promotes child sponsorship. In 2004 when Sudan was left with 1.4 million displaced people due to civil unrest, the congregation of Hillsong church raised and donated $106,000 to World Vision Australia's work in Sudan (Hillsong Church, 2004). This is one of many Christian organisation or bodies that supports World Vision Australia and its mission. In response to the support World Vision Australia receives from its Church Partnerships and affiliations, in 2004 "Grid: A Christian Leadership Letter" was released. It is a published 3 times a year and focuses on Christianity and Christian related topics (World Vision Australia, 2005a).

About Tim Costello: CEO of World Vision Australia

As the Chief Executive of World Vision Australia, Tim Costello leads an organisation of over 500 staff, with an annual income of over $300 million, and more than 400,000 children overseas sponsored by Australians.

In February 2004, Reverend Tim Costello was welcomed as the new CEO of World Vision Australia. In July 2004 he was named Victorian of the Year for his work as an anti gambling crusader and welfare advocate, and in 2006 Tim Costello was named Victorian Australian of the Year. The Victoria Day Awards recognise individuals and groups who have made significant and valuable contributions to Victorian communities. Since Rev Tim Costello became the Chief Executive Officer of World Vision Australia there have been a number of humanitarian disasters, many of which he witnessed first hand and he has "seen the most inspiring human responses to suffering" (World Vision Australia, 2007). After the tsunami disaster of Boxing Day 2004, Costello travelled immediately to the devastated area, and his presence made national headlines and "added significant weight to the World Vision appeal" (World Vision Australia, 2007). His high profile has assisted the popularity of World Vision Australia as a major charity and drawn attention to the plight of the poor and those

affected by wars and disasters, particularly in Third World countries.

Annual Reports for 2005 and 2006

The annual reports summarised below detail the work achieved by World Vision Australia providing an insight of how the organisation operates in regards to expenditure and funding.

World Vision Australia 2005 Annual Report (World Vision Australia, 2005d)
(as audited and compiled by Ernst & Young in November 2005 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards)

This was the year that drew a huge public response in the aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day Asia Tsunami disaster. World Vision Australia raised $106.4 million through various appeals to help the survivors of the tsunami

World Vision Australia's 2005 Financial year (as at 30 September 2005) recorded a significant increase in resources for their work overseas, as well as continuing with the trend of strong income growth and reduced administration fees.

Some of the highlights are:

- 21% increase in the number of people who helped, up from 10.4 million last year to 12.6 million

- 23% increase in donations from the Australian public

- The number of children sponsored by Australians grew by 38,080 to 360,241

- Overall income increased by $129.6 million or 55.3% on the previous year

- Donations from the Australian public amounted to $296.5 million (up 68.7%)

- 479 projects were funded by World Vision Australia in 63 countries and an additional 11 projects were funded aimed at eliminating child trafficking

- 80% of income was used for charitable purposes

- $800,000.00 was spent on programs aimed at improving the health and life chances of Australians living in remote indigenous communities

- Implementation of new supporter information system which is improving administration and fundraising cost efficiency

World Vision Australia 2006 Annual Report (World Vision Australia, 2006b)
(as audited and compiled by Ernst & Young in November 2006 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards)

This was the year of the Make Poverty History global campaign in which World Vision Australia took part. "In Australia, **MAKE** POVERTY **HISTORY** is a coalition of aid agencies, community groups and celebrities. Along with partner Micah Challenge, an alliance of Australian churches and Christian groups, over 50 Australian organisations participated in the campaign" (Make Poverty History Australia, 2005).

Some of the highlights are:

- 400,000 Australians helped over 12.4 million people through 678 projects in 57 of the world's poorest countries

- Number of children sponsored increased by 30,133 to 390,374 (up 8%)

- 78.3% of funds were spent on helping communities through relief and development activities

- Cost saving initiatives reduced administration and overheads by $1 million

- More than 100,000 Australians took part in the Make Poverty History campaign

- An increase in global vaccination coverage of 5% in the 1970s to over 70% today

Values of World Vision Australia

As with many aid organisations, World Vision Australia has values that the public and its management expect to be reflected in the workplace and through the way the work is carried out by its employees within the organisation. In the 2006 Financial Statement and in each Annual Report and Financial Statement released in previous years, the following appears "World Vision Australia has adopted a set of core values

and a mission statement which are distributed to all employees. The directors regularly review these values and mission statement to ensure that World Vision Australia's organisational practices reflect best practice in corporate governance" (World Vision Australia, 2006a pp. 11).

The core values of World Vision Australia as stated on their website are:

"We are Christian
We are committed to the poor
We value people
We are stewards
We are partners
We are responsive" (World Vision Australia, 2005b)

As important as these values may appear for perhaps the donors, perspective donors, management and staff, they can be conflicting and difficult to achieve simultaneously. This thesis will later delve into this important issue that will look at contradictory factors within the organisation and how difficult it is to balance these values which are also a social responsibility and an internal liability.

World Vision Australia is driven by an underlying philosophy based on Christian ideology and teachings around equity and social justice and concern particularly for the welfare of children in Third World countries. On all printed and electronic releases as well as all publications by World Vision Australia, the following caption will be found which reads "World Vision of Australia is a Christian organisation pursuing freedom, justice, peace and opportunity for everyone in the world". This philosophy is intended to influence not only the way World Vision Australia uses the funding it receives but also, ideally permeates through the management structure and the way human services operate. World vision Australia has a program that seeks to make employees aware of the Christian ethics of the organisation during orientation and they are expected to reflect this philosophy in the ways in which they relate to each other and to their tasks. This drive to connect the various operations of the organisation even permeates in the way the building is decorated.

World Vision Australia- The premises

Upon entering the building of World Vision Australia, you are surrounded by large portraits of children in third world countries. Some are of women and children smiling but the majority are of malnourished children. In some pictures the children look content and, in others they look unclean and shy. They show poverty in the surroundings, in the clothes, in the uncleanliness of the subjects in the portrait. These are the people or as World Vision Australia phrases it, "the communities" that they are helping.

World Vision Australia- The work

World Vision Australia's core business comes from the Australian public who sponsor a child living in poverty overseas. The money is donated on a monthly basis and is ongoing until the sponsor decides to no longer continue with their commitment. The money donated is used to provide for the child food, clothes, bed if these are lacking considerably and then the money is used for community projects that will also benefit the child as mentioned earlier, whether it is setting up a school to educate the child in, or assisting in preparing land for harvest to feed the community, or perhaps grow produce to sell. This also creates jobs for members of the community who will be responsible for the land and selling the produce. In each community there is at least one field officer who supervises these projects and ensures that the money is spent where necessary and as planned.

Drucker who has worked for 40 years with non-profit institutions raises some useful and pertinent points about the importance of using administrative and/or business principles in not for profit organisations. Based on his experience of effective management practices he wrote a book *Managing the Non-Profit Organisation. In this book he explains that* forty years ago "management" was considered a very bad word in non profit organisations because it meant "business" and managers thought that this concept ran counter to the aim of the organisation which was to help people in need. He claims that in more recent times the "non-profit" institutions themselves know that they need management all the more" (Drucker, 1990 pp. xv) because "strategy converts a non-profit institution's mission and objectives into performance" (Drucker, 1990 pp. 99). He believes that strategies are needed in any effective non-

profit institution to enable it to innovate and to improve the effectiveness and productivity of its operations. And above all, "it needs to develop a donor constituency" (Drucker, 1990 pp. 99). These or similar management strategies seemed to have been adopted by aid organisations like World Vision Australia as they try to meet ever increasing claims on their funds.

The ideas of equality and justice that are the linchpin of World Vision's operations are expected to co-exist with best economic and business practices. As this thesis aims to understand the cultural milieu of an aid organisation, it is important to note how staff at World Vision Australia deal with the tensions that must arise between these often competing demands and aims and how they handle the tensions that arise when for example concern for a 'below par' worker's wellbeing cuts across the need for efficiency and best practice. Noting that efficiency in the home environment inevitably influences the amount and quality of assistance that can be given to the children in third world countries.   What mechanisms are used to ensure compliance and do these mechanisms actually contradict the very practice it is trying to engender?

The above questions were addressed through interviews conducted with World Vision Australia employees and through written material published by World Vision Australia.

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

The participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences at World Vision Australia and of their perceptions of its working environment. This needed to be analysed in a way that would make it possible to discover the meanings underlying their accounts of working in an aid organisation and to find interpretations which were congruent with their perceptions. The analysis sought to discover the similarities or differences in how workers understood and gave meaning to their work experiences and to examine the impact that World Vision Australia had on these experiences. It also sought to examine the match between the stated aims of the organisation and their application in the workplace.

This project used thematic analysis because it was most appropriate to the task in hand. The aim was to discover what reoccurring themes the employees presented in regard to their work environment and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it. The analysis was then taken one step further in order to situate the employees' stories of their work experiences within the formal mission of this organisation. In this way, contradictions as well as consistencies between the two were explored. Straus and Corbin (1989) describe a way of categorising data such as transcripts of interviews. They suggest that in order to give an authentic account of the dialogue, each of the concepts which appear in the data should be identified and summarised with a word or a phrase of several key words. Phrases and words which are related to similar themes are then grouped together under a label which describes the common or similar theme. This is the method I chose for analysing the data because it provided a way of making sense of the data without losing meaning and authenticity.

My interaction with respondents during the interview often resulted in emotionally charged conversations. Some were initially reluctant to express any dissatisfaction with their work experience in the public arena, possibly because they wanted to uphold the good name of the organisation and its managers or because they were concerned that they might be identified. After I informed them that I had worked at World Vision Australia and re-stated that my study had been approved by a recognised Ethics Committee which assured them of confidentiality, they appeared to be more open and responded well to the questions I asked.

The interview began by seeking the opinion of workers about the work environment in general and then as the interview progressed more detail was sought about their experiences. From the data, issues emerged and themes were identified about the work environment.

Participants presented a number of consistent reports about the working environment of World Vision Australia. On occasions there were competing and contradictory views about World Vision Australia both within the material supplied by a particular participant and also between participants. In respect to the former, a worker could be satisfied with one aspect of the work environment but less satisfied with another. In general, a worker's response differed according to whether he or she was talking about the work environment at a micro level or at a macro level which involved the way in which the organisation is conducted.

Some employees based their satisfaction with the work environment on how well they were treated by other staff, whereas others did not consider that aspect to be so important but were mainly concerned with issues around the work itself, the degree to which the work culture matched their own ethical framework and work ethos.

While there was a good deal of consistency among the way participants viewed the work environment and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with parts of it, there were differences in emphasis which are based on a number of different criteria that are detailed in the next section.

The World Vision Australia Work Environment

The World Vision Australia Customer Service Centre was refurbished and constructionally reorganised in 2001, mainly to accommodate the increasing amount of employees and to produce a more modern looking work area. When management advised staff of the plan to redesign the Customer Service Centre, they said the new design was to maximise personal space by allocating a work-station to each employee and to improve visual stimulation by adding colour and character (colourful paint and pictures) to the walls. Prior to deciding on the final plan, a great deal of time was invested by World Vision Australia management firstly in consulting with experts and then in selecting a design that would meet their objectives and that

is within the budget allocated for this project. This project was especially important for the Customer Service employees at World Vision Australia because during campaigns and when disasters (natural or otherwise) occur around the world, the centre is very busy and chaotic with more employees working to take calls from the public who are donating money to help those affected by the disaster/s and it can become overly crowded and very noisy.

The environment at World Vision Australia certainly appears to have a number of attributes that are noted as being necessary for a healthy organisation which are documented in chapter 1. These attributes are clean air ventilation, personal work space, moderate room temperature (not too cold, not too hot), absence of certain odours (e.g. sewerage), a clean work area, visual stimulation (windows) and sufficient light (Crick & Koch, 1997). I observed during the site visits that these positive stimuli are applicable to the World Vision Australia physical work environment, making it a healthy workplace for employees.

The décor, pictures and even furniture can impact on the way staff feel about the environment. There are numerous photographs and portraits of hungry poor children and families that look back at you wherever you are in the building. There are also pamphlets that are filled with such images as well as the photo cards of children who are waiting to be sponsored.

During the interviews, participants were asked whether they thought these images and materials were disturbing to the point of manipulating them into feeling guilty and ensuring they give it their all during each shift. One participant felt that those images were needed so that the staff "identify with the people we are serving" and another added that the pictures are "more an inspiration".

Marcus felt that the visuals are "really uplifting" however he also said:

> It has manipulated me because it allows me to sponsor children
> and give to programs and things.

Eva on the other hand said that she did not feel manipulated but her comments can be interpreted otherwise. The pictures clearly did have an impact on encouraging empathy for the recipient of the funds raised by World Vision Australia.

> *I don't need to see a starving child but I do know that there has been times when a staff member has seen an image that's really touched their heart and it's a made a difference for them to keep going with the work that they're needed to do.*

Would those staff members to which Eva refers, be as committed had the images not touched their heart or if there had not been any images at all? While this clearly impacted on some, others like Christopher did not think it influenced him in any way:

> *I think it's fact. That's just the way it is.*

There are other aspects of the work environment that appear to be highly important to staff. It is noteworthy that there are some factors that are common to everyone while there are others that differ either in emphasis or in type. Clearly some factors appear to be of greater significance to some employees than others and influence both their work performance and their decision to stay at (or leave) their employment at World Vision Australia. The interviews for the most part, reveal a positive view of the working environment at World Vision Australia.

We will first explore the factors that seem to be important to the work satisfaction of many employees. These factors varied from workplace practises that affected employees personally to aspects of the work environment that were more related to a good match between their own and the organisation's ideological framework.

Personal and Familial Factors

An important factor in staff satisfaction was related to more personal matters including how it affected them, their friends and their families. The interviews indicated that the management at World Vision Australia was supportive and flexible in terms of their staff's personal and family needs. Several staff reported that management was sympathetic to staff's personal needs particularly in times of stress and emotional trauma. This is evidenced by their willingness to allow staff to take time off to deal with personal issues. Tessa made the following comment::

> *I had a daughter doing Year 12…it's really important to me that I be able to drive her to exams and pick her up. My workmates*

said 'you tell us when you need to be away and we'll cover for you, don't worry'. And my boss said 'just do what you need to do'. I mean I think that's fabulous.

For Tessa, the ability to fulfil her need of being with her daughter contributed greatly to her positive view of World Vision Australia.

World Vision Australia has a family friendly policy which stipulates that "time off" be granted to employees to spend with their families (children, spouses and parents). Staff at World Vision Australia have internal access to "The Source" which is a central repository for all information regarding employment with World Vision Australia. The Source states that "World Vision is committed to understanding the ongoing potential for conflict between personal and work commitments". One way of assisting in this area is the implementation of an initiative which provides staff with a range of flexible working arrangements that can be negotiated with management. World Vision Australia allows up to an additional 90 days extended personal/carer's leave to staff in situations of long term illness and also allows sick leave to be used for family illness and needs. In emergency situations, such as school or childcare shutdowns and during school holidays, World Vision Australia staff can bring their children into the office after consulting with management.

Family friendly means different things to different people depending on their life stage and family responsibilities. Family friendly for the woman who had no children meant being able to attend to the needs of her elderly parents and for the young mother it meant being able to take a break from work to pick up her children from school and then return to work. Two participants made the following statements:

Working at World Vision is a very, very good place to work in a sense that they're very sympathetic and understanding of family needs. There is a lot of flexibility with time off if you're sick, if you've got children, they're family oriented a lot and they're very easy in that sense and committed to keeping staff as happy as possible.
(Roula)

They're very understanding, they are very family oriented, so there's a lot of give and take with what you can do, take time off so they're very good with leave and stuff. The people, the team leaders integrate very, very well with everyone. It's not a boss and you're not scared of talking about anything.
(Rositta)

The notion of "give and take" and a trust that reciprocity is part of both the management's and staff's agenda shows this is not an authoritarian environment but rather an authoritative one. It was claimed that people are not scared to voice an opinion.

On the other hand being family friendly for Sally meant being able to change work arrangements and get time off for personal reasons when required. It meant being up-front and not being forced to exaggerate stories or situations. It is important to note that the application of family friendly work policies was not restricted to staff with young families but was applied more generally. In this sense, it appeared that staff thought that the policies were applied even-handedly.

Flexibility of Work Practices

While there is no indication that males were unhappy about the latitude that was offered by the application of family friendly policies, it was not a factor in terms of male satisfaction in the workplace. None of the five male participants noted that the family policies directly contributed to their satisfaction with the workplace.

For males, different aspects of the work environment were noted as being attractive features of the work environment. For example, for Gary who was single, the frequency and fun associated with after-work social activities was a big factor in his work satisfaction level. Gary said in the interview "invitations are always going around to attend other people's parties which in my experience would be somewhat limited in a commercial environment". As for another male participant it was the ability to work from home, which was important. There was no instance recorded where staff felt World Vision Australia had let them down in this area.

Emotional Safety

For others the attractiveness of World Vision Australia was that it offered them emotional safety. It was in this arena where there were the most diverse opinions with some enthusiastically endorsing World Vision Australia policies and others who gave instances where it did not meet their expectations. Stephen and Roula who appreciated the emotional safety that the work place provided commented:

> *I worked in many organisations now. Only a few in office situations and definitely (this is) the best environment that I've worked in both physically, emotionally, you know the people you work with, the way that the organisation is structured as well. You feel very valued here so that's why I've been here for so long as well.*

> *I worked in journalism with the ABC, very competitive, and very cutthroat and very hard-edged. I worked at a radio station when I was again in a journalist environment, very competitive; you have to watch your back all the time. Here you don't have to do that.*

At other workplaces the participants had worked in, the work environment was more reserved perhaps or not as friendly and open.

> *In World Vision the goals for ideal calls for our audit are laid out very plainly in emails or in meetings but it's not something that's ever demanded of you. It's more sort of 'oh here are your statistics, see where you think you might improve or see where you're going well'. Whereas something like Market Research it's very much sort of 'oh you only got 20 surveys tonight', so there's a red asterisk next to your name and if that happens too often you would have to talk to management. I mean your calls are being listened to in World Vision but it's very open.*
> (Marcus)

When staff have personal problems they said that they appreciated that their

colleagues listened sympathetically to their problems and were concerned for their welfare. The following comment from Rositta illustrates this quite clearly:

> *[I have] shed tears of frustration if things are not going the way I felt they should be going and there's a lot of support and understanding and that's what I appreciate very much.*

Another area in which staff said they felt "safe" was in the staff review processes and the way management dealt with the staff's mistakes. For example, it was noted by several participants that management encourage staff to learn from their mistakes and were not highly critical of errors that occur during the work environment. The interviews revealed that when an employee spends a long period of time with a sponsor on the phone, management is not punitive in the way they handle this situation. Instead managers suggest techniques to deal with the situation.

A tension in the work place occurs when the needs of the organisation for efficiency in respect to getting money from donors conflicts with staff's desire to be pleasant and friendly to these donors. Participants were well aware of this tension. The more calls they attend to in a day the more funds will be available for needy children. When a prospective donor or sponsor calls World Vision Australia, the call is automatically directed to the customer service centre. If all representatives are on other calls, the caller is placed on hold until a representative becomes available. Reasons for these calls could be to ask a question regarding an existing sponsorship, to find out how to sponsor a child, to make a donation for a recent disaster or cause, or a general inquiry about the work World Vision Australia does. If a caller is kept waiting too long, there is the possibility they may hang up and that is a big loss to World Vision Australia if that caller decides not to call again.

Gary is well aware of the need to limit phone time with sponsors or callers, he said that the number of supporters has grown rapidly and the organisation's dollar income has more than doubled in the past 5 years, "we don't have enough staff to spend 10 minutes on the phone talking". They are unsure how to end a call when the caller wishes to have a long conversation. There are time limits put on calls but these time limits are constantly being over-run, which creates problems for management.

While taking a low key approach to the instances where too much time was spent on the phone long after the query of the caller has been dealt with, was effective in staff feeling safe and not feeling as though they have failed in certain aspects of their role, it was not effective in solving issues of phone calls that took too long because "the sponsor just wants to talk" and some staff were still unwilling or unable to end calls that went over-time. It was an issue for management to handle without alienating staff once it realised that the time-limit exercise was not working.

Management approached the problem in two ways. The first step involved management having discussions with staff about how to resolve the problem. The second process involved management making changes to work procedures and to the regulations and to enforce them by monitoring and providing feedback to staff about how they were performing. Management set a time limit for client phone calls so that targets can be reached. This was discussed during appraisals, during which time performance indicators in respect to targets were discussed. Staff claimed that this was done in a non-threatening manner and one in which the manager tried to make employees aware that this is of benefit to the international programs and not to make life easier for management. Putting in performance indicators was relatively effective in improving the problem of too much time spent with callers as indicated by the following comment:

> Gone are the days when half your phone calls were 10 minutes
> or more, calls are down to 4 to 4½ (minutes).

As noted earlier, there is tension between attempting to treat sponsors well and meeting targets. It was noted by one worker that by cutting down talk time with sponsors, the organisation compromises one of its core values, namely, "We value people". By not taking action, another core value is at risk. By being relatively aware of the time limits and making an effort to end calls once the business aspect of the call has been achieved, employees were available to take other calls and not have any potential sponsors hang up. By attending to more calls and taking on more sponsors, the organisation is upholding its "We are committed to the poor" and "We are stewards" core values.

It is a precarious situation for management to deal with and participants recognised

that management operated within many constraints in endeavouring to balance the needs of the sponsors, the needs of the client population and the needs of the workers. However, from the workers' perspective, they need to have a pleasant working environment and feel emotionally and physically safe and their work valued. Many staff indicated that the work place is a pastoral environment and one in which they felt emotionally safe and encouraging of personal development. Did all participants feel safe in the work environment?

As indicated earlier, some staff did not. An incident which indicates a resentment of the "Christianity" bias at World Vision Australia involves a question asked during appraisals. When asked to recall an incident where their beliefs conflicted with the policies and values of World Vision Australia Tessa made the following comment:

> *I do object in one way when we have our appraisals, when we are questioned on the way we respond to the values.   And I have made that perfectly clear to whoever's been appraising me that I find that a gross invasion of privacy and should not be asked… who would you be marking me on my "Christian-ness" or otherwise!*

This example of religious insensitivity led me to question what other practices and policies also have some shortfalls. While I have stated in the opening chapter my personal interest in World Vision Australia, this did not prevent me from observing some of the difficulties that participants outlined in the interviews. These difficulties were around the tensions created in trying to run a family friendly and supportive environment with the need to be commercially viable and deliver good services to the client group.

Ideological Factors

Several participants indicated that they believed that the organisation's ideology and mission was in line with their beliefs and personal values. Two participants describe this match with clarity and commented on the impact it had on their level of work satisfaction:

It's not like factory work; it's very personal rather than impersonal. The atmosphere is very free and easy. It's fun working here, it's comfortable.
(Roula)

Very little money believe me but the atmosphere is just wonderful. You wouldn't think of the money, I wouldn't mind if I was to just work here as a volunteer because I find the occupation of the people that I speak with, our supporters quite amazing and humbling enough for me to want to just dedicate my time for free and regardless of the money.
(Sally)

Brian recalls the time Iran was hit by an earthquake a few years ago. It was a Saturday night, which meant less staff were on duty than were normally on weekdays. In times of an emergency staff are called and asked to come into work over the weekend. However on this occasion Brian did not need to call extra staff because "people were coming in of their own accord on a weekend to man the phones, even the Executive Head of our department…they knew that the disaster happened, knew that people will be calling (to donate)". He indicated that these staff although they would be paid for their time, came because they cared about the plight of others and not for monetary reasons.

One participant claimed that at World Vision Australia there is "a common purpose that unifies the group". The employees "are here for the greater good". At World Vision Australia, "you get to know the people you are working with" including management. He values the camaraderie that goes with working for the common good:

To a lot of our staff it's a ministry, it's more than a job and that's indicated and clearly evident when we have a crisis. The majority of our staff are here because they believe in what we're doing.
(Christopher)

Stephen also commented that there is:

An inner self recognition that you are doing something to help. Every little bit helps and I think most people here have got that… that's why they work to their best capacity.

Part of the ethos of World Vision Australia that the employees said they liked was related to the work ethic. At other workplaces the participants had worked in, the work environment was more reserved perhaps or not as friendly and open. This work ethic related to notions of vocation and to cooperation rather than competitiveness.

The corporate sector, in general, seemed to me to have a different work ethic. They were not willing to give extra energy - above defined expectations. In other work places and I have worked in other Call Centres, it's been very much you come in you do your job you go home, there's no personal connection with the work itself, the motivation is the money.
(Marcus)

Vocation

A vocation (Latin for "calling") is usually used in a religious context and involves a person being called by God to live a life of good deeds. Miller has written extensively about vocation and Christianity and believes it is the "wellspring of a dynamism and energy that is radically outwardly focused" (Allen & Miller, 2006 pp. 72). Some of the participants said that working at World Vision Australia is a "vocation" and a "calling". Some said it is their mission in life.

One participant left a paying job to volunteer at World Vision Australia which he did for a few years and then was offered a permanent paying position which he accepted. Prior to that, he managed to survive financially by living off his superannuation. Other staff indicated that they knew they could get higher pay and better conditions elsewhere but declined to do so because they were ideologically in tune with the work and mission of World Vision Australia. Some staff were willing to sacrifice the material benefits that they could get from working for a commercial

organisation because of their commitment to the work and mission of World Vision Australia – because they believed they had a 'vocation' to serve others in this way. The following comments from different staff members detail different aspects of what loosely may be described, as a vocation. There is in some sense a deeply spiritual aspect to what they are saying. They make reference to something that transcends the ordinary and mundane:

> *After 9 years of working for this organisation there's not 1 day where I had to work and I've felt I don't want to go in. I actually look forward to coming to work... In this department I believe the management team, my direct superiors are very understanding, very accommodating, very supportive, they give me the freedom I need to do my job but are supportive when I need their assistance. It's a beautiful place.*
> (Brian)

> *It's opened my eyes to lots of things that I didn't know before. I didn't come here out of any sense of wanting to help impoverished people. But I think it (the work environment) changes you, once you do come here.*
> (Tessa)

Work for some employees engendered an emotional response, which appeared to bring out good qualities within themselves:

> *People get very emotionally involved when they work here. For most of the people here, well particularly those who have been for a longer period, for a lot of us it's not a job it's not a 9 to 5, take the money, go home. I've got a number of colleagues around this place who call it their mission. In some sense it is what they feel God has called them to do whereas some people might get into active ministry and become ministers or priests. They feel they are called to work here. So that creates an interesting environment in itself.*
> (Gary)

What is apparent in this comment is that the environment engenders a spiritual as well as an emotional response. The idea that God sanctions this work was mentioned by several staff.

While not everyone mentioned an ideological match as being important, this did not necessarily imply that had they been asked the question directly that they would have answered negatively. Having said this there were a few instances where staff indicated an ideological mismatch. Eva had trouble accepting changes made to the way World Vision Australia sought child sponsorships:

> *We'd launched a neighbouring marketing campaign where basically we do door knocking. I feel it's against what World Vision is about in that we've always had a non-invasive way of advertising the work that we do or promoting the work that we do. You know you see an ad on the TV, you call us we don't cold call… why would we then knock on a complete stranger's door and say 'hi would you like to sponsor a child?'*

This reaction could be interpreted as someone who simply disagreed with a certain marketing strategy as opposed to being an ideological mismatch. However it appears that this employee has come to see this non confrontational method of advertising as standard organisational practice or part of the organisation's culture where people make the first move and not the employees.

Collegiality

For some participants, their work environment provided the opportunity to work with like-minded people and this was an important factor in their work satisfaction. It gave them a sense of self worth and they went home feeling like they had contributed to the common good. Catholic anthropologist Victor Turner (1972) used the Latin term *communitas* to denote the particularly intense experience of group cohesion – of oneness, unity, that can occur, in particular circumstances (Mason, 2008). There was something of this in the descriptions participants used to describe how much they valued being connected to like minded people who shared the same ethos and values

One participant felt that World Vision Australia values people "more so than maybe in other places where I (have) worked". Another participant was surprised when during one of his shifts a manager approached him and asked "how are you doing?" The participant who was new at World Vision Australia having left a market research work environment immediately replied "I've only earned $550.00 so far" and the manager explained that she really was asking how he is and not checking on how much work he had done.

> *I mean your calls are being listened to in World Vision but it's very open. But the fact is that if they record a call that you maybe didn't do everything by the book you still would probably get about 80% on their grading of your call because it's very much sort of where you're being nice to the person on the phone, where you tried to listen, but it's not something that's punished.*
> (Marcus)

While aspects of self efficacy were mentioned by several respondents, it was not mentioned as being highly important by some staff.

Competing Values

The consistency and application of World Vision Australia stated values were called into question by some participants, with at least one participant stating that the values are in conflict and that by adhering to one, management risks over-looking or discarding another:

> *In a sense those 3 Core Values are in conflict with each other. Some people would argue we need to be more Christian, other people say we need to value people, other people then say we need to be better stewards. Now they are striking a balance but sometimes the balance might shift towards stewardship, which means you can cut down on salaries, you cut down on pay increases which in effect devalues people.*
> (Gary)

One of the participants interviewed for this study whose role was a manager in the customer service centre said that it is very hard dealing with competing demands of being a steward and valuing people.

It can be hard to do both at the same time. In terms of like staffing if you have someone who is not performing well. I think sometimes we will go quite far in trying to assist that person in getting them up to speed or getting to the point we need them to be performing at when in another organisation they would be given, shown the door much earlier. But because we value people, we do put that extra effort in. But then in conflict to that is that we are stewards and we're thinking well we are looking after donors' money and they're entrusting us to make sure that money is used as effectively as possible and is this the best use of their money if we're spending extra time in training or coaching with a particular individual?
(Eva)

When asked if management would still take the same steps if this happened today, the reply was:

I feel that maybe we were a bit lenient with performance issues but I can see in recent years that that's something that we have become a lot tougher on and we will make those decisions when they need to be made.

Another topic that emerged during the interviews and which generated conflicting opinions, was the means by which World Vision Australia raises the money to help the poor. Some workers felt that some fund-raising practices were ideologically questionable and were contrary to Christian teachings. Others were highly critical of the way the money was spent and the programs that did not receive funds because of what they considered to be an inappropriate moral stance and a misunderstanding of Gospel imperatives. The following quote illustrates this point well:

I went to a talk of a guy speaking about World Vision's work with AIDS and asked him so what are you doing to recommend contraception to people in these areas. And he said that because of World Vision' beliefs they can't recommend contraception to the people of Africa or wherever… Well within myself I just thought well that's a terrible way of looking at things but it's a limitation that you have if you stand up as a Christian organisation and if they were a secular charity then it wouldn't be a problem but you just have to realise that World Vision exists because of Christianity and so do the boundaries as a result.
(Marcus)

This is an incident that was relayed to me during an interview with one of the participants, however after some research on the World Vision Australia website, I discovered information regarding this issue and it appears that World Vision Australia programs "support modern contraceptive methods as part of an integrated approach to effective family planning " due to the alarming rates of child and maternal mortality in many developing countries and that all contraceptive methods promoted by World Vision Australia "are reviewed with respect to ethical, medical and development standards". However the information also states that this program is designed and implemented in partnerships with "the local health system, local faith-based organisations and other non-government organisations" which could be why that in certain parts of the world, World Vision offices cannot recommend or distribute contraception if in breach of local practices or laws. While it could be argued that Marcus may have misunderstood "the guy" at the talk he attended or a more detailed explanation might have helped Marcus better understand the answer, there is no denying that World Vision Australia exists because of its Christian history and is based on Christian moral teaching.

Is there any evidence that participants viewed World Vision Australia as being biased towards those who were practising Christians or that Christians at World Vision Australia felt it is their privileged territory and excluded or treated less favourably non-Christian employees? World Vision Australia "values people" and all religions

and faiths are valued and presumed equal, but there is no doubt that some participants believed that traditional Christianity is more highly valued than more liberal Christian views or other faiths. This emerged in a number of subtle ways.

Some people did feel uncomfortable, particularly when they were first confronted with an up-front religious environment as indicated by the following statement:

> *Quite a change, at the drop of a hat people can quote things from the bible and that's quite different and something I've had to adjust to.*
> (Sally)

I was informed that Christian devotions were conducted in the workplace on a daily basis whereby staff gather in a group and offer prayers. However, not all of the less devout were put off by these occurrences. One non-religious participant did not experience any negative feelings, nor did he feel excluded in any way. He frequently offered to 'man' the phones during devotions. However, he attributes his ability to cope with the Christian emphasis to his "confident personality" and his strong sense of self, rather than the policies or practices of the organisation.

> *I can imagine that someone who did not feel confident to express their non religious position may feel excluded or uncomfortable.*
> (Christopher)

There was an instance whereby a staff member who belonged to a different faith felt that she was treated unfairly because she was not a Christian but came from another major religion. While she did not wish to reveal her religious identification to her fellow workers or her line manager, she felt pressured to do so on one occasion by some of her team members. She felt that her faith was not received with the same respect as those who held Christian beliefs. Five years later, she is still with the company. When asked why she remained at World Vision Australia, she replied because she has put the incident behind her and most people are now aware of her religious beliefs and it's no longer an issue that bothers her. Other than these incidents mentioned above, participants did not indicate that they feel excluded or

discriminated against because of their beliefs. Those who were committed Christians stated that they did not think that they would be at a disadvantage if they were from another faith or were not religious.

Many staff mentioned that the organisation prided itself on trying to put in egalitarian practices, which underpin basic Christian beliefs. One of these values is respect and understanding for the family. From the interviews and as demonstrated above, they seemed to have been relatively successful in this endeavour. Another basic tenet of Christianity is an attitude of kindness and respect for all people irrespective of whether they are Christian or not. In terms of the mission of World Vision Australia, there are many instances when this value is demonstrated clearly. However, there were some shortfalls outlined by participants. There appears to be an assumption, albeit implicit, that the practices and beliefs associated with Christianity are superior or at least preferable to other faiths as illustrated in the examples noted above. While their literature and publicity outline their value position, sometimes the rhetoric was not matched by reality.

> *What I feel is that they are a little less tolerant, not as an organisation but as individuals in the area. Some of them are very, very fundamentalist Christian and I find it extremely jarring that you're working in an international organisation where you're dealing with different areas, with different religions and it sometimes feels more like an evangelical thing and I do find that a bit disturbing. The organisation isn't pushing that. It is a few individuals.*
> (Roula)

Sally on the other hand believes that it is Christianity that makes World Vision Australia a caring thoughtful environment.

> *I am a Christian and I am talking from a Christian perspective here. I like the fact that World Vision has time to just gather around, to pray or to discuss other people's needs… World Vision is quite a caring organisation.*

Altruism

One of the participants who was given the task of accompanying me during the many times I visited the World Vision Australia work environment provides a most useful insight into the way a work environment may influence a person's values and give him or her a new way of looking at the nature and mission of an organisation. Tessa told me she didn't come to work at World Vision Australia out of wanting to help impoverished people, however "the work environment changes you, once you do come here". Tessa couldn't point her finger at exactly what causes the change but rather said "that we as an organisation do make a difference" which prompts her to keep going with her work. It was obvious she enjoyed and loved her job at World Vision Australia.

The recent work on civic participation by Mason et al, (2007) found that altruism and service to others is catching, and that the original motivation for being involved can be replaced by a strong desire to serve the common good.

The Culture of World Vision Australia

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were asked if they would like to make any additional comments about World Vision Australia or about any of the topics discussed. All the participants made concluding remarks that were similar in content and in reference to the culture of the work environment. Even those who had complained about certain aspects of the organisation made positive comments about this aspect of World Vision Australia. For example, Brian said that he loved the place and although the work is at times difficult and demanding:

> It's more than that, it is belonging to a family of people. The job
> we're doing is affecting lives for the better. I think that's what it's
> all about for me.

Others also mentioned that the work place provided them with a kind of spiritual well being that contributed to their general happiness. The comments by the following four participants provide a sense of this.

Gary took the opportunity to say that although he is critical of the place it is still giving

him "something other than a salary" and that is why he still likes being at World Vision Australia. Rositta added:

> We have a very good working atmosphere. I like coming here, I love my work and I just love the people I work with.

Stephen expressed his surprise at having stayed so long in the one place:

> It's hard to think that 6 or 7 years ago that I would be working in such a happy environment where I enjoy coming to work.

Sally said

> I think it's quite rare in a lot of organisations where if you were to ask someone else 'where is your accounts person? they wouldn't know… at World Vision we try by all means to have that sense of community with each and every individual department and I think I admire that working environment a lot.

Peters and Waterman (1982) attributed culture as the key to organisational success. The interview data revealed that overall participants experienced a positive culture within the work environment of World Vision Australia.

While comments made in earlier sections of this chapter demonstrate that workers valued the ethos of World Vision Australia and what it does to help the poor, the above comments show that they obtain personal benefits from the collegiality of the work place. It offers its employees the opportunity to feel good about the mission of the organisation as well as the culture that underpins the interpersonal interactions.

Conclusion

Christian doctrine and teaching are at the foundation upon which this organisation treats its staff, and in the mission of the organisation and the types of programs it facilitates and funds as indicated earlier. World Vision Australia has many devoted employees as well as its share of issues that cause concern to its employees and obstacles to its managers in finding a balance between the values of World Vision Australia and applying them within the work environment.

Data from the interviews also revealed that some employees felt emotionally uplifted about the work they do in fulfilling World Vision Australia's mission to help the poor. This response provides personal satisfaction and according to Clements – Croome (2000), personal satisfaction generates increased productivity in the workplace and overall well being for the individual.

Harvey and Denton (1999) also stipulated the importance of approachable management in the achievement of improved productivity in employees. Data from the interviews revealed that management at World Vision Australia have an "open door" policy so that employees are welcome to approach them with any complaints, hassles or issues they may have. Participants agreed that for the most part their experiences matched the stated open-door policy, although there were some examples where participants felt unable to voice their concerns, particularly over religious matters.

We know from previous research (Clements-Croome, 2000) that a healthy physical environment alone cannot improve productivity due to human responses being "partly physiological and partly psychological". Productivity is influenced by the physical work environment as well as by non tangible factors. The physical working environment of World Vision Australia is congruent with what the literature outlines as being conductive to productivity. From the other perspective, it has short-falls as the interviews revealed and instances where staff were unhappy with the policies and the values that the organisation promotes, by the behaviour of other staff and from decisions made by World Vision Australia. Despite this, World Vision Australia has a low percentage of staff turnover which is a sign that its employees stay at World Vision Australia longer than most staff in many other customer service centres. It is also clear that these participants can get better pay at other organisations yet they remain employees of World Vision Australia with an admirable sense of commitment and loyalty.

A healthy work environment includes:

- Material Incentives (monetary rewards)
- Solidary Benefits (individual desire to subscribe to a particular collective or group identity)

- Purposive Benefits (goal related intangible rewards)

People do not necessarily give equal weight to each of these. Those who choose to work and remain at World Vision Australia appear to place great emphasis on solidary benefits rather than on the other two factors. Some might accuse World Vision Australia employees of being "tunnel visioned" and ignoring other aspects of the workplace. But this research does not support this negative connotation. For them, altruism, working for the common good and harmonious working relationships, take precedence over ambition and plush work conditions.

The data clearly indicates that the positives far outweigh the negatives for these employees who are by and large satisfied with most issues around their employment situation.

CONCLUSION

The World Vision Australia work environment seems to be a thriving one. Previous research has demonstrated that stress at work results from workers being dissatisfied with a number of factors including a) the work environment or its the surroundings, b) the working conditions, c) employees and/or management interactions and d) a combination of other factors, and that each of these factors leads to decrement in work productivity and performance (Clements-Croome, 2000; Parker, 2000). The findings indicate that most of these factors were absent from the work environment at World Vision Australia. This may in part be due to the fact that it has low staff turnover and the mission statement is endorsed by workers and management.

Previous research indicates that when staff are not overly stressed at work, they perform better which in turn results in increased productivity levels and work output (Clements-Croome, 2000). As the annual reports of World Vision Australia indicate, the quality of transformational development is better each year in terms of money raised and sponsorships accrued etc… This seems to have a flow-on effect with staff being pleased that they are able to help more people with the money raised, and this increases their job satisfaction.

The thesis raised some interesting and challenging ideas about the operations of an aid organisation and the work environment. The purpose of the questions addressed in this thesis was to discover why staff members wanted to work at World Vision Australia and chose to stay working at this organisation despite lower pay and less salubrious conditions. While a variety of theoretical explanations might be useful in explaining these complex issues, the concept of solidary benefits, which was developed in the 1960's by Clark and Wilson (1961) is especially useful in this context. It is a particularly useful concept in trying to understand why staff members at an aid organisation derive pleasure and clear benefits from working in this environment. The term solidary is quite uncommon in Australian literature and although known from as early as 1961 in American literature, there is not much written about it. According to Clark and Wilson, solidary benefits "derive in the main from the acts of association" and include such rewards as socialising, congeniality,

the sense of group membership and identification, the status resulting from the membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions, and so on" (Clarke & Wilson, 1961 pp. 133). Their common characteristic is the tendency to be independent of the precise ends of the association. It is a term very befitting and applicable to the work environment of World Vision Australia.

Bowman et al., (1969) also measured purposive incentives and found them to stem from "concern with public issues" and "sense of community obligation". Knoke and Wood in 1981 in support of Clarke and Wilson's concept, measured purposive incentives by whether participants mentioned factors such as "opportunity to help others" and "to accomplish the goals and aims of the organisation". The objective of these studies was "to capture the extent to which individuals are motivated by the prospect of contributing to the achievement of specific ends" (Samuel, 2004 pp. 108).

The findings of this thesis support the findings of Clark and Wilson (1961) in that social or solidary incentives are motivations that grow from the social and interactive nature of political participation. This includes the desire to spend time with like-minded and interesting people, and a sense of fun or desire to please friends and family. The findings indicate that World Vision Australia staff do value spending time with like-minded people whether it be in regards to religious affiliation or work orientation. The solidary concept explains why staff work for lower pay than they could get in the corporate sector and why there tends to be a small turnover of staff.

An analysis of the data derived from the interviews portray World Vision Australia as a place that has a specific cultural milieu that is by and large valued by staff who work there. It is a culture that is embedded in the environment through its mission statement, employment policies and the way that management treat staff. Through these measures in addition to achieving its objective of helping people from third world countries, the culture transposes and infiltrates from the managerial level through to their employees. One way of passing on culture is through the use of language. World Vision Australia has managed to inculcate normative behaviour that focuses on being 'nice' to each other and to prospective donors.

There appears to be unspoken cues that relate to the language used among workers

and with their clients. Certain ways of speaking and behaving have become reified in the organisation so that staff no longer have to consciously think about the manner in which they address each other or the clients. For example, employees know that it is not okay to use vulgar or swear words when at World Vision Australia, particularly because it is a Christian organisation. They do not have to remember that this is a place where people are respected, they have internalised these ways of behaving, it had been internalised by them. Employees realised quite soon after their employment commenced that the values they derive from working at World Vision Australia are not about the opportunity to make money or to look corporate or to have status, it is about a shared vision and a commitment to the less privileged.

Data revealed that staff for the most part accept graciously, if not adopt, World Vision Australia's work conditions because although the instrumental rewards are not high, staff are ably compensated by receiving expressive rewards. While this was evident in this study it was conducted in the early 2000's and at a time when the economy was booming. Since then there has been the global financial crisis which may affect the way staff think about their employment and pay conditions. This desire by staff to stay employed at World Vision Australia for less pay than they could get elsewhere might change when living costs and interest rates are on the increase. In time these events might change the outlook of the employees as they focus their attention on their family and children and consider their needs before the needs of those in poverty stricken countries. If employees who are experiencing financial difficulties know that at World Vision Australia they cannot get better pay, they may have to look elsewhere and an organisation such as World Vision Australia may not operate as successfully if its workforce is reduced to employees who have less financial responsibilities.

From the interviews, I ascertained that there is a shared perception about World Vision Australia being a friendly, caring, and supportive environment. Based on the positive media attention given to World Vision Australia, this view is shared by many Australians. It is only natural to adopt such a view when one is familiar with what World Vision Australia does and this is seen through its various marketing approaches and advertisements. However, through data collected in the interviews, it is now apparent that while the overall picture is one of a healthy organisation in

respect to staffing issues, there are some issues and elements of the World Vision Australia work environment that are contrary to this perception. While religious symbols can create unity and re-enforce the mission of the organisation, they also can alienate non-religious or people of other faiths.

In any setting where the behaviour, language and practices are so clearly defined, deviation can result in sanctions. How would an outspoken atheist or a person who had a pregnancy termination be treated at World Vision Australia? While these issues were not directly addressed in this thesis, it would be reasonable to claim on the basis of comments made on other matters related to values that are outside those adopted by a conservatively based Christian organisation that a worker who did either of these things would feel uncomfortable at best and stigmatised at worst. As Mary Douglas (1970) pointed out in her discussion on patterns and cultural structures, concrete symbols give meanings, which demarcate boundaries and maintain moral order. The religious symbols of the organisation, including the prayer time and religious type meetings all purvey the cultural boundaries that provide a clear message of the dominance of Christianity and the moral values that are often attached to it.

While only one incidence of religious intolerance was reported, management of World Vision Australia as well as other welfare organisations would do well to evaluate regularly their equal opportunity guidelines and practices, to ensure that staff are aware of and observe non-discriminatory policies. In order to maintain its excellent reputation World Vision Australia's management might consider reinforcing the Christian doctrines of tolerance and compassion to all people. While these are included in the mission statement, vigilance is required to reinforce the principles behind it.

Results suggest that there are other areas where World Vision Australia might focus its attention in order to further enhance its work environment:

1. A re-examination of policies and practices related to various aspects of the organisation which at times have competing needs and requirements including:

a. being a good corporate manager in respect to finance and time management,

b. adhering to a commitment to maintain good staff relations,

c. being respectful of donors and sponsors, and

d. balancing client demands with staff satisfaction.

2   Ensuring that there is a match between advertising strategies and the mission statement

3   Reviewing practices and policies with the intention of examining the different requirements of staff within the work environment taking note of gender issues, life stage and family requirements as well as ideological views.

4   Re-assessing the practices and policies that are designed to challenge employees in their work environment to increase productivity while avoiding monotony.

At a global as well as at a national level, factors that affect the work of an aid organisation are constantly changing. World 'hot' spots, wars, famine, economic swings and environmental disasters are but a few of the areas that confront those trying to assist people in need.   For this reason, constant vigilance and improvements are required within aid organisations to maintain credibility and ensure productivity in a healthy and thriving work environment that its employees find rewarding, challenging and fulfilling.

Appendix A

✛ ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

<u>Committee Approval Form</u>

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: A/Prof. Ruth Webber   Melbourne Campus

Co-Investigators: n/a

Student Researcher: Ms Pauline Abboud   Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
An ethnographic study of the work environment of an aid organisation

for the period: 12/07/04 - 31/12/04

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V2003.04-89

The following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

(i)   that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii)   that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: .... Date: ...12/07/04.........
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

Appendix B

General questions asked during interviews:

- What makes you want to come to work?

- In what ways does working at World Vision Australia differ from previous work places that you've been at?

- How are the values and policies of World Vision communicated to you?

- What first drove you to work at World Vision Australia or to apply for a position at World Vision Australia?

- How do you believe tensions and conflicts are resolved here at World Vision Australia?

- Can you think of an instance where there has been a conflict between what you think and what you're meant to do at World Vision Australia?

- How do you come to know what behaviours are acceptable and what behaviours aren't?

- What do you think the dominant ethos is at World Vision Australia?

- What do you do at World Vision Australia?

- Have there been instances or examples where your behaviour was looked upon as inappropriate? If so what had you done or said?

- What is it about World Vision Australia that makes it an ideal (if participant had indicated so) working environment for you at present?

- What positions have you held prior to working at World Vision Australia?

- Do you think the employees are different at World Vision Australia compared with previous work colleagues?

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