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Micropolitics of Knowledge

Communication and Indirect Control in Workgroups



Emmanuel Lazega



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THE MICROPOLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Communication and Indirect
Control in Workgroups

Emmanuel Lazega



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Emmanuel Lazega has lectured and held research appointments at several European universities, including Geneva, Paris, and Oxford. Most recently he was a visiting postdoctoral fellow at Yale. Though he has published several previous monographs in French, this is his first book-length work in English.

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Introduction: What Is an Informed Decision?

What is an informed decision? This question has long been an important issue for theories of individual and collective behavior. Particularly since the 1960s, the sociology of knowledge has focused on a related problem: What do individual and social actors consider to be an informed decision? or What counts as such to the members of different social settings? In the following study I try to approach this second question from a microsociological and organizational perspective, using notions such as *appropriateness judgments*, *knowledge claims*, *relationships toward authority*, *boundary work*, and *epistemic alignments*.

Although sociologists of knowledge have been traditionally interested in macrosociological issues, changes toward such a microsociological approach have been introduced, for instance, by Berger and Luckmann's essay *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Their concept of knowledge is a relational and praxeological (goal-oriented) one. It is in tune with old political and ethical questions raised in a new way by the "information society," for instance, questions of democracy and secrecy, of indirect control in the workplace, and of informed consent in different areas of social exchange (Code 1987).

This change in direction of the sociology of knowledge owes much to the specific influences of different philosophical traditions (American pragmatism and symbolic interactionism on the one hand, European phenomenology on the other), but also to a rediscovery of Georg Simmel's work. In his essay "The Secret and the Secret Society" (1908/1950), Simmel proposes a typology of social relationships characterized by the degree of reciprocal knowledge they presuppose among the actors. Since then, many researchers in "information control" have taken as their starting point the fact that every social setting imposes on its members rights and duties concerning infor-

mation management and diffusion. The behavior observed has been that of actors confronted with problems in the publicity or confidentiality of a given piece of information; problems of obligation or prohibition of transmission; and problems of strategic sharing or hoarding of information by individual or collective actors. The perspective created by Simmel is that of a "political economy of information" (Boisot 1987), or the study of the production and exchange of information.

For example, sociological studies of actors' behavior in work relationships and decision-making in organized settings—such as work-groups or larger groups—often stress the strategic dimension of information. These studies give prominence to situations in which individuals are confronted with uncertainties they attribute to a lack of or to an overload of information; and to the considerable quantity of time and resources actors spend in "processing" information they need, to control (reduce, maintain, or increase) this uncertainty (Crozier and Friedberg 1977; Farace, Taylor and Stewart, 1978; Feldman 1989; March and Sevón 1982; O'Reilly 1980; Paisley 1980; Stinchcombe 1990; Vaughan 1983, 1989; Weiss and Gruber 1984; Wilensky 1967; Wilsnack 1980).

All attempts to build microsociological frameworks for the study of information control seem to be based on this Simmelian perspective. And despite the fact that Berger and Luckmann's focus on "what passes for knowledge" among various actors constitutes a change from the Simmelian tradition, the sociology of knowledge has not provided much work based on its own and more recent theoretical insights.¹ This is mainly due to the fact that currently the sociology of knowledge relies on a technical conception of communication that holds back its own development. By focusing on rules or social norms of information management, it takes for granted the informative value of a message exchanged between actors. In other words, even Berger and Luckmann's conception of knowledge is still based, paradoxically, on a Simmelian understanding of communication, which is convenient either for macrosociological studies or for the study of information control, but much less so for the study of what counts as knowledge and as an informed decision to the members of a group.

This essay tries to overcome some of these limitations by questioning the assumption that the informative value of a message is a constant. It assumes that decisions—especially when they are made under time pressure—are considered to be informed decisions based upon the control of knowledge claims as much as upon information control. It is more concerned with actors in situations of uncertainty confronted with questions such as: What has to be known, or taken

into consideration, in order to make this decision and orient one's behavior accordingly? Is this message appropriate, i.e., does it have an informative value, does it bear on choices that must be made, and how it is possible to judge this? How can one develop sufficient confidence in the assertion of a proposition, and legitimately claim to know? This approach shifts the emphasis from a well-established problematic to a less developed one, but the new perspective remains within the framework of the sociology of knowledge. It looks at how members of a social setting interactively "elaborate" information.

Building upon this conception of knowledge, but using the idea of "information elaboration" (as differentiated from information control), I propose a theory of "knowledge claims" based on the symbolic interactionist notion of the definition of the situation. For this theory, knowledge claims are based on what will be called "appropriateness judgments," an important element of the decision-making process as understood by a microsociology. An organizational perspective is then combined with this theory of knowledge claims so as to benefit from its emphasis on the structural constraints put on members' behavior and interactions.

INFORMED DECISIONS AND RATIONALITY

A sociological contribution to a theory of decision-making and knowledge claims does not necessarily try to provide a systematic theory of rationality (understood as an individual characteristic). As shown by Manning (1986, 1992) and his "naturalistic" model of decision-making and discretion, many determinants account for a given choice, for instance, a sociopolitical surround, an organizational context, decision fields, and cognitive frames. To provide a general explanation of decisions made in situ, a theory would have to combine many structural and phenomenological factors. The scope of this essay is more limited. It focuses on workgroups and on the contribution of the microsociology of knowledge to the study of a narrower set of indirect controls influencing decision-making.

The issue of the relationship between information and decision does not directly or necessarily belong to a quest for efficiency. Rather, it is helpful to understand the relationship between structure and process in collective action. This study is based on the assumption that a specific form of indirect social control constrains our decisions by creating the conviction that we are making informed decisions—even under uncertainty. This constraint has implications for various areas of behavior ranging, for instance, from any type of

collective decision-making process to individual ethical problems of informed consent. My aim is to contribute to the development of a microsociology of knowledge by looking at the nature of this type of constraint.

In this section, I would like to show that, in a paradoxical way, such a program owes much to work by Simon, March, and their associates on organizational decision-making, and to their critical attitude toward ideals of rationality. One common feature of organizational decision-making theories is the importance they give to information in shaping organizational choices. Information processing models of organizational decision-making are often considered to be a good way to examine the decision process in general. These models usually still refer to the perfect- and bounded-rationality theories: in the first case, the assumptions underlying the choice process include complete information about alternatives, and knowledge of the probabilities associated with different alternative-outcome links; the second case recognizes the limits on both available information and the cognitive processing abilities of the decision-makers, who do not have complete knowledge of alternatives, probabilities, or outcomes.

Despite their influence, these conceptions of decision-making and bounded rationality have been criticized for different reasons. For instance, they sometimes ignore the gap between the normative theories of decision-making and the empirical understanding of how decisions are actually made within organizations (O'Reilley 1983). But the most important objection sociologists make is that decision-making theories do not take into account in any rigorous way the organizational context (the structure of the organization) in which the decision is made and the way in which this context influences the process.

Attempts by March and associates, however, to define a contextual rationality do introduce a new perspective on this point in the decision-making literature and provide a bridge between the sociological and the decision-making literatures. Their "garbage can" theory of organizational choice does so by uncoupling all the elements of the decision process from one another, thus providing a heuristic view of the dimensions that can be taken into account by a more microsociological research.² In this model of organizational systems, the components—people, problems, solutions, choices—are only loosely coupled and are often supposed to vary independently of one another (Weick 1976). Problems are seldom clearly defined, and competing conceptions of these problems are framed according to available and predefined solutions, or to battles over questions of legitimacy and accountability. Alternatives become known only after certain outcomes are preferred, in accordance with individuals' and

subunits' vested interests. Decision-makers may be pursuing multiple or competing objectives simultaneously, the goals being ill-specified or lacking consensus. Messages may be incomplete, ambiguous, or tardy (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972; O'Reilley 1983). In this framework, information and decision are also uncoupled.

This relation (or quasi-absence of relation) between information and decision is described in terms of what March and Simon (1958), Cohen et al. (1972), and March and Olsen (1976) call a theory of "attention" to decisions and problems.³ They call for a study of the allocation of attention by members of organizations because they want to understand "why people flow in and out of specific choice situations" (March and Olsen, 1976): March (1978:592), emphasizes the importance of competing claims on the attention of actors, on the allocation, patterns, rules, and distribution of attention: "There is a need for introducing ideas about the process by which beliefs are constructed in an organizational setting," about the "considerable perceptual ambiguity" in which members construct what they "know about events within organizational choice situations."

An interesting contribution to this theory of attention allocation and contextual rationality can be found in Feldman and March (1981) and Feldman (1989). As a heuristic move, information is almost completely uncoupled from the decision in a way that opens up this area of research. This attempt to offer a new description of the relationship between information and decision reconceptualizes communication behavior and information processing in organizations in a way that can fit in with the garbage can model. Basically, it is an interesting approach because it questions a technical and instrumental conception of information. Such a conception predominates among communication scholars, information systems specialists, and engineers, who assume that the value of information is clearly defined and obvious to the decision-maker. Feldman and March offer an alternative picture of the relation between information and decision-making. They summarize this as follows. Much of the information that is gathered and communicated by individuals and organizations has little decision relevance; it is collected and interpreted after the decision has been made to justify it; it is ignored or considered insufficient, and regardless of the information available, more information is requested; it has a symbolic value in the sense that its relevance in the decision-making process to the decision being made is less conspicuous than is the insistence on information. "In short most organizations and individuals often collect more information than they use or can reasonably expect to use in the making of decisions. At the same time they appear to be constantly needing or requesting more information, or complaining about inadequacies

in information" (Feldman and March 1981:174). This is explained by the fact that organizations offer symbolic incentives for gathering too much information, that members gather information in a "surveillance" mode as much as in a decision mode, and that information is strategically misrepresented.

Uncoupling information from decisions helps us study the internal politics of organizations in two different ways. First, information management and processing are part of direct struggles against the loss of resources, status, and power; given a predefined decision, information is considered as a political resource (March 1981; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and data that support the desired outcome are sought out, while information supporting opposite views is to be rebutted by questioning its accuracy or by impugning the credibility of the source. Second, a more indirect and unobtrusive form of control uncouples information from decision by evaluating messages independently from their instrumental value as a potential premise for a given decision (Crozier 1963; Hawkins 1986; Lukes 1974; Manning 1986; Perrow 1986; Pfeffer 1981; Vaughan 1989), "before" it becomes a commodity (with a recognized and established informative value) equally or unequally allocated.

By almost entirely uncoupling information and decision, Feldman and March push their organizational theory to its limit, and perhaps question the relevance of such theories in general insofar as they try to find a pure definition of rationality on which to base a quest for efficiency and control in organizations. But weakening the relation between information and decision-making suggests, first, that there may be different types of linkage between the two, which could be described and classified; and second, that the variations of these types could also be related to structural dimensions of the organization. Thus, indirectly, Feldman and March suggest that relevance is socially constructed. What remains to be seen is how the actors themselves actually make this connection, how they evaluate the informative value of a message or a proposition in a decision-making context. Paradoxically, the garbage can model questions the very possibility of informed decisions in organizational contexts, while at the same time bringing together many elements of a theory of "contextual" rationality—without really (not surprisingly) organizing them. Instead, it defines a purely symbolic value of information (as a symbol of competence for the organization and the decision-makers, as a symbol of the legitimacy of the decision itself, or as an indication of an ideological belief in rational decision processes).

In summary, organization theories have addressed the question of informed decisions by making assumptions about actors' rationality, considered successively as perfect, bounded, or contextual. This

study intends to contribute to the description of the relation between information and decision from a more sociological perspective.

One way of doing this is to show how information is a social construct indirectly linking the structure of the organization to the decision made by the actors.⁴ Few attempts have been made to consider information and communication from this perspective. One example is in Boisot (1987), who looks at how information is "structured" in order to analyze how it is shared by actors. The "structuration" of information is presented in very general terms, as the result of two operations: codification (the extent to which information is coded) and diffusion (the extent to which it is diffused). Both vary between high and low. The cross-classification of these two dimensions produces what Boisot calls a "typology of knowledge" (identifying proprietary, public, personal, and commonsense types of knowledge). Some types are assumed to be dominant in certain types of environment (bureaucracies, markets, fiefs, clans), which can therefore be considered and classified as specific "information environments." This work is an interesting theoretical attempt, but it is not operationalized in a way that demonstrates how the members themselves elaborate information, or the informative value of the messages they exchange. It measures the degree of codification in semiological terms and the degree of diffusion of given information in a way that still relies on a technical conception of information. The structuration of information is not analyzed at an interactive level; it is not conceived of as a set of operations performed by the actors themselves, but as a set of properties that external observers can associate with information already acknowledged as such. Therefore, this theory does not address the microsociological dimension of the structuration of information. It does not show how members intuitively or strategically contextualize the messages in a way that gives them a specific informative value, or what kinds of assumptions they make about the social context for which their assertions become appropriate.

This study offers a theory of the "interactive elaboration of information" (Lazega 1990) that tries to go beyond the limitations of both organizational decision-making theories and semiological theories by examining the link between information and decision as mediated by indirect social control processes and structural constraints. It is based on the idea that information and decisions are linked by knowledge claims, and that knowledge claims have an interactive and rhetorical dimension. They contain a bid for support, an attempt to win acquiescence from others (Miller 1991). Knowledge is interactively produced, not only in an empirical sense, but also more broadly in the sense that claims involve the negotiation of roles and identities and

some forms of direct and indirect social control. Just as the creation of alliances among researchers is central to the success of scientific ideas,⁵ the creation of alliances in the workplace tends to focus members' attention on certain stimuli; it provides them with different criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of a message for their decisions. A theory of these claims is developed in Chapter 1, in which I examine the process of interactive elaboration of information understood as a form of social construction of reality.

For several reasons, it seemed useful to concentrate on the definition of the problem and on the description of a theoretical framework enabling me to handle it: First, because there are no studies, as far as I know, describing knowledge claims or the process of the social construction of reality and its interactive dimension, from a microsociological point of view. Second, because the empirical observation of this interactive process requires a theory that is able to reconstitute the main steps of what I call "appropriateness judgments," and to analyze the link between this dynamic process and the structure of the interactive setting. The theory of the "definition of the situation" provides the necessary framework.

A THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS

Although the impression of competence, of "knowing well," which provides the intuition that we are making informed decisions, may seem to be a very individual phenomenon, knowledge is a social construct. The relational dimension of knowledge here is given particular attention through the study of the process of the interactive elaboration of information. Knowledge claims analytically "precede" the decision, which is based upon the information that they provide (Feldman 1989; Hawkins 1986; Manning 1986).⁶ Depending on the type of decision, these claims are more or less implicit (Wadel 1979). I assume that they take the form of appropriateness judgments applied to messages to evaluate the information that they carry. In my terminology, both knowledge claims and appropriateness judgments represent the process of interactive elaboration of information.

The term *elaboration* as it is used here refers to a different process than information "processing." Psychological (especially cognitivist) and epistemological studies usually observe the processing of information by the individual; the latter is rarely studied in the interactive context of market, work, family, or friendship relationships. Such studies do not consider information as a more or less accessible resource, the value of which must be determined by the actors themselves, in relation to others. From my point of view, a proposi-

tion must be evaluated by a judgment of appropriateness to be considered informative. The term *appropriateness* is used here in order to avoid a confusion with the "relevance judgment" applied to a message; while the latter is based on linguistic, logical, or even pragmatic criteria, appropriateness refers to social criteria (which make sense from a praxeological perspective involving what I would call "epistemic accountability") (Sanders 1980). Appropriateness is linked to identity, authority, and control, and is used by actors to ground their knowledge claims when they have to make decisions. For instance, when the members of a group must agree on the facts needed to define a policy, they use social as well as technical criteria: the information must be socially appropriate as well as technically satisfactory, the two dimensions being wholly interdependent.⁷ This is especially true in workgroups, where activities are partially finalized by the explicit definition of a common goal. My work focuses on the social aspect of the judgment of appropriateness, particularly the way it is linked to the actors' relationships toward authority and their involvement in internal politics. I intend to establish the set of criteria actors use to determine or negotiate what messages can be considered as information.

In order to observe this elaboration of information understood as a negotiation of the appropriateness of a message, a description and a model of the process are necessary. The often implicit character of knowledge claims and appropriateness judgments makes it difficult to "observe" the interactive elaboration of information purely inductively. Therefore, to develop a theory of these knowledge claims, I use the theory of the "definition of the situation" to make initial assumptions. Chapter 1 builds a model of the process of information elaboration.

As mentioned above, I consider the symbolic interactionist theory of the definition of the situation as an ideal-typical description of the appropriateness judgment, based on the relationship between behavior and social control.⁸ From this theory I have drawn a set of criteria that actors can play on to negotiate the appropriateness of an act or statement. The definition-of-the-situation model and the conception of social control underlying it are composed of three operations, which describe in an ideal-typical way judgments of appropriateness for any behavior. These operations provide answers to the following generic questions.

First, for a given or contemplated act, what is the instance of social control recognized by the actor? From the symbolic interactionist point of view, the answer lies in the actor's modalities of identification, in the recognition of him- or herself as the source of the action. The actors negotiate their identity by choosing among several possi-

ble instances of social control, thereby establishing the interactive dimension of their behavior. This act of "allegiance" (or hierarchization of allegiances) is of particular importance because it establishes actors' positions in the social structure. Without this first step, it would not be possible to link the next steps with the social structure.

Second, how is the act legitimized on behalf of this instance of social control? By referring to this instance, actors are able to problematize their own behavior, in order, for example, to anticipate (and perhaps prevent) undesirable induced consequences. The form taken by the legitimation of an act can be seen as an answer to this problematization; it indicates the way actors can introduce social control to the orientation of their behavior.

Third, who—of all the members of the group to which the actor belongs—may represent the instance of social control for this particular act? In a social setting, actors can manipulate what I call the "extension" of their accountability (in a praxeological sense, not a moral one). The choice of an authority inside the group to whom actors are accountable for their behavior, and from whom they seek validation or endorsement, indicates the way in which social control is perceived and located in the interactive setting.

It is worth noting that this conception of the definition of the situation reveals very clearly the interactive dimension of the process of elaborating appropriate information. Thus, based on symbolic interactionist conceptions of social control, the theory of the definition of the situation is reinterpreted as an ideal-typical description of the appropriateness judgment, using the notions of *identity*, *legitimacy*, and *accountability*. These concepts link appropriateness to social control by defining a system of criteria that the members of a group use to negotiate the appropriateness of a message. Once developed inductively by an empirical study, this model allows the identification of the different types of knowledge claims made in workgroups.

Chapter 2 examines the variations of these criteria—the identity of actors, the legitimation of the action, the nature of actor's accountability—defined in Chapter 1. Following a limited version of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) methodology for the discovery of grounded theory, it presents observations of communication behavior within two workgroups. A *typology of knowledge claims* is explored, which results from the reconstitution of different types of appropriateness judgments. These four types are *realistic*, *expert*, *polemical*, and *initiated*. Each type of claim has a micropolitical dimension: it contains a specific attempt to create legitimation and support for a member's definition of the situation and to secure the member's authority to know. A closer look will show that, to do this, each claim relies on a particular system of

social control by performing what could be called *boundary work*, which is a minimal form of *coalition building*. Constituencies and coalitions are needed to guarantee trust in a piece of information. Sometimes actors do not use internal boundaries to negotiate the appropriateness of the message; sometimes they use rigid boundaries defined from outside the group, and sometimes more negotiable boundaries defined from within the setting. In each case, I assume that they try to control participation (mainly of others) in the process of the defining of the situation, or building authoritative knowledge, by including and excluding potential representatives of social control.

For insiders, each claim implicitly assumes and indicates who is likely to belong to the coalition that supports it, who is likely to represent the members and the social control that this coalition exercises, and what is acceptable or legitimate for such members of the coalition. This reliance on a system of social control is a form of contextualization of the message, an attempt by the actors themselves to define the context in which their claims make sense. Not surprisingly, these dimensions of the definition of the situation are often challenged and negotiated.

STRUCTURE, PROCESS, AND CONTROL: AN ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

Workgroups are the settings from which most of my examples are drawn. This makes sense for at least three reasons: First, social groups are the traditional setting for observing interactive processes (such as knowledge claims and appropriateness judgments). Second, my study combines an organizational perspective with a microsociological approach in order to speculate about the link between the process examined and the structure of the groups where it is observed. The two workgroups used here—an administrative unit representing a quasi-Taylorian and bureaucratic structure, and a social workers unit representing a more collegial structure—are good contexts for developing theory at this level of analysis. Third, organizational and work relationships provide particularly easy access to the micropolitics of members' behavior and decision-making.

Since the elaboration of information is interactive and can take different forms, it becomes sociologically possible to try to link this process to the structure of the social setting in which it is observed. The choice of an organizational perspective and the focus on workgroups provides a convenient design for the study of the relation between these variables. Chapter 3 defines the structure of work-

groups in terms of authority relationships, using a "strategic perspective" (Crozier and Friedberg 1977). This concept of structure can be easily integrated with the notions used to describe the process of interactive elaboration of information: it means control and constraints to the members themselves when they are involved in the definition of the situation. At the same time, it offers a strong criterion for classifying workgroups, which helps in designing a comparative analysis.

Because this study is at the intersection of two disciplines (the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of organizations) and also of two traditions (European and American), it is important to specify that, although it deals with workgroups and interactions among workers, it is not a study in the "human relations" tradition. The latter, with examples such as Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939), Homans (1950) and W. F. Whyte (1962), was very influential in the study of relationships at work, but did not address issues of power struggles in organizations. Human relations theorists—ultimately interested in obtaining employee participation and cooperation without sharing control—addressed structural issues of power and conflict by psychologizing them, whereas a strategic perspective is based on a systemic theory of power and influence. My study is based on the assumption that conflicts of definition of the situation do emerge in the workplace, in which vested—but not rigidly organized—interests vie for influence and control in the process of defining the situation. My assumption is that it is interesting to study members of workgroup and their attempts to base their authority to know on different sources of legitimacy and in different structural contexts (bureaucratic and collegial) where power differentials vary. Therefore, as opposed to a human relations approach, I only introduce the informal organization into my analysis to get a more complete picture of particular processes, not to claim that nurturing informal groups would increase industrial performance. Here I frame the discussion in terms of informal power and conflicts of definition of the situation, not in terms of harmony and equilibrium created by the right type of managerial leadership.

The theoretical link between structure and process is also described in Chapter 3. Grounded hypotheses are formulated on the relationship between this important structural property of workgroups and the types of knowledge claims used in them. These types are considered under their strategic value. As seen above, they are classified according to how they incorporate a specific form of social control and how they play with the internal boundaries of the group. The formulation of these hypotheses thus elicits a relationship between authority and appropriateness.

Some more clarification is needed here about the notion of structure presented above. To understand the link between the structure of a social setting and appropriateness judgments (and ultimately to see how the latter vary with the former), I use a definition of the structure that has something in common with the definition of the process, i.e., that shows how one's judgment can be constrained by one's position in the structure. Since the process has been defined in symbolic interactionist terms, it makes sense to draw upon the same theoretical framework in order to define the structure. Despite an undeserved reputation for a lack of interest in the existence of social institutions, of bureaucracies, power structures, and stratifications of any kind (Maines 1977), this theory defines the structure as a set of constraints put on members' identity negotiations, and therefore on their accountability and capacity to control. Symbolic interactionism provides a very flexible definition of the structure, which articulates identity and authority: the structure is neither purely exogenous, nor purely endogenous, neither purely formal nor purely informal.

To develop my initial focus on authority and identity, I combine the strategic perspective (Crozier and Friedberg 1977; Sainsaulieu 1977) with the symbolic interactionist approach. This enables me to see authority as the capacity to use an institutional authority argument (not necessarily as its actual use) for control purposes. The organizational literature recognizes that there are at least two types of institutional authority: professional and hierarchical (Freidson 1986).⁹ The strategic perspective helps us understand how actors' *relationships toward authority* vary according to whether or not they have access to one of these institutional authority arguments, and how they attempt to exercise control in each case. By distributing positions and roles that authorize some actors, but not others, to use an institutional authority argument, the organization creates among its members different types of relationships toward authority. I account for this difference by distinguishing between *tactical* and *strategic* relationships toward authority.

Thus the synthesis presented in Chapter 3 clarifies how the structure of a social setting influences interactive processes like knowledge claims: by installing constraints on identity negotiations, it forces the members of the social setting into relationships toward authority, which in turn contain constraints as to the nature of the actor's audience and accountability, and therefore ability to exercise control and secure some epistemic autonomy. This theoretical reconstitution of the link between the structure and the process is complex, but it presents at least one way for the sociology of knowledge to deal with the question of knowledge claims, and to benefit (as already shown by the "laboratory" studies) from an organizational approach.

This conceptual framework clearly emphasizes that knowledge claims have a micropolitical and strategic dimension. As stressed by symbolic interactionist theories, actors' knowledge is not a direct reflection of the way they define their immediate and respective interests. A judgment of appropriateness is a process over which competing authorities try to exercise control. Different claims compete for decision-makers' attention. Perception of control by others over one's claims is a constraint with which the members of a group deal from their own position and from their relationship toward authority. Actors' knowledge is also based on their perception of common interests with others, and on their perception of social control exercised by others (Mead 1934).

Knowledge claims need some form of entitlement or anticipation of support, which is provided by members' "micropolitical consciousness." Members organize their claiming behavior: they place it in an informal set of rights and duties to know, in coalitions of support and criticism. Asserting or claiming adjusts itself to the context in which it is performed, but it also tries to shape this context formally or informally. Some coalitions facilitate knowledge claims in some contexts, while inhibiting them in others. At least in workgroups, members can assume, create, or imagine entitlements to mobilize support for their claims or abstain from it in a given context.

Thus, understanding the micropolitical dimension of knowledge claims means examining members of social settings who are coalition builders promoting specific definitions of the situation. Coalition building is conceived in terms of members' absorption into and insulation within (Lawler and Bacharach 1983) subgroups in which they will share a definition of the situation, a sense of appropriateness, and an understanding of the controls that put pressure on them to assert specific statements. Coalition building is seen as a way to manage boundaries and relationships. Each coalition functions as a reference group for its members and is also involved in a competition with others for the right to define the situation.

This conception of the micropolitics of knowledge orient my speculations about the connection between structure and process. In bureaucratic and collegial contexts, the specific way of building coalitions represented by each type of knowledge claim (bidding for support for its definition of the situation) has a different value and carries a different weight. My hypothesis is that in one context most members tend to *diversify* as much as they can the types of claims that they use, so as to take advantage of small chances to exercise some control offered by each type; whereas in the other context most members tend to *limit* the types of claims that they use, so as to extend as much as they can the control that they already exercise.

These hypotheses on the relationship between structure and process are based on assumptions about structural advantage in the competition for control. For instance, when most of the members of an organized setting have a strategic relationship toward authority (i.e., are in a position to use an institutional authority argument), they tend to perpetuate forms of social control already in place and thus strengthen their formal position. In a democracy, diverging interests have legitimacy and some leverage to make claims that formally bid for the acquiescence and consent of others, whereas when most of the members of an organized setting have a tactical relationship toward authority (i.e., are not in a position to use an institutional authority argument), they tend to create or perpetuate forms of social control that weaken others' control. In a nondemocracy, most members are without formal authority, and those who have it do not need the formal acquiescence of the governed to legitimate their behavior.

The link between structure and process, as it is created by social control, is illustrated by two case studies in Chapters 4 and 5. Each case study describes the workgroup itself, its functioning, and relationships among members of the group; it then reconstitutes conflicting definitions of organizational problems within these groups. I look at how members identify the problem (there are conflicts or divergences about what the problem "really is") and the relational climate, built around authority relationships, in which they discuss it with the other members of the group (there are various ways to recognize or deny legitimacy to the assertion of particular claims). Several versions compete to become the underlying "facts" shaping the policy designed to handle the problem. These versions are not always debated in the same forum and do not always make themselves challengeable by others. Boundary work (absorption and insulation processes) aims at selecting the persons whose business it is to challenge or support one's version. Therefore, I try to explain why and how it would make sense for the members to try either to diversify or to limit (depending on the structure of their group and their respective position in it) the types of claims that they use, as well as the overall consequences of such strategies in each group. These case studies thus illustrate the fact that the structure of the work group has an indirect influence on the use of knowledge claims and thus on the definition of what counts as an "informed decision."

COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS: METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

As designed here, the study of the interactive elaboration of information requires the observation of communication behavior. In

general, however, studies of communication and information management in small groups and organizations rely on a technical conception of communication (involving a sender, a receiver, a code, and a message, which can exist and make sense intrinsically and independently from the conditions of its transmission). This model of communication is useful for defining and observing many organizational problems of structure or functioning. But, as seen above, it is not compatible with my purpose.

In this study, all the tasks performed by actors and the type of data collected, as well as the type of analysis chosen to identify the variations in the principles governing the negotiation of appropriateness, assume a different conception of communication. Chapter 2 examines how communication behavior provides empirical indicators to help reconstitute inductively the process of the interactive elaboration of information. For that purpose, the latter is defined as the negotiation of the appropriateness of messages exchanged by the members of the group.

This method breaks down the system of criteria used to make appropriateness judgments into different variables. I observe each variable separately and then combine the results. This methodology is exploratory and static, and could be called *prerhetorical*, if one gives to the term *rhetorical* the same meaning as Miller (1991). It uses tasks confronting the members of the groups with sociometric choices. The rationale of this method is to observe how members of workgroups deal with problems of communication. These instruments assume that the observation of individual tasks allows the collection of indications needed for an ideal-typical reconstitution of the interactive process I am interested in (Kellerhals et al. 1986).

For instance, the first type of communication behavior used here as an indicator is the acquisition of information. The data analyzed are the arguments invoked by the members to justify inclusion or exclusion of information sources among their colleagues. A typology of these arguments describes the variation of each criterion (institutional vs. noninstitutional identities, substantive vs. procedural legitimations) used in the negotiation of the appropriateness of a message. An interpretation of the differential use of these arguments according to the type of group is presented. The second type of communication behavior used here as an indicator is the quotation of others' positions concerning a common and controversial problem in the workgroup. The data analyzed are quotations produced by the members about each others' position. A typology of these quotations describes the variation of the third criterion (private vs. public accountability). An interpretation of the differential use of each type of quotation according to the type of group is presented.

In theory, each claim is perceived by the claimants as grounding their authority to know, as more likely to produce some acquiescence, some legitimacy, or some support for a specific definition of the situation, within the boundaries of a specific epistemic alignment. A more rhetorical approach (Miller 1991) to knowledge claims would certainly offer a more dynamic picture of this process of information elaboration. It would show in more detail how each claim includes an attempt to produce and reproduce acquiescence from others. A more sophisticated methodology could follow claims and counterclaims, the way members work out mutually acceptable agreements, give in, reach dead ends, lock themselves out of the process, etc. However, it should also be noted that a strict rhetorical approach does not address the question of the relationship between structure and process, and often loses the comparative approach adopted here. This is not the purpose of this study, and further research would be necessary to combine both methods.

To summarize this presentation, the contribution of this essay to the question, What do members consider to be an informed decision? is based on a theory of the knowing process. What counts as an informed decision also depends upon members' claims to know. An informed decision is a decision based on appropriate knowledge claims, which are conceived as intrinsically interactive. Members have a choice between different types of claims, and hypotheses are offered about the relationship between members' positions in the structure (summarized by their relationship toward authority) and the types of claims that they use to link information and decisions when different definitions of the situation compete for their attention. The amount of social control that they manage to exercise on epistemic coalitions providing legitimation and support for a specific claim is seen as the main link between structure and process. The social context in which decisions are made may thus indirectly preselect the claims that will be used to consider these decisions to be informed decisions. This epistemic control is achieved not only through control of information flows in the classical sense, but also through control of knowledge claims and epistemic alignments, which relies more on coalition building, on strategies of distribution or appropriation of the authority to know.

The first three chapters of this study offer a theoretical framework designed to develop, both conceptually and empirically, this perspective in the sociology of knowledge. Chapter 1 sketches a theory of knowledge claims. To develop this theory, I designed a study presented in Chapter 2, which offers a typology of such claims. Chapter 3 spells out the theory of the linkage between the process

and the structure of the social setting, and offers some hypotheses on the nature of this link in terms of social control. This framework helps to describe knowledge claims as an interactive process and prepares the case studies presented in the last two chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 attempt to illustrate and explore some empirical aspects of the process identified by this theoretical framework. They try to assess the extent to which the types of knowledge claims used by work-group members vary according to the hypotheses previously presented in Chapter 3. The conclusion defines the limits and perspectives of this approach to the microsociology of knowledge.

NOTES

1. In "*The Stranger*," Simmel (1908/1950b) addresses the question of the relationship between actors' positions and the knowledge produced by their various perspectives. However, the perspectives examined in his short essay are not linked to different positions within the social structure, but to issues of membership and allegiance to the group as a whole.

2. This is not to say that the early garbage can model of organizational choice offers the ultimate theory of decision-making, especially since it underestimates the importance of power, structural, and institutional constraints on organizational life [but see exceptions like Levitt and Nass (1989) or Mezias, Myers, and Scarselletta (1990)]. But it makes it easier, by uncoupling all the components of the decision-making process and by loosening all the relations among them, to try to reconstitute their shape and examine how the context influences the decisions. It is considered here as a heuristic model, even if its worth as a device for teaching how to make good decisions, and the extent to which it is in itself a good general theory of behavior, may be questionable.

3. The term *attention* is used both in the sense of participation and cognitive concentration: "Activity levels for individuals having considerable information about the system are quite different from the levels of those having little information, and these variations in attention have an impact on the decisions of the organization" (March and Olsen 1976:38).

4. Such a perspective could help explain the internal politics of an organization indirectly by analyzing how members generate their own distribution of attention and how they struggle to include or exclude each other from participation in this distribution.

5. As many studies of the sociology of science show (Latour and Woolgar 1982; Mukerji 1988).

6. See, for instance, the distinction made by Hawkins (1986) between deciding and ratifying. Feldman's (1989) study of policymaking analysts is also based on the assumption that decision processes depend upon or include a prior process whereby problems and solutions become defined. She calls

this process "issue interpretation"; it allows boundaries to be established within which analyses can occur. These boundaries help to determine what is relevant and irrelevant to an understanding of the issue.

7. The "information" I am referring to is produced by the actors in order to control uncertainty and encourage predictability of behavior, to orient themselves in their organized work environment, to develop their opportunities of strategic behavior, and to insert themselves in processes of decision and bargaining. As shown by Swanson (1978), this information has technical contents linked to the execution of particular tasks, as well as relational contents: the main point is its strategic value in the process of collective production characterizing organized workgroups. Therefore it can be defined as a "difference" made by a statement, which can clarify objectives as well as show possible alternatives for certain choices, costs and benefits linked to these choices, the degrees of uncertainty concerning the decisions to be made, the state of the relationship between decision-makers; and this in all the different aspects of organizations life. Concerning this conception of information, see also Paisley (1980).

8. My interpretation owes much to Shibutani (1962, 1966) and to more sociological conceptions of symbolic interactionism. Frame analysis (Goffman 1974) could also be used here. However, the definition-of-the-situation model, as a middle-range theory, seems to be better adapted for my purpose, especially since it is more sensitive to the link between structure and process, identity and behavior.

9. Concerning this, see Waters (1989) and Weber on the relationship between bureaucracy and collegiality.

Chapter 1

Knowing Well and the Sociology of Knowledge

The question, What is considered to be an informed decision? can easily be translated into another question: When do members of a social setting consider that they know what is going on *well enough* to make decisions on the basis of this knowledge? In theory, we can assume that an informed decision presupposes a knowledge base, and that this knowledge base is constructed by the actor as a result of a series of judgments. Their function is to assess the certainty of the propositions included in the reasoning leading to the "informed decision." In this sense, it is worth looking at what knowing well means to the members of a group in order to offer a sociological contribution to decision-making theory. To some extent, this approach has already been shaped by existing work in the sociology of knowledge. This chapter reviews some of this work and reformulates the question of knowing well in terms of information elaboration. It leads to an approach focusing on how members of a group use one another through a complex process of coalition building and boundary management in order to base their informed decisions on specific types of knowledge claims.

A MACROSOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

What knowing well means to the members of a social setting was not a central preoccupation of the first sociologists of knowledge. There has, however, been a trend in the discipline leading to the study of this subject, along with approaches designed to take into account actors' perspectives on their own behavior. When considering the latter issue, it is useful to remember the extent to which the

sociology of knowledge has long been, with some exceptions like the sociology of science, a macrosociological discipline mostly driven by epistemological or cognitivist concerns. Early perspectives in the discipline have not been concerned with what the actors themselves consider adequate knowledge. This is particularly clear in the work of authors like Durkheim, Scheler, and Mannheim.¹

When Durkheim (1912) writes about knowledge, he refers to entire disciplines such as law, ethics, or religion; he is mostly interested in actors' "capacity to know" (classifying, subordinating) in order to show the social origin of logic. Human understanding is collective in that it is rooted in social frames provided by kinship and hierarchical relationships, and in that it relies on categories or "instruments of thinking" that have social, spatial, and religious origins. Scheler (1925/1980) also makes a distinction between several genres of knowledge (religious, metaphysical, technical). The production of each of them is considered to be an assertion of a specific moral value and their distribution is supposed to vary according to individual personality traits. Such classifications (often too empirical or evolutionist) of types of knowledge are still in use in contemporary theories, even though they do not really show how knowledge is determined by the structure of society.

Mannheim's work (1952) focuses more on the latter issue. But his interest in how the production of ideas is linked to historical variations in the forms of social life is also related to epistemological questions. It maintains as its central question the problem of "true knowledge", accessible only to "free-floating intellectuals." It tries to uncouple the sociology of knowledge from Marx's political thought by separating a restricted ideology (which is partisan) from a generalized ideology (comprising all social determinants influencing thought). From this point of view, the sociology of knowledge studies "exclusively" the generalized ideology, and its perspective is inseparable from a quest for truth.

Later work in the field has introduced more microsociological concerns, which prepare sociologists to take actor's perspectives into account more systematically. In general, the idea that the knowledge produced by actors about their environment is shaped by their social (in the sense of relational) activities has now become a central idea of the discipline. For instance, the microsociological dimension appears in the study of the role of the "man of knowledge" by Znaniecki (1940) and the study of the credibility of the scientific argument by Ziman (1978). Gurwitsch (1966) started developing a microsociology of knowledge by associating "modes" of knowledge (for example, mystical vs. rational, empirical vs. conceptual) with "forms of sociability" (masses, communities, communions), thus proposing that the

way members of a society relate to each other influences the type of knowledge they can acquire.²

The sociology of science provides successful examples of this shift from an epistemological and macrosociological focus. Merton's work (1938, 1970), for instance, observed the scientific profession—science as an institution with its own norms and values—and its link to the industrial revolution; it remains a macrosociological work, but it inaugurates current studies in the production of scientific "facts," which represent an important and different contribution to the sociology of knowledge (see, for instance, Bloor 1976; Crane 1972; Kuhn 1962; Lalive d'Epinay 1983, 1985; Latour and Woolgar 1982; Menzel 1966; Mulkay 1979; Mukerji 1988). The microsociological and organizational perspectives of their "laboratory studies," which often focus on microprocesses of negotiations between scientists, can be used in the study of other social settings.

Given such developments, the study of what knowing well means to a member of a social setting becomes a more legitimate problem. In the next few pages I associate Berger and Luckmann's work (1966) with the first systematic treatment of this question. It is widely recognized that they provide a synthesis of different trends in the sociology of knowledge (micro- and macrosociological, European and American) that redefines its goals and redirects it toward the study of what passes for knowledge in society. Their approach brings the discipline closer to the study of what knowing well means to actors by stressing the importance of action, relationships, and communication in the construction of knowledge.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

Berger and Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), is generally considered as a turning point in the history of sociology of knowledge. The program they assign to the field is the study of everything that passes for "knowledge" in society. Their contribution to this goal does not merely consist in a new inductive empiricism: they provide a synthesis of several approaches, which deserves some description. First, they promote a praxeological conception of knowledge (knowing as a goal-oriented activity). Second, they stress the importance of the interactive dimension of knowledge construction and bring together the micro- and macrosociological sides of the field. And third, they link language and knowledge, thus pointing toward the study of communication behavior (information control and elaboration) as an important methodological choice for

the discipline. This interpretation of their contribution is widely shared, but its presentation here will only focus on the points that are relevant to the present analysis.

A Praxeological Conception of Knowledge

Berger and Luckmann do not understand knowledge to be the result of a cognitive performance that can be measured in terms of how well or how badly we see things as they are. Rather, knowledge is analytically considered as part of actors' goal-oriented behavior. For instance, since their focus is not on a "cognitive performance," it does not make much sense to consider knowledge as the contemplative reconstitution of "social representations," which is more important from an exclusively macrosociological perspective. The notion of collective representation in the sense originally defined by Durkheim, and later by many others (e.g., Herzlich 1972), has at the same time a psychological, epistemological, and macrosociological dimension. The study of social representations uses a cognitive approach: a social representation is supposed to organize perceptions, it is in itself a cognitive mechanism for processing information, an instrument of "social thought." It is not a purely intraindividual mechanism, but becomes too quickly a macrosocial phenomenon, largely collective, since the cognitive system of an individual is not supposed to be a perfectly autonomous entity functioning exclusively according to the "laws" of the psyche.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) do not conceive of the social construction of reality as the specific expression of any social thought, even when social thought is not defined in narrowly cognitivist terms. The difference between the interactive construction of reality and the reconstitution of social representations is made clear in the method with which each process is reconstituted. As we shall see, it is not possible to observe the interactive construction of reality directly; it is an ongoing process accompanying the actors' intentional behavior, a parallel work that has to be reconstituted in a constructivist way. The construction of reality must be observed indirectly, by examining actors performing communication tasks. The reconstitution of social representations, on the other hand, is a more thematic process in which knowledge is assimilated to the notion of "representation" or to that of "conscience" (which should rather belong to philosophical theories of "self-knowledge"). To know does not mean to build images, to face them, and to contemplate them. Knowledge has a praxeological dimension. The act of knowing is identified by its subject, the operations involved in it, and its purpose. Knowing is not

a simple game of intelligence, of empty forms, of pure activities working without strategic orientation or mediating value (Coulter 1989; Kellerhals and Lalive d'Epinay 1987; Kellerhals and Valente 1987; Lalive d'Epinay 1983).

This praxeological approach is a well-established one and stems from many theoretical insights. The concepts used by authors like Mannheim, Schutz, or by "formal" sociologists and ethnomethodologists to theorize about social action often correspond to this perspective or agree with the importance of "work," intentionality, and the goal-oriented dimension of knowledge. The phenomenological tradition, especially Schutz's conceptions of common sense and "everyday reasoning," links knowledge with intentionality and practicality. The ideas of work, of project, of goals known to actors, structure the meaning of all acts occurring in connection with them. Formal sociologists (in Simmel's sense) also strongly emphasize the praxeological dimension of knowledge, since they are interested as much in the extent to which actors "know how to do," as they are in "what the world looks like to them." Ethnomethodologists like Garfinkel have worked on questions such as how members get concrete jobs done in the real world, using whatever resources are at hand. For them, any credible theory of social action begins with this question. Garfinkel began to answer it by discovering some of the methods of thinking and acting observed in the "jury studies." Cicourel worked on the formation of social skills and extensively developed the idea of competence.

Along with this praxeological approach (and to the extent to which—as they develop today—they are of interest to sociologists), decision-making theories also account for this practical orientation of knowledge construction. They usually provide a model of behavior that illustrates the praxeological dimension well, although as indicated before, its theoreticians often have an instrumental and technical conception of information that ignores its relational construction (Feldman and March 1981).

The Interactive Dimension of Knowledge

Berger and Luckmann's work represents a synthesis between European and American contributions to the field, the latter often being considered as a social psychology or microsociology (Remmling 1973; Stark 1958, Stickers 1980). Their contributions to the sociology of knowledge has been to reintroduce in their discipline, following Schutz (1962), Mead (1934), and others, the idea that knowledge of an

object is built intersubjectively, that is, negotiated in the interaction between actors. Their phenomenological analysis of "everyday life reality" (Schutz's "paramount" reality) focuses on intersubjectivity in order to understand the processes by which knowledge is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social relationships. This everyday life reality is considered to be a construct shared with others, produced by "common sense" (as opposed to science, for instance). Actors refer to it to ground and justify their behavior. Although this reality often appears to be given and obvious, it is naturalized while being maintained by routine relationships. Actors can build other realities, but they are assumed to return to this everyday reality as their starting point. Berger (1970; Berger and Kellner 1964) has shown a great deal of interest in the relativization, abolition, or dissolution of this everyday life reality, its breaches and its competition with other realities, which are supported and maintained by competing experiences and social relationships. Multiple realities, and their coexistence or competition in society, are linked to multiple relationships that recognize, confirm, and approve them, and in which they have a meaning (Maffesoli 1986).

Knowledge of reality is interactive in that it can only exist with the support of an "epistemic community" (see also Holzner 1968; Holzner and Marx 1979). Interpretation does not happen *ex nihilo*; it is organized by categories socially approved, and differently legitimated in different groups. The validity of this knowledge is not absolute, a question of "truth," but derived from forms of relevance and legitimation. Knowledge resulting from this work is subject to constraints, negotiations, and acknowledged responsibility. For Berger and Luckmann, each relation accumulates and maintains what Schutz calls a "stock of knowledge." Reality is valued, legitimized, and maintained by the relationship among actors. The actors' stock of knowledge is socially distributed, i.e., appropriated differently by different individuals. The individual actor knows only some sectors of the common stock of knowledge, which is divided into common and specialized knowledge. The sociology of knowledge should be able to explore the emergence and transformation of these different forms of knowledge produced and reproduced in the ongoing interaction among partners in various relationships.

To summarize, this trend in the sociology of knowledge, inspired by phenomenology, concerns how actors construct their own reality in interaction with others.³ As an attempt to link the macro- and the microsociological perspectives in the discipline, *The Social Construction of Reality* shows that knowledge is built within relationships—even imaginary ones—which are a necessary dimension of the way actors make sense of phenomena and behavior. Interaction is represented

here by "conversation," or "face-to-face" exchanges. Little effort, however, has been spent in showing how this construction is accomplished, how it "emerges" from interactions situated in different relational settings.⁴

This underdevelopment of the microsociology of knowledge seems true in spite of work on the notions of uncertainty and ignorance, which contains as many indications of the interactive dimension of knowledge construction as the "positive" idea of knowledge itself. One can distinguish two types of uncertainty: a position of conscious ignorance and a position of metaignorance (Laing 1970; Smithson 1985).⁵ In a situation of conscious ignorance, the actors have an idea about what their problem is and what they should know; they know the extent of their ignorance and can attribute to somebody else the knowledge of a solution to their problem. In a situation of metaignorance, the problem to be solved is itself ignored or unclear, the actors are unaware of the extent of their ignorance and depend on others for the definition of the problem itself as much as for its solution.⁶ This distinction helps to show that knowledge and ignorance must be defined or negotiated by actors who perceive themselves and each other as knowledgeable or as ignorant, given a specific problem and compared to others (Kruithof 1972; Moore and Tumin 1949; Simmel 1908/1950a; Smithson 1985; Weinstein and Weinstein, 1978). Knowledge and ignorance cannot be defined in absolute terms because they are constructed interactively. When actors are considered or consider themselves to be ignorant, it is always relative to some knowledge attributed to others. Thus understood, ignorance and uncertainty show the dependence of members upon each other in the construction of knowledge.

Although this sensitivity to the relational and relative dimension of knowledge construction is not new, it emphasizes the trend in the sociology of knowledge toward the study of "knowing well." Along with the study of the social construction of reality, actors' perspectives are introduced and taken into account in the sociology of knowledge, while recognized as practical and relational products. Once the approach of knowledge construction as a goal-oriented (intentional) and interactive process becomes more acceptable in the field, theorizing about knowing well becomes easier. Just as one needs others in order to know the extent of one's ignorance, one needs them to be able to claim to know. One cannot know without—temporarily at least—believing that one is certain of one's knowledge. To be confident in one's authority to know is a necessary condition of knowledge. Actors can be socially required to be able to justify their claims to know, which means that knowing well requires some

judgment about one's claim to know, as well as ways of creating confidence in this judgment.

The question, at this stage, is how to develop this perspective. For Berger and Luckmann, as seen above, interaction and intersubjectivity are represented by conversation and face-to-face exchanges. Their constructionist approach takes us as close as it can to the study of knowing well by suggesting that the construction of knowledge can be studied through language and communication. From a rhetorical perspective, language in itself is considered as the locus of these interactions and simultaneously as a system of social control that frames these interactions. From this point of view, everyday experience is grasped and objectified in everyday language, which makes it possible to accumulate a practical and shared stock of knowledge. The study of language use and communication is thus presented as the method for this development. However, as this concept has been explored in the literature, it only provides a first and limited construct: knowing well means becoming richer in information, knowing more. This conception of knowledge as a finalized and collectively accumulated stock of information made possible by language and communication is best illustrated by the studies of information control.

Knowledge and Information Control

This approach considers actors' knowledge to be the result of information control processes that select and preselect the information available to them for accumulation. In a Simmelian tradition, many authors like Goffman (1959, 1961, 1971, 1974), McCall and Simmons (1966), Oyen (1982), Redlinger (1980), Shimanoff (1980), Sigman (1980, 1983, 1987), Vaughan (1989), and Wilsnack (1980) have described processes of social control over information flows and exchanges. Individual or group privacy, for instance, is built upon norms that control and regulate access to information, and determine whether information belongs to the individual member or to the group. As defined by Wilsnack (1980:468), information control concerns "the social problems of getting, keeping and using information."⁷ For instance, he identifies four processes (or operations) used by actors to control factual information: espionage (the process of obtaining information from people who do not want you to have that information), secrecy (the process of keeping other people from obtaining information you do not want them to have), persuasion (the process of making sure that other people obtain and believe information you want them to have), and evaluation (the process of

making sure that you learn more from the information you have obtained than just what other people want you to know). These operations, which can reinforce or counteract one another, shape the volume and direction of information flows in a social setting, and thus directly or indirectly actors' knowledge and decisions.

Secrecy, its functions, and the price paid for knowledge are major themes of this body of literature. Secrets are considered as one way to regulate the flow and distribution of information. Redlinger (1980) defines secrecy (the theory and practice of concealment) as an instrument of information management and as a way of including or excluding actors, by controlling membership in networks, groups, or secret societies. The more actors are allowed to know about a society the greater their demonstration of commitment and loyalty must be.

All sorts of practices, ranging from politeness rituals to various forms of deceit and the use of timing have been described as forms of information control (Bok 1982; Brown and Levinson 1978; Douglas 1986; Goffman 1959, 1971; Gouldner 1957; Oyen 1982; Shibutani 1962; Turner, Edgley, and Olstead 1975; Vaughan 1983, 1989). Some studies of interpersonal communication deal with openness and secretiveness by observing changes in communication style as the relationship between interlocutors develops (Baxter and Wilmot 1984; Berger and Calabrese 1975; Douglas 1985; Hewes, Graham, Doelger, and Pavitt 1985). Researchers in the field of interpersonal communication show how information exchanged by members changes with their definition of their relationship (Bochner 1978; Miller 1976).

Information control has itself been studied as an activity formally and informally regulated by the members of a social setting and their conceptions of their rights and duties to know (Lazega 1989). Empirically it is not difficult to identify different sets of rules of information control in members' reasoning leading to decisions. Consider an organizational setting: different categories of rules of information "distribution" can be identified inductively from members' assertions about choices of information sources in the organization. The distribution of information seems to work on the basis of reasoning in terms of attribution and allocation:⁸ how does one attribute knowledge to someone else, and how does one allocate knowledge (to others and to oneself)? In other words, reasoning about information control involves two operations at least: deciding who knows what (information attribution) and who should know what (information allocation). By looking at how allocation and attribution vary, and then cross-classifying these variables, various sets of rules of information distribution emerge. Members of organized settings use them in order to assess their respective rights and duties to know (about issues related to the decisions they have to make): confidentiality

rules (client), professional secrecy rules (profession), managerial communication rules (organization), and "hoarding" rules (internal coalitions). The main difference among these rules involves which locus of social control (indicated in parentheses) is perceived as having priority in shaping the flow of information.⁹

These complex studies of information control are based on a conception of knowledge that does not, in my opinion, directly advance the study of what knowing well means to the members of a social setting. This does not lessen their important contribution to sociologists' understanding of many social problems. Kruithof (1972) and many others develop the question of knowledge on a political level by looking at ignorance (defined as a lack of information and understanding in which actors can be kept) as a powerful lever of indirect social control. On a macrosociological scale, Kruitof observes power mechanisms by which social classes try to keep each other in ignorance and uncertainty. While focusing on the social context in which his operations of information control are performed, Wilsnack (1980) raises questions about how control of information is exchanged for other powers and resources; how inequality affects the uses and consequences of control processes; and how control processes break down or fail to be used in social relationships. Studies of information control also raise questions about privacy and individualism, sovereignty and property rights (for instance, intellectual property in highly competitive areas of research), inequality and participation in decision-making, as well as security systems and their dysfunctions (see Chapter 2).

As far as the study of knowing well is concerned, this overview leads to a basic conclusion: Theories of information control serve Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge very well, but both the theoretical approach and the empirical studies mentioned above usually assume that we know much more about information as a resource than we actually do. The processes described are operations controlling flows of information once the value of this information is already defined or recognized. Much of the work on information and secrecy does not directly address the question of knowing well because knowledge is conceived as a stock of information.¹⁰ Although these studies raise important problems, studies of knowing well based exclusively on this approach to information control would be reduced to studies of knowing more or knowing less. It would not make sense, sociologically speaking, to question the existence of inequalities in the distribution of information understood as a resource. But the problem of knowing well can be considered to be more a problem of evaluation of that resource than a problem of distribution of that resource. As already mentioned, knowing well

will be understood here more as a question of information elaboration than as a question of information control. Knowledge will not be considered exclusively as the product of information control processes manipulated by individuals and groups, but also the result of goal-oriented and interactive appropriateness judgments. The nature of these judgments is defined below.

KNOWING WELL AND INFORMATION ELABORATION

Knowing well cannot be reduced exclusively to the use of a stock of knowledge, as in the perspective of Berger and Luckmann, nor to the conception of information control as manipulation of rules of allocation and distribution. For the study of knowing well, uncertainty control is not only a question of quantity and access to ready-made information, but a question of authority, trust, and boundaries in information elaboration.¹¹ Messages need legitimation to be considered as informative. In Heimer's (1985) terms, information needs to be "auditable" in order to be used as a base for decisions. The secrecy approach to information control can be misleading for this reason: in everyday life actors design their own ways of controlling their uncertainty, which can be different from looking for experimental evidence, or double-checking their information as do journalists or intelligence agencies. Information control theories do not account, for instance, for the way actors decide about what is their business and what is not, the extent to which such a judgment presupposes the use of authority, and the actors' perception of social boundaries. Considering actors' knowledge to be the result of information control processes does not take into account actors' specific activity of knowing well (consisting of judgments about the certainty of one's knowledge). This essay offers a theory of knowledge and information as constructed by this type of judgment. Members of a social setting use one another as instruments for constructing facts (elaborating information) through complex processes of consensus and conflict (or relation building and dissolving). As noted above, just as one needs others in order to know the extent of one's ignorance, one needs them to be able to claim to know. The knowing process includes members' adjustment to the audience of their claims.

A useful way to explain the difference between control and elaboration is to return to the idea of information as a resource to be evaluated and exchanged. Theories describing social relations in terms of exchange make distinctions between several types of resources. The exchange theory literature provides several typologies of

resources (see, for example, Foa and Foa 1974; Kellerhals et al. 1986) where information—which can take the form of advice, opinion, instruction, or “facts”—holds an important place. Considering information as a resource raises the question of the criteria used to establish or measure its value. In his definition of communication from the perspective of exchange theory, Roloff (1981) stresses the importance of scarcity in this evaluation: actors may or may not take into account the perceived scarcity of information in order to give it a value. The evaluation of information can be understood as a particular form of contextualization; it can be compared to associating a piece of information with a “market.” The definition of this market is necessary for this information to become a resource, to have a value. To represent a market for a piece of information means to identify the actors for whom this resource might have a certain value, and also from among them those who already have this resource and those who do not.

This evaluation transforms sets and subsets of actors into potential markets. Information is valued here according to its transmissibility, to its exchangeability on markets either already institutionalized or created by the actor him- or herself. This marketing activity (creating or locating markets) consists basically in selecting potential interlocutors, including exchange partners and excluding others, i.e. in “playing” with boundaries and identities. It can be more or less exclusive since the actors can associate with the goods or with their exchange characteristics that exclude some other participants from the market where the exchange takes place (Kellerhals et al. 1986; Mauss 1923/1973; Piaget 1965). As shown by Singelmann (1972), exchange can be considered, at least in part, as a symbolic interaction (in the sense defined by symbolic interactionist theories) precisely in that the evaluation of the resources exchanged depends upon the definition by the exchange partners of the market they belong to. This information is not considered here as a resource in absolute terms, but as a potential resource, actualized or not by actors’ ongoing evaluation work.

There are many examples of theories that consider the evaluation of a qualitative resource as a task in itself rather than as an *ex post* recognition of an assumed intrinsic value. Work on “self-disclosure,” for instance, gives a particularly visible and helpful example of the evaluation of information by its contextualization. Self-disclosure presupposes that the actor tries to create and control two kinds of boundary. This type of communication has been described as a process of control of an “individual boundary” that the actor “opens” to transmit information about him- or herself, and of another boundary that the actors involved in the exchange try to institutionalize

around themselves; the latter boundary is supposed to reassure the person who is confiding that the information will not leak out to an unexpected and intrusive third party. The exchange takes place in a predefined and protected “market” (Derlega and Chaikin 1977). It is another matter (a matter of information control) to ask to what extent and under what conditions the definition of the market is stable or unstable, under what conditions these boundaries are respected or not, or confidences kept or broken.

We define information as a resource by working on the definition of a market for this resource, before we try to gain control (which is most often very limited) over who has access to what. The metaphors provided by exchange theories do not constitute in themselves a theory of information elaboration. However, they clearly show why we should not take for granted the informative value of messages, when studying what actors consider an informed decision to be and what knowing well means to them. A theory of information elaboration is needed (in addition to a theory of information control) that accepts the properties of knowledge described above (goal-oriented, interactively constructed), but is also based on a different conception of communication, and on an indirect approach to social control (in terms of allegiance, trust, and authority).

In summary, although the question of what knowing well means to the members of the social setting has not been sufficiently addressed by the sociology of knowledge, it has been framed by current trends in the discipline. The study of what passes for knowledge introduces the concept of knowledge as a praxeological and collective accumulation of information. This conception of knowledge underlies studies of information control. However, as innovative as these ideas may be, they formulate the question of knowing well exclusively as a question of knowing more or knowing less, being “rich” or “poor” in information. Without ignoring that there are obvious inequalities concerning information exchange and distribution in social life, the sociological study of knowing well needs an approach in which the informative value of the message is not taken for granted, and in which the task of evaluation and elaboration of information by the actors holds a more central place. The interactive dimension of knowledge has to be understood in more dynamic terms. The following chapters focus on one important aspect of this evaluation and elaboration, which consists in the way actors entitle themselves as knowers, gain the authority to know, and try to exercise control over what should be known. Theorizing about knowing well thus means theorizing about this aspect of knowledge construction, which has been neglected by the sociology of knowledge: how actors legitimize the *claim to know* on which their feeling or judgment of knowing well is based. The

Introduction indicated a general answer to this question: the members of a social setting use one another for that purpose through a complex process of coalition building and boundary management. As already mentioned, the specific answer will be provided by considering information elaboration as the result of a judgment called "appropriateness judgment." The nature of this judgment has not been studied by the sociology of knowledge; the next sections provide a theory that tries to account for its dimensions.

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

The difference between information control and information elaboration does not yet explain how information elaboration works. To do this, it is useful to reduce this difference to two underlying conceptions of communication. In other words, the difference between the two processes stems from two different models of communication: a technical model and a "negotiated" model.

The technical conception of communication (largely dominant in the social sciences) is based on the well-known model of a source sending a coded message to a receiver. In this model, communication is the exchange or transfer of a piece of information that exists and has a meaning independent of the interlocutors, source or receiver. The message has its own life, contains in itself its own informative value. Information is thus traditionally viewed as "something" describing reality, which is routed through specific channels, and reduces uncertainty to allow actors to adapt to this reality and control it better. This instrumental definition refers to an invariant, to the idea of "objective information" describing the world independently from the observer (Dervin 1980). It also requires the idea of language as a system of signs used to accumulate stocks of knowledge, which are in turn sharable and transmissible between actors using the same system. The telephone conversation best illustrates this definition as a transmission of information that is easy to interpret in technical, sociological, and sociolinguistic terms.

However, such a technical conception of communication loses its heuristical qualities when the observer wants to take into account the fact that actors elaborate information interactively, that they are confronted with uncertainty concerning what has to be known, that they do not assume that it is transparently offered by the message itself. Therefore, it does not contribute to the study of knowledge claims. In contrast, I will define communication as a process of

negotiation producing the informative value (or the appropriateness) of the message. On the basis of this definition of communication behavior, knowing well is understood as a process of information elaboration. The latter is based on the evaluation of the appropriateness of the message, the negotiation of its informative value. Again, the question is not who is rich and who is poor in information, but who uses which criteria to judge the appropriateness of messages. The negotiation mentioned here consists in the strategic use of this "criteriology."

If knowledge is based on the definition and accumulation of "facts" or information, in which terms should we think about this "definition"? What are the criteria used in this negotiation of the informative value of messages? A theory of information elaboration is needed for that purpose, which describes the operations comprising this process. This description should include an ideal-type system of criteria on which the appropriateness judgment is based. Its variations would describe the negotiation of interest here.

TOWARD A THEORY OF APPROPRIATENESS JUDGMENTS

In what terms should this negotiation of the appropriateness of a message be analyzed? What are the criteria used by the appropriateness judgment? How do they vary so as to allow such a negotiation? Examined below are terms in which it is possible to define the dynamics of information elaboration. The criteria used to judge the informative value of the message are articulated by the symbolic interactionist theory of the "definition of the situation."

The Contribution of Symbolic Interactionism

Among sociological theories, that of symbolic interactionism pays the most attention to interactive phenomena such as appropriateness judgments produced by actors.¹² This approach stemmed from anti-behaviorist criticism, and developed in a polemical climate against functionalist orthodoxy by stressing the meaning that behavior has for the actors themselves. The perspective of symbolic interactionism on social behavior generally rejects any view attributing to the social world a reality independent of actors' minds or detached from the meaning they give to it: the social world emerges from intentional and symbolic activity of its members acting in relationship with one another. People are interpreting and interacting beings, and the

description of their behavior must include the meaning that this behavior has for the actors. *Meaning* is not considered here in its philosophical dimension but as a part of behavior itself (Manis and Meltzer 1972).

The interactionist movement (in a very broad sense) in sociology is not homogeneous. Some of its theoreticians, like those of the ethnomethodology school mentioned above, have almost transformed the construction of reality into a subjective—though always abstractly “contextualized”—phenomenon that does not really take into account the influence of the social structure on this process; social reality is observed as if created by autonomous actors embedded in the flow of everyday life (Garfinkel 1967; Silverman and Jones 1976; Zimmerman 1970). Other authors, closer to symbolic interactionism, take more into account the social context and the way it influences individual behavior and interactions, even though they do this without comparing these contexts in a systematic way (Burke, 1965; Goffman 1961; Strong 1979). From this point of view, actors construct “reality,” actors among whom researchers recognize predefined roles and therefore an insertion into a social structure. Berger and Luckmann’s perspective borrows from both tendencies, while calling for a type of research that “socializes” the construction of reality more, and is therefore closer to symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism has produced a praxeology, a general theory of action, based on this conception of reality as a social and intersubjective construct. In that sense, the elaboration of information is important for actors who cope, individually or collectively, with situations of uncertainty, with decisions to make, with problems to solve, with tasks to perform. Although the term *praxeology* is usually used from a functionalist perspective on social action, it is deliberately used here to qualify the symbolic interactionist perspective. From such a basic point of view, at least, the two schools are difficult to distinguish. The praxeology contained in symbolic interactionism insists on the *control* that actors have on their own behavior, that is, on some type of rationality. This control resides in the appropriateness that behavior can have at the same time for the actor and for the others.¹³ This theory of action is based on the idea that actors make sense of their behavior, and that this sense is linked to the appropriateness judgments applied to behavior in order to guide it.

From this perspective, the question of knowing well makes more sense than from others. Indeed, the contribution of symbolic interactionism to the study of knowing well has been to provide a first ideal-typical description of such appropriateness judgments. The theory of the “definition of the situation” supplies this model. Symbolic interactionism has absorbed and transformed this theory

into the description of a social rationality of knowledge in a way that is very useful here.

The Theory of the Definition of the Situation

As part of symbolic interactionist thought, the theory of the definition of the situation has a particular status as an ideal-typical description of the appropriateness judgment.¹⁴ A short description of this theory seems necessary to ground the description of the criteria used by this judgment.¹⁵

Thomas’s definition led to the development of the theory of the definition of the situation: “Preliminary to any self-determined act of behavior there is always a stage of examination and deliberation which we may call the definition of the situation” (1923:27). This theory starts from reflection on this “examination” or “deliberation” as a prerequisite of all “rational” action. On the basis of Mead’s ideas, authors like Shibutani (1962) ground this “examination” in actors’ selective perception and add an interactive perspective to the understanding of the process. Among the indefinite number of perceptions that simultaneously constitute their environment,¹⁶ actors are supposed to differentiate those to which they pay attention and those which can be ignored or neglected in order to evaluate the appropriateness of an action. This selection between what is “real” and what is not introduces a second operation (analytically speaking): actors cannot perceive without resorting to a “point of view” or a “perspective,” not to be understood as “opinion” or “belief,” but as a position of authority from which the selection—and the set of criteria used to shape it—are certified as legitimate. This position is indispensable for the symbolic transformation to which the actors submit their environment, and with which they guide their behavior. For the symbolic interactionist theory, the required existence of such a position of authority means that behavior is not understandable without an audience, which enables sociologists to explain actors’ behavior in terms of social control. The actors anticipate the actions and expectations of this audience and orient their behavior accordingly. They cannot perceive these expectations and organize these actions unless they share a common language with this audience. This way of explaining behavior has made the notion of “reference group” very popular. As a form of social control, it consists less in coercion than in taking into account the expectations attributed to the audience.¹⁷ The definition of the situation produced by actors thus depends upon what their perspective and instance of social control allow them to anticipate: what is perceived largely depends on what

one is expected to perceive under the control of this audience (Rock 1979; Shibutani 1962).

The theory of the definition of the situation is based on the idea that the use of the criteria of classification depends on an act of "allegiance" to an instance of social control (audience), which in turn guarantees the legitimacy of these criteria and the "reality" resulting from the selection. Behavior includes such an "instantiation," i.e., the definition of an instance of social control to which the actors account for their acts, in exchange for being acknowledged as the sources of these acts (their identity and role) and as members of the group (Shibutani 1962). Thus the control that actors exert on their behavior, the orientation they give to it, depends on their capacity to look at their own acts from the point of view of "someone else." It depends on actors' allegiance to this instance, which identifies them with some actors and differentiates them from others, thus establishing their membership to a social setting. The interactive dimension of actors' behavior resides precisely in this allegiance, rather than being defined through the empirical and conditional model of two actors facing each other, and acting in relationship to each other. Actors' behavior is interactive precisely in that it assumes this allegiance to an instance from where an appropriateness judgment can be applied to their behavior.¹⁸

In summary, this task of defining the situation results in a selective and iterative perception. Without such selection, what is known or perceived would not have identifiable dimensions, and would vary according to an indefinite number of modalities. The interactionist perspective recognizes that this selection does not happen in a vacuum. A considerable amount of sociological literature tries to describe the phenomena that are supposed to influence the definitions of the situation: many factors such as the perception of significant others and acquisition of language (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1959, 1974; Gonos 1977; Javeau 1980; Lalive d'Épinay 1985; McHugh 1968; Perinbanayagam 1974; Shibutani 1955, 1962, 1966; Stebbins 1967; Stone and Farberman 1970).

The use of this theory of the definition of the situation as a theory of knowing well and of information elaboration requires some adjustments. First, this notion remains in the literature either very abstract or too empirical; therefore, the next section will translate it into a limited set of operations that actors perform (or criteria they refer to) in their interactions with one another so as to produce appropriateness judgments. Second, this notion has frequently been used in a way that does not correspond to this use, particularly to describe a psychological, or "mental," orientation of actors' behavior. I will

stress the social and interactive dimension of the operations described here. This will enable us later to formulate hypotheses on the relationship between different modalities of the definition of the situation and the structure of the social setting to which the actors belong.¹⁹

The Criteria of Appropriateness Judgments

This presentation of the theory of the definition of the situation is long enough to identify three operations required by its conception of appropriate behavior. These operations describe the appropriateness judgment in an ideal-typical and analytical way; they define the system of criteria on which it is based. The three components of this system of criteria are selected from the theory for their praxeological importance. They answer successively the following basic questions: First, for a given or anticipated behavior, which is the instance of social control recognized by the actor? Second, how is the action legitimized on behalf of this instance of social control? And third, who is entitled to represent this instance of social control among the members of the social setting to which the actor belongs?

Actors' Identification. The importance given by symbolic interactionism to a "perspective", an "audience" of actors' behavior, indicates how central to this theory the allegiance to an instance of social control is. This allegiance represents a form of affiliation or alignment in Goffman's sense. In exchange for this allegiance, the actors are invested with a specific identity and membership. This identity allows the actors to recognize themselves as the sources of their own actions. Any appropriate behavior that makes sense to the actors themselves entails a recognized "signature."

The interest of this exchange lies in the potential conflict between competing allegiances in a social setting. Hence each actor represents for other actors several ways of being recognized and identified. The important question then becomes in what terms actors establish their own identity among all possible ones. They "negotiate" their identity (Holzner 1973) by ranking these allegiances hierarchically and by giving priority to one among these multiple memberships. This arrangement can therefore be considered as a choice of an "identity criterion" (Kellerhals et al. 1986) among several instances of social control, which has possible repercussions on the negotiation of appropriateness of one's behavior. Actors are other-monitored in the sense that they depend on others' recognition in order to be able to act, but self-monitored in the sense that they choose where they belong and create a hierarchy of allegiances by deciding which

identity to involve in their action. In other words, actors' identification entails the creation of an interactive setting in which the anticipated or performed actions make sense. Further below, identity negotiations will be described as a choice between institutional or noninstitutional identities.

The first operation (the identification of the source of the action) has a central place in the symbolic interactionist theory in that it relates the other actions with one another and with their position in the social structure (Turner 1956; McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1980). Thus, the next two operations can be linked directly to this first one and indirectly to the structure of the social setting in which the actors belong. The course of action is oriented and influenced by definitions and redefinitions of identities. The structure of the group affects members' behavior indirectly, through its influence on these negotiations.

Stressing this analytical phase of defining identities does not mean that one can reduce an interactive behavior to a series of purely symbolic exchanges. From a praxeological perspective, actions and interactions are connected to tasks and problems.²⁰ Establishing identities and showing allegiance to an instance of social control are necessary prerequisites of action (McCall and Simmons 1966), and only the first component of the definition of the situation.

Legitimacy of Action. The second generic question is, How do actors legitimize their behavior on the behalf of this instance of social control? What form does the legitimation of behavior take? When comparing alternative actions, the actors can orient their behavior by interpreting the existence of a social control in several different ways. In what terms will the anticipated or expected behavior be considered as legitimate or illegitimate?

This link between the instance of social control and action must be recognizable, in one way or another, to the actors themselves. The theory of the definition of the situation stresses the formation of expectations and the anticipation of induced consequences of one's behavior as a necessary step when choosing among alternative actions and ways of legitimizing the choice. In that sense, "what is legitimate" means "what is expected from me." The actors are able to problematize their own behavior, that is, to establish a relationship between an action and an effect to obtain or to avoid. This problematization can take, for instance, the form of an anticipation of sanctions—and sometimes of a prevention of risks, inasmuch as the actors try to avoid behavior perceived as inducing undesired consequences.

This means that accounts for descriptions of the effects of one's

actions (by the actors themselves) contain indications about how one legitimizes the behavior on the behalf of an instance of social control. The fact that such accounts contain these indications will be used methodologically for the observation of the different ways in which actors answer this second generic question.

Actors' Accountability. The third generic question is, Who is entitled to represent the instance of social control? For the theory of the definition of the situation, every action involves other actors since instances of social control do not exist unless represented by others, particularly within a group. The allegiance to an instance of social control and the definition of an identity create an interactive setting. Since the instance of social control is a position that others can occupy, the question for the actor becomes, For a given act, whom to recognize among all the members who might exercise this control as a representative of this instance? In what terms are these inclusions and exclusions performed?

The praxeological importance of this criterion is linked to actors' accountability. Since they are accountable for their behavior to an "audience," actors look for support; but to whom do they turn for this validation of the legitimacy of their actions? Actors certainly have several possible ways of answering this question through trying to shape the audience, which will provide the guarantee that the actions make sense to others, too. They can define and redefine ad hoc constituencies in which these actions are evaluated, validated, or disqualified. To include some actors and exclude others from this audience, that is, to decide about the extension of this audience, comes down to choosing representatives for the instance of social control.²¹ In a group, for instance, the question can arise whether all the members can represent the social control for such action, whether or not they are all part of this audience. As described further below, the actor may thus establish, by cooptation, internal boundaries within the group, and try to play on their stability.

To decide about the extension of one's accountability means therefore to designate, within the social setting one belongs to, those from whom one wishes to obtain an assent, a ratification, a guarantee of legitimacy for one's behavior. The selection of these representatives of the instance of social control can divide the group; this helps to establish the discriminant quality of one's behavior, the "distinction" that actors may try to acquire among all the members of a social setting.

In summary, the theory of the definition of the situation describes, within the praxeological framework of symbolic interactionism, three operations that constitute the interactive elaboration of information

when applied to the transmission of a message. In this study, the notion of definition of the situation will be considered as an ideal-typical description of the operations into which the appropriateness judgment can be broken down.²² This transformation of the notion of definition of the situation into a set of criteria allowing actors to negotiate the appropriateness of a message produces a theory of "knowledge claims" or "reality claims."

A sociology of knowledge built upon the study of knowledge claims and information elaboration can contribute to the study of actors' conception of what an informed decision is. To see how these operations constitute a system of criteria used by actors to negotiate the appropriateness of a message, it is necessary to observe the way each of these operations can vary. Each of these criteria is a variable in the negotiation through which an act acquires meaning and appropriateness. The question of the variation of these criteria separately and together, and that of a typology of knowledge or reality claims is the focus of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. My intention is not to present a history of the sociology of knowledge. Instead, I focus briefly and selectively on some authors who participate in the definition of the important problems in the field, leading to the question of how actors evaluate their knowledge and what it means for them to know well.

2. This work remained unfinished, and *Les Cadres sociaux de la connaissance* insists more on broad and empirical distinctions between types of knowledge (economic, scientific, political, for instance) and types of social formations. As noticed by Namer (1985), Gurvitchian relativism distributes types of knowledge (arbitrarily differentiated) according to either historical criteria or multiple and nonhierarchized sociological classifications, and is essentially macrosociological.

3. Berger and Luckmann define reality as a quality of phenomena recognized by the actor as having an existence that is independent of his or her will. Knowledge is defined as the certainty that these phenomena are real and that they have specific characteristics (1966:13).

4. The analysis of interactions and of experiences of intersubjectivity does not occupy a central place in their description of the emergence of a society (by the institutionalization of behavior and by the creation of symbolic universes legitimizing this behavior), or the progressive socialization of individuals (by successive interiorizations of this constructed reality). Only their description of everyday reality insists on the interactive dimension of knowledge construction.

5. The construction of reality might be understood as an activity trying to "reduce" uncertainty, as Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, and Miller (1976) do, when they try to build an "interpersonal epistemology." I would rather refer to the term *uncertainty control*, and identify different situations of uncertainty rather than different degrees (weak or strong) of uncertainty. This difference can be illustrated by an empirical distinction between uncertainty linked to a specific task and uncertainty linked to actors' relational environment.

6. On the differences between an actor's dependence upon others in each uncertainty situation, see Waller (1936) on the normative dimension of the definition of social problems.

7. "By information control I mean the processes used to make sure that certain people will or will not have access to certain information at certain times" (p 468).

8. Attribution means perception of the participants in the information exchange, for instance, in personal or impersonal terms. Allocation means perception of interests having priority in the exchange of the resource (allegiances, loyalties); it is based, for instance, on a perception of intraorganizational power and trust games or on the perception of pressures from outside the organization (such as duties toward clients or other organizations).

9. A similar classification of socially defined and negotiated rules of information control can be found in Sigman (1983, 1987), who identifies two types of rules: the first concerning what can or cannot be taken for granted, attributed, understood, or known by members in a social setting; the second concerning what can or cannot be transmitted. See also Descombes (1977).

10. Although it does sometimes look at the extent to which the rules of information control are used by the actors themselves in order to consider whether they know well or not.

11. See Smithson (1985) on "reality tests," and Erickson's (1979) study of actors' judgments about the need for secrecy in organizational contexts, and the extent to which such judgments are based on "norms of trust and distrust" and on assessments of the importance of information to others. Similarly, in the studies of persuasion as well as in the data presented later in this essay, judgments about the trustworthiness of others are used in order to ascertain the value of information. About this point see also Shapiro (1987).

12. A distinction should be made here between a strict and a broad use of the term *symbolic interactionism*: the strict use refers to the work of a core set of sociologists and social psychologists like Blumer (1969), Denzin (1970), or Shibutani (1955, 1966), who start from Mead's (1934) texts; the broader use refers in a more general way to an interactionist movement whose members, like Becker (1963) or Strauss (1978), acknowledge no particular allegiance to Mead's work. The authors referred to here under this denomination belong to the first as well as to the second category; they will be cited according to their interest for the development of this theory, not according to distinctions that have less meaning for a microsociology for knowledge.

13. For analytical reasons, I make a distinction between logic or linguistic

"relevance," and sociological appropriateness. Concerning this distinction, see Sanders (1980), but also Schutz (1970).

14. The theory of the definition of the situation has not always been interpreted as a model for appropriateness judgments. An "empiricist" tradition, quite paradoxically, considers the definition of the situation from a behaviorist perspective. I do not include here a discussion of this tradition since it is almost entirely disconnected from an interactionist theory.

15. I prefer the notion of the definition of the situation to the term *frame* in Goffman's sense (1974). The notion of frame is sometimes understood purely cognitively. It is not linked to the identity of the actor and to the interactive dimension of knowledge, and is therefore more difficult to integrate with a microsociological perspective than is usually acknowledged. For instance, criticism against the "just reframe it" idea does not apply to the theory of the definition of the situation. Although both these notions have the same function in the description of actors' behavior, the theory of the definition of the situation has a more dynamic and analytic dimension, insofar as I understand it as a description of the process of the appropriateness judgment and the criteria that constitute this judgment.

16. This uncertainty applies to all the ingredients of decision-making: participants, goals, problems, solutions, etc.

17. By this I do not mean that all are "other-monitored," but that actors do refer to norms that they do not define themselves, although they may have to choose between competing sets of such "external" norms in situations of normative ambiguity.

18. It is also true that the actors involved in the empirical interaction may represent this instance for one another.

19. See, for instance, Walker, Thomas, and Zelditch (1986).

20. In organized settings, identity is transformed into status and role, therefore introducing questions of authority relationships and decision-making power.

21. Here the extension of actors' accountability does not measure their degree of responsibility. The extension of their accountability measures the possibility or impossibility for others to represent social control to which the actors answer for their actions.

22. In this theoretical description of the appropriateness judgment, only three generic problems are identified on the basis of the theory of the definition of the situation. However, other praxeological problems could add more steps to the model of appropriateness that is presented here. The criterion used to include a new analytical step would be that the operation should have a meaning from the symbolic interactionist perspective on social control. This condition links an additional criterion to the three already taken into account. The necessary simplification by this model raises the question of "completeness" of this criteriology, of the exhaustiveness of the theory. Given the literature on the subject, however, this question seems secondary at this stage. I find on the one hand cognitive and intrapsychical (Roloff and Berger 1982) or technical (Miller 1976) conceptions of information processing; on the other hand, for other sociological approaches such as the functionalist

approach, the question of this elaboration does not even make sense. The question of how simplified is the ideal-typical description provided here should therefore be answered on the basis of its results. It is sufficiently complex if it allows me to reconstitute a typology of the modes of interactive elaboration of information, and to formulate interesting hypotheses concerning the relation between the process and the structure of the social setting.

Chapter 2

Boundary Work and Forms of Endogenous Knowledge¹

Is it possible to observe different types of reality claims and ways of knowing well from this interactionist perspective? This chapter offers a tentative answer to the question by using communication behavior to reconstitute these claims. Berger and Luckmann root the social construction of reality in communication, which they usually characterize as face-to-face. Their conception of communication is a technical and semiological one: it assumes the separate existence of a sender, a code, a message, and a receiver. For the purpose of this study, however, such a definition of communication is insufficient and, paradoxically, seems to account for the current lack of development of the microsociology of knowledge. It does not take into account judgments of appropriateness that interlocutors incorporate in the messages that they exchange. Here I look at communication behavior in a much more "pragmatic" way. It is still defined as the transmission and exchange of messages, but it assumes that the appropriateness of the message is socially negotiated by interlocutors in the act of transmission itself. Reality claims are based upon the negotiation of the appropriateness of the messages that carry them.

Therefore, to observe reality claims is not easily done directly. Rather, it minimally involves studying how actors perform the different steps of an appropriateness judgment. The negotiation of the appropriateness of a message, as it has been previously theorized, is made in three operations. The immediate purpose of this chapter is to identify the forms of each of these operations taken as a variable, and to use these descriptions to undertake a typology of the different modes of reality claims. An exploratory study was designed to work on this issue inductively and to ground propositions concerning the relationship between process and structure, the negotiation and its

context. This is a first attempt to "listen" to reality claims and to develop the theory of the interactive elaboration of information. Its limits and methodological problems will be made explicit, and suggestions put forward for future research.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

The exploratory study was undertaken to collect information about the main steps of the appropriateness judgment. This reconstitution identifies inductively different types of reality claims and derives from them a typology of forms of "endogenous knowledge."

The study is based on the observation of communication behavior in two workgroups. Both workgroups are units of public administration. One is an administrative department, representing a strongly bureaucratic type of setting, and the other a social work unit, representing a bureauprofessional or collegial type.² An overall description of these groups is provided here because reference to their communication system and to the communication behavior of their members will be made throughout the rest of the book as illustrations of more abstract ideas.

The social work unit is a workgroup comprising thirteen members. The officially stated purpose of this group is to manage a semiprivate institution, which houses about 150 asylum-seekers and their families when they arrive in Switzerland from different countries around the world. The institution accommodates them, tries to help them adapt to their new context and to become financially as well as psychologically independent as quickly as possible. The asylum-seekers can stay in this institution as long as it takes for an official response to be made to their asylum request. This can take several years, and a negative answer results in expulsion from Switzerland. The institution is situated outside the town in relative isolation, which tends to reinforce a sense of autonomy among the team responsible for running it. It is divided into four separate houses, three of which are managed by two social workers each, and the fourth by one social worker. The institution's administration and supervisors are housed in separate offices. The team consists of a director, who is a social worker; his deputy, who is an administrator; and a team working under their supervision. The director has under his supervision the professional team of seven social workers; the administrator manages the institution and has under her supervision a secretary and three maintenance persons. A description of their work (which includes only a small proportion of routine tasks), interdependence, and

accountability is presented in Chapter 5. It must be stressed, however, that the composition of this workgroup shows a dominant proportion of workers who think of themselves as professionals [or "semiprofessionals," in Etzioni's (1969) classification of social workers] and believe in principles of collegiality (Freidson 1986; Sainsaulieu and Périnel 1979; Troutot 1982; Waters 1989).

The administrative unit is a tax office comprising eleven members, all of whom are civil servants. As a fiscal department, it is one of the official units responsible for taxation and tax collection in the city of Geneva. Briefly stated, this department's objective is to bring in as much money as possible for the administration, within the limits imposed by law. The unit enjoys a certain autonomy and is geographically separate from the administration's buildings. The interdependence between member is even more obvious than in the social service, as work is organized into a kind of chain. The team is made up of a manager and her deputy, who are lawyers; a secretary; an accountant; two investigators; four tax officers; and an employee responsible for the databank. The tax collection is divided into a set of connected tasks: updating the taxpayers' files, finding new taxpayers, sending out declarations to be filled in, calculating the amount to be paid by each taxpayer, sending the invoices, collecting the money, negotiating deadlines or reductions with recalcitrant taxpayers, or taking legal action against them if necessary. A description of the members' tasks, interdependence, and accountability is provided in Chapter 4. Unlike that of the preceding group, the composition of this workgroup shows a majority of nonprofessional employees. Its organization is quasi-Taylorian, or at least much more bureaucratic than that of the social service unit (Knights and Robert 1982; Rothman 1979; Sainsaulieu 1977).³

The study undertaken in these groups is qualitative, adopting an approach close to that described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The author spent two to three months observing each workgroup. The first step involved a case study, which was also used to adjust the research technique presented below to the characteristics of each group. The data collected during the second step comes from a more systematic inquiry conducted within each group. The "subjective solidarity networks" technique developed in Kellerhals et al. (1986) inspired the methodology. It is not, strictly speaking, a sociometric technique, although it makes use of the same principles, especially concerning the tasks the members of the groups are confronted with. In this study, all the members (individually) were given problems of communication to solve. Resolving these problems presupposed choices concerning inclusion and exclusion of information sources listed on the chart of the workgroup. These problems of communi-

cation involved (1) the acquisition of different types of information⁴ and (2) the re-creation (by statements) of other members' positions in an ongoing debate inside the workgroup.⁵

This inductive reconstitution of a typology of reality claims is based on content analysis of the arguments used by the members to legitimate their choices of inclusion and exclusion on the chart. The following sections present in more detail the observation technique, the type of data, and the content analysis used to render the steps of an appropriateness judgment.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

In order to observe the principles governing the negotiation of the appropriateness of a message, two types of decisions linked to communication behavior were analyzed. To make informed decisions, actors may have to acquire information from others, and thus select information sources, and also decide whether or not they are satisfied with the information they have acquired. These decisions and their justifications are used as indicators of how each operation in the negotiation of the appropriateness of a message varies.

Acquiring Information

From among the many ways of gathering information in organizations, this study selected "interactive" strategies (Berger et al. 1976) of information acquisition. Each workgroup member was presented individually with the chart of the group and with a problem that required information from others. Members were asked, first, to simulate choosing information sources from among their colleagues, and, second, to justify the inclusion or the exclusion of each potential source.

The members were asked to explain the reasons that lay behind each choice. During the interview and the analysis, I focused on the arguments justifying the inclusion or exclusion of sources. These arguments are not purely circumstantial; presumably they contain indications of a more general nature, namely, criteria used by the actor to evaluate the appropriateness of a message. Indeed, each argument contains two types of indications concerning the variation of the first and second parameters (modes of identification and modes of legitimation). For the first parameter, I observe a difference between *institutional* and *noninstitutional* modes of mutual recognition; these are the broadest categories used by the members to

identify others' shared or competing affiliations or interests (in the sense of McCall and Simmons 1966; Kellerhals et al. 1986). For the second parameter, the difference between *substantive* and *procedural* arguments of legitimation was the most powerful discriminant. When the choice of information sources is justified in substantive terms, the actors focus on the message transmitted, its content and the quality of the information transmitted or ignored (completeness of the reported facts, expected or perceived accuracy of the reported facts, proximity to the point of view reporting the facts). When the justification is procedural, members focus on preestablished rules organizing communication within the group. Members use procedural arguments that focus on the act of acquisition itself, its authorization, the relational or formal constraints on the transmission of information. For instance, procedural arguments refer to formal rules requiring or preventing acquisition of information from potential sources; the existence or absence of personal relationships with the potential sources (which are ultimately used to assess their reliability); the loyalty or absence of loyalty to subgroups and more or less impersonal coalitions.

Four types of arguments are inductively distinguished: (1) institutional and substantive arguments, (2) institutional and procedural arguments, (3) noninstitutional and substantive arguments, and (4) noninstitutional and procedural arguments. Examples of each of these arguments follow respectively.⁶

- (1): I go speak to the secretary because she has loads of information—I know that she knows things, even if I have to be a bit selective and careful.
- (2): I would not ask X because I am the head of this department and I don't want to weaken my deputy's position, out of respect to him. You've got to decide what you want: either you appoint a deputy and you respect this delegation in front of all the other clerks; or, if you want to go and ask questions directly, you don't appoint a deputy and so you don't bypass anybody. I don't like people interfering in my business, so I wouldn't interfere in his.
- (3): I would go chat with X; I can take my questions even further because we're on good terms, and we have similar points of view on this institution.
- (4): I'd go to X because he is the person I get on with best. He is a friend, I trust him the most. If something happened, for instance, which could endanger my position, I know he would warn me even if he'd been asked not to tell me about it.

Each argument displays two of the components or properties of reality claims. First, they either authorize or disqualify the use of institutional authority in the negotiation of the appropriateness of the message.⁷ This dimension of reality claims will be considered more closely in Chapter 3. Second, they either presuppose the existence of a common reality, which is accessible to all the members, thereby assuming a possible consensus between all members on a definition of the situation; or they emphasize the existence of internal boundaries within the group, which are used to avoid a conflict between competing definitions of the situation. By boundaries I mean the differences between members that are activated to separate, to raise barriers to the construction of a common definition of the situation. The second component of these arguments is the most important to the purpose of classifying reality claims. It concerns whether claims present themselves as legitimized or authorized by all the members of the group or by part of the group. It shows how a reality claim protects itself against delegitimization: substantively, by building consensus, or procedurally, by compartmentalizing the setting in which claims are made. This indication is matched below with a third, but equally important dimension of appropriateness judgments.

Quoting Other Members

Each member of the workgroup is presented with the task of describing the other members' position concerning an ongoing debate in the group. Actors must thus differentiate between colleagues whose position they know and can repeat, and those whose position is unknown and therefore unquotable.⁸ When another member's position was claimed to be known, respondents were asked to "quote" it and to explain how they knew or learned about it. As explained in Chapter 1, I assume that respondents find in the context of transmission of information a basis for trusting their own knowledge and a guarantee for their claims. To help the members quote each other's position, I chose an issue that had been discussed in the group for several weeks, giving everyone the opportunity to know about everyone else's position—provided this position was considered worth being remembered. The issues were matters of concern to each team as a whole: in the bureaucratic workgroup it was a major delay, and in the bureauprofessional workgroup a process of self-reorganization. Chapters 4 and 5 present these issues in more detail.

In both workgroups, members were always able to quote at least two or three of their colleagues, and to recall the way they learned about their positions. These quotations were treated as statements

containing, as in the case of the acquisition of information from potential sources, two sorts of indications. The first concerns modes of recognition of the person quoted, i.e., institutional or noninstitutional. The second indicator has just been described: the reason members use to decide whether they are satisfied with, or trust, the information they have about an issue surrounded with uncertainty. For this third variable, the difference between *private* and *public* endorsement (guarantee) appears inductively to be the best conceptual discriminant. With a public guarantee, actors indicate that they find a reason to trust their own claim to know in the fact that all the members of the group have access to the same information, and can therefore be supposed to know and support its use when participating in the definition of the situation and debating reality claims. With a private guarantee, actors indicate that their ground for trusting their own claim is the fact that only some of the members of the group have access to the same information; exclusive or scarce endorsements are considered to provide better endorsements.⁹ Four types of statements were therefore distinguished: (1) institutional and private; (2) institutional and public, (3) noninstitutional and private, and (4) noninstitutional and public. Examples of each type follows respectively:

- (1): We spoke about this between us, and he is quite disappointed because he worked really hard and now it almost looks like it could be held against him. What's more, he's quite worried because if, for example, you give the person in charge of the home a budget, he'd have to do his own accounting and he doesn't know how. This is a problem because restructuring is supposed to rationalize the work, but in fact it's going to complicate things even more.
- (2): He thinks just like the junior social workers, that we forget about them, "That's it, we're being thrown out." They think they are being excluded, they are a bit suspicious. They think that's going to work against them when in fact it's going to give them specific functions. But I recognize that they are not taking it very well; they worry about it a lot. I saw this clearly when they questioned me this morning during the meeting.
- (3): I know his position, because there are some people who prefer to stick to paperwork and who are in fact very good at it. He's a bit like that. We talk about it often at lunch. He thinks that the changes are good, but for the moment there are only words; all the good talkers and those who like paperwork are for it.
- (4): I know her position on this because we talked about it at the meeting and by no small coincidence all the women had the

same opinion on this question, that is, they don't see that all this reorganization is necessary.

Again, each statement displays two components or properties of reality claims. The first is the way the source is recognized, and is interpreted here as it is in the previous section: institutional recognition means that the use of an authority argument is considered legitimate in the debate about the real nature of the problem. The second component is the most important for the purpose of classifying reality claims. These statements clarify how members have been informed (remarks at lunchtime, official meetings, for instance). Such indications may be interpreted as follows: the claims that members consider as heuristic or valid are either those which quote information accessible to and endorsed by all in the group, or those which quote information only accessible to and endorsed by some of the members. In the case of public guarantee, all members are considered as interchangeable as the source of endorsement or locus of social control; they are all representatives of the social control over the construction of knowledge, with each actor accountable to all others. In the case of private guarantee, all members cannot be considered interchangeable representatives of social control over one's construction of knowledge.

TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS

To summarize, the second variable indicates whether reality claims present themselves as legitimized or authorized by "reality" or by a method, i.e., by a consensus among all the members of the group or by a consensus among members of a subset within the group. This variable shows how a reality claim protects itself against delegitimization: substantively and by building consensus, or procedurally or ritualistically by compartmentalizing the setting. This indication is matched below with a third, but equally important dimension of appropriateness judgments. Among other things, the third variable indicates whether reality claims present themselves as challengeable by all the members of the group or by a subset within the group. The second and third variables show how a reality claim establishes its legitimacy, and from where this legitimacy may be challenged. Sometimes, as illustrated below, reality claims are paradoxical: they present themselves as drawing legitimacy from the community as a whole (potential consensus on reality), but take away from some members of this community the right to challenge this legitimacy. Or

the other way around: they present themselves as drawing legitimacy only from part of the community, but make themselves challengeable by all the members of the community.

Thus, it is important to stress that the two criteria used in appropriateness judgments that are useful here for identifying types of reality claims are the criteria dealing with boundaries within the social setting. The first variable, the identity criterion, will be dealt with in the next chapter. The second and the third variables composing appropriateness judgments are used below to cross-classify reality or knowledge claims.¹⁰ The study of the main steps of an appropriateness judgment identifies four types of homogeneous and discriminant reality claims based on specific ways of building epistemic communities or coalitions. In each of these coalitions, such reality claims produce a corresponding form of knowledge that I would call "endogenous knowledge" (knowledge produced from within the coalition).

The first type of claim, called *realistic*, assumes a substantive legitimation and a public endorsement. On the one hand, it naturalizes members' knowledge, removing the traces of an appropriateness judgment; on the other hand, it involves all the members of the group in the definition of the situation. In that sense, such a claim presupposes the existence of a reality common to all the members of the group, and their endorsement of a satisfying description of this reality, whatever their status. Members using realistic claims try to ignore potential divisions within the group and consider themselves as interchangeable when defining the situation. One's authority to know depends only on the fit between one's statements and reality: for instance, one chooses or disqualifies an information source depending on whether it brings us closer to the "reality" or distances us from it. Reality claims of this type protect themselves from delegitimization by trying to build consensus in the setting where they are made. They also present themselves as challengeable by all the members of the group. Their statements are to be considered as everybody's business and responsibility. They establish their appropriateness democratically, by drawing legitimacy in a way that enables the community of members to challenge or support them.

The second type, the *expert* claim, assumes a substantive legitimation and a private endorsement. Like the preceding type, it naturalizes members' knowledge; however, it does not involve all the members of the group in the definition of the situation. In that sense, although such a claim draws legitimacy from referring to a common reality, it does not consider this reality as accessible to everyone. Appropriate statements are guaranteed only by members considered to be most competent or responsible. This type of appropriateness

judgment, on the one hand, ignores the divisions within the group; but on the other hand, it restores these divisions by limiting the members who may represent the instance or locus of social control. Unauthorized members who question such expert reality claims are said to be unqualified to recognize the reality. One's authority to know depends on the fit between one's statements and reality, but the ability or right to measure the fit belongs exclusively to a subgroup of co-opted members who claim to speak on behalf of all.¹¹ Such reality claims protect themselves against delegitimization by presenting themselves as challengeable only by a subset of members within the group. They are not considered to be everyone's business or responsibility. They also contain a paradox: they present themselves as drawing legitimacy from the community as a whole (which is ultimately needed to provide the consensus without which there is no "reality"), but they take away from some members of this community the authority or right to endorse or challenge them.

The third type, the *polemical* claim, assumes a procedural legitimation and a public endorsement. Unlike the preceding types, this claim does not presuppose the existence of a common reality; it relies instead on ritualized statements of members' knowledge by imposing rules, authorized methods, or specific distribution of rights or duties to assert one's knowledge. It organizes the expression of claims in a way that necessarily limits some members in their attempts to make such claims. However (as paradoxically as in the case of expert claims), it does involve all the members of the group in its endorsement. Such claims present themselves as legitimized or authorized by rules protecting them procedurally against delegitimization, i.e., by compartmentalizing the setting. But at the same time they present themselves as challengeable by all the members of the group. A polemical claim pretends to expose itself to everyone's challenge while dismissing challenges altogether. Legitimacy and validation are uncoupled as long as they are in conflict, and recoupled only when new claims support previous claims, or when challenges are not threatening. Theoretically all members of the group are involved as representatives of social control, but in fact they only count as such if their counterclaims conform to that of the members making the initial claims. Therefore, to assert a statement in this polemical mode means trying to paralyze in advance any opposition, undercut any challenge. Having the authority to know depends on the side one stands for in a divided group, but the right to stand on the "right" side is recognized to all.

The last type, the *initiated* claim, assumes a procedural legitimation and a private endorsement. Like the preceding type, it is based on appropriateness judgments that ritualize the assertion of a claim. In

addition, it limits its own exposure to challenges by attributing the privilege of endorsement only to some members, who claim to be different and share an exclusive identity. Reality claims can only be expressed and accessible to "initiated" members, and become a "mystery" to the others (who cannot see reality, their eyes having not been opened).¹² In that sense, these claims rely entirely on the division of the group. They represent themselves as legitimized or authorized by a subset within the group and protect themselves from delegitimization procedurally, by compartmentalizing the setting. Having the authority to know depends on one's specific identity in a heterogeneous group, and the right to be converted to this identity is not granted to all the members (which is how these claims differ from the expert claims). They draw legitimacy only from the members who are entitled to challenge them (but who usually do not because it would undermine their own privilege), and thus differ from polemical claims.

The different types of reality or knowledge claims described here show how knowledge is produced interactively and how its claims carry traces indicating how its producers relate to each other. Appropriateness judgments are linked to how members manage relationships with one another. Claims may be successful and convincing in one context and not in another because managing relationships is indirectly an important dimension of knowledge construction, and ultimately of decision-making and behavior. The question of the "success" of such claims will be addressed in Chapters 4 and 5. Here, an additional comment must be made about this typology. Who you are and who you talk with [as opposed to what you know (Centeno 1990)] counts as basic property of three out of four ways of claiming to know. Two of these types of claim do not even need to make sense in public (i.e., for all the members of the setting). Therefore, this theory of reality claims seems incomplete without a closer look at the idea of boundary work and the process of creation and re-creation of epistemic communities or coalitions.

KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS AND BOUNDARY WORK

By definition, a microsociological and interactionist approach focuses on actors' ways of managing relationships and exercising social control. The form taken by appropriateness judgments and reality claims is based upon how actors relate to others, deal with common or conflicting affiliations, and create epistemic communities. The method used here to reconstitute different types of reality claims

shows that such relational activities can be described in terms of boundary work. The different ways of drawing lines between members of the group shape reality claims. This stresses their strategic or micropolitical dimension.

Boundary work as part of a struggle for direct and indirect control was referred to as members' tendency to cluster and recluster each other, to segment the group in ways that often blur boundaries as they are defined by other members of the group (Kellerhals and Lazega 1988). Within the group, boundary work is necessarily conflictual. It includes or excludes members as potential representatives of social control. It is a struggle for control of participation in the process of definition of the situation. One may say that a boundary is created by the existence of competition (for support) between members (actors sharing an affiliation) making different reality claims, and by the "activation" of a difference between them as a means for lowering the level of competition or dealing with mutual challenges. Boundaries are created and sustained by a struggle for control that is rooted in processes of competition and cooperation. The epistemic coalitions created by boundary work can be compared to constituencies: the struggle for control of the definition of the situation is thus conducted through the creation of constituencies supporting one's claims and challenging others' claims. These constituencies may be imaginary or real, but they are constituted to carry definitions of the situation or reality claims that are valid and endorsed within their boundaries, to support or challenge, legitimize or delegitimize acts like reality claims. The latter may thus gain in popularity or be protected by expanding or contracting these boundaries.

Bacharach and Lawler (1981) and Lawler and Bacharach (1983) have developed a description of coalition building that is helpful to understand boundary work. Their approach examines the nature of the relationship between conflicting actors and identifies insulation and absorption as major political processes or tactical moves. Interaction and relationships are analyzed in terms of competition, cooperation, or a combination of both. Politics involves the efforts of social actors to mobilize support for and/or opposition to policies or actions (like reality claims) in which they have some stake. Political action consists of the tactics actors use to deal with opposition and to maximize their influence. Coalitions have two fundamental effects on actors in the organization: they bind some actors within the coalition, and simultaneously they split these actors off from others outside it. Absorption deals with the relationship of actors within a coalition, while insulation deals with the relation of actors in the coalition to those outside. Absorption envelopes others, blurs the differences between ego and the absorbed alter. Insulation generates more

distinguishable differences between those within and those outside the coalition; it sharpens the line dividing some actors. Taking a social setting as a whole, absorption processes blur the formal distinctions between subgroups, while insulation processes heighten some distinctions. Any political alignment existing at a given time can be construed to be the result of prior absorption and insulation processes. Absorption captures the process of moving together and insulation the process of moving apart.

From this point of view, epistemic communities can be understood as epistemic alignments with micropolitical stakes in defining the situation in one way or another. It is important to see the micropolitical dimension of boundary work and reality claims because it brings us back to the question of how the structure of social settings influences one's claims and indirectly one's decisions. In the next chapter this issue is explored by defining the structure in terms of control and power differentials. This leads to the formulation of some grounded hypotheses about the relationship between the different types of knowledge claim and the structure of the workgroups used here as example and empirical grounding.

NOTES

1. The bulk of this chapter was previously published in *Human Relations* (Lazega 1990).

2. The study was undertaken in Geneva in 1985-86. The choice of the groups is explained in chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 include comparisons made between observations of the two types of groups.

3. Chapters 4 and 5 present the communication system of each group in more detail.

4. Mainly two different types: "information of unknown existence" and "information of unknown content" (Lazega 1989). The difference can be illustrated by the distinction introduced by Feldman and March (1981) between two modes of acquiring information in organizations: the surveillance mode (where the actor looks for information without knowing exactly what he or she is looking for) and the decision mode (where the actor knows exactly what information must be obtained in order to solve a well-defined problem). This difference is rooted in the contrast between metaignorance and conscious ignorance (Smithson 1985), which in the sociology of knowledge can be considered as two different situations of uncertainty. In this chapter, the difference between types of information is not taken into consideration. Elsewhere (Lazega, 1989), I have used this contrast to illustrate the relative and interactive dimension of knowledge construction. Ignorance is an interactive construct, since these two situations of uncertainty place an actor in different relationships with another actor, who is "supposed to

know," particularly in terms of dependence or autonomy. This line of reasoning deserves further development, based on the significance of each type of uncertainty situation for different kinds of relationship toward authority, i.e., in different types of groups.

5. This technique assumes that observing each individual member completing the required tasks is sufficient for the study of an interactive process. This assumption is legitimate for two reasons: my definition of interaction is not a probabilistic or a conditional one, but a "heterological" one, based on the way actors incorporate social control in the orientation of their behavior. Second, my approach is analytical. I am looking for indications about the way operations composing the process are performed, not for an overall and dynamic reconstitution of the process.

6. These responses come from a question about acquisition of a specific type of information: I asked the members to imagine that they were coming back from their annual vacations and needed to find out what had happened while they were away.

7. The most common types of authority arguments would be: "I am the boss" or "I am a professional."

8. Members of a workgroup are often confronted with problems concerning the group as a whole. When such problems arise, members have their own conception of what the problem is, of who is responsible, and of what the right solution might be. But each member also knows that the others have their own ideas about what is going on; the problem "itself" is accompanied by a more or less visible "conflict of definitions." Most often (where the group as a whole is concerned) solutions can only be agreed upon through negotiation, all members being attentive to each other's positions. Therefore, the ability to describe a colleague's position [resulting from "coorientation" work (McLeod and Chaffee 1972; Newcomb 1953)] on a common problem indicates that this position had been somehow perceived and transformed into information (Glynn 1989).

9. The link with the notion of extension of accountability (Chapter 1) is as follows. When members recall or quote some colleagues' opinions, they also give indications about who the people they debate with are, who may influence them. Those who endorse and guarantee my own claims are also those to whom I am accountable. In symbolic interactionist theory, one's (heterological, not necessarily empirical) audience is one's source of authority and control. All the members of the group may or may not be given the right to represent social control or to participate in the definition of the situation by validating or guaranteeing claims, or by challenging them. These are indications of whether reality claims present themselves as challengeable by all the members of the group or by a subset within the group. I interpret them as showing whether a knowledge claim about the problem in the group is considered as everybody's business or not, whether everyone within the group may challenge it or not, or be asked to share the responsibility for making the claim.

10. *Methodological note:* In this research, the three parameters were observed two by two, in a nonsequential way. Each pair of variables had in

common the mode of recognition. This common component allows me to articulate pairs of variables and therefore to reconstitute artificially the final typology of reality claims. Strictly speaking, by cross-classifying the two typologies considered above (arguments and quotations), I obtain sixteen types. However the mode of identification has a special function in the process, i.e., ensuring the praxeological continuity in the actor's behavior by recognizing him or her as the permanent source of discrete acts; this means that only the "homogeneous" cases, i.e., those where the mode of identification is the same in both pairs of parameters, can be considered as indicating properties of a single type of appropriateness judgment. This reduces the types that can be considered as valid to eight. Furthermore, a second reduction is possible, as the difference between institutional and noninstitutional recognition does not discriminate intrinsically between types of appropriateness judgment: it does not give any indication about the way actors play on the divisions within the group. Therefore, the eight remaining types can be reduced to four ideal-types of appropriateness judgment.

11. Centeno (1990) provides a remarkable description of "technocratic frames" as an elitist "ideology of method" disqualifying challenging claims as political, selfish, and unrealistic.

12. See, on a similar process, Horobin (1983).

Chapter 3

Structural Constraints on Knowledge Claims¹

The theory of the knowing process suggests a link between variations in types of knowledge claims on the one hand, and some structural dimensions of social settings on the other. An organizational approach provides both a conception of the structure and a framework compatible with the microsociological approach previously adopted. By this I mean that this organizational perspective can be used to define the structure of social settings so as to emphasize the link. Hypotheses based on the relation between identity and authority can be formulated about the nature of the link. I will take the view that considerations of power and authority to know underlie the negotiation of one's identity and, by extension, one's boundary work. Actors try to "sign" their behavior by negotiating their identity in a manner that puts them in the strongest possible position of authority when making (always challengeable) claims or decisions (McCall and Simmons 1966). These considerations of power and authority are the main focus of this chapter.

Such an insistence on power issues does not mean that the structure of a group can be reduced to its formal hierarchy or formal distribution of power. The previous chapter shows that knowledge claims incorporate attempts to secure the authority to know, and that these attempts take various forms. In a group, having the formal authority to know is not necessarily a sufficient condition to secure the success of one's claims, or to delegitimize other members' claims. Depending on the context, members do not invoke such formal authority, and do try to use other possible ways. For instance, the use of one's formal authority may depend upon whether or not the other members of the group also have such authority. I will assume that, whatever the situation, members always try to secure their authority

to know. This will help offer hypotheses about how members of two different types of groups deal with structural constraints.

Most available definitions of structure in the sociology of organizations do not show how social settings constrain interactive behavior such as appropriateness judgments, mainly because they are not part of theories that link structures and processes. In contrast, the structural dimension of importance here is defined in terms that make sense for the process of the definition of the situation. The following sections develop this basic idea about the relationship between identity and authority.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE QUESTION OF THE STRUCTURE

In Chapter 1, the link between identity and the knowing process is described by interactionist theories of social control, as differentiated from cognitive theories of frames and scripts. This link has implications that go beyond the limited scope of the sociology of knowledge. The interactionist approach theorizes about the structure of social settings and about interactive processes in the same terms; it can therefore help in defining structure in a way that makes its link with processes explicit. Because it is mainly a microsociological approach, symbolic interactionist theory has an undeserved reputation for its lack of interest in macrosociology in general, in the existence of stratifications, power structures, social institutions, and bureaucracies of any kind. As shown by Maines (1977) or Stryker (1980), the symbolic interactionist movement is not homogeneous, and it takes into account—much more than is generally acknowledged by the sociological literature—the structure of social settings as an exogenous, although not “reified,” determinant of behavior.

Some theories within this symbolic interactionist movement, like the “negotiated-order theory” (Strauss et al. 1963; Strauss 1978), certainly attempted in their time to assert that the regularity observed in members’ behavior does not result from their conformity to official and institutional rules, but from a series of ongoing negotiations and compromises, from the combination and interaction of priorities, mutual constraints, and individual aspirations. For this school—which tries to abolish the distinction between the formal and informal (or social) structure of social settings—when a structure exists, it can only be the temporary and renegotiable result of conflicts and compromises between actors trying to establish a basis for their concerted action. The polemical tone of this approach is obvious. To

assert that everything in social settings is negotiable and negotiated was a way of responding to the functionalist orthodoxy for which the relationships observed between structural components of a social setting are supposed to exist automatically, as a result of necessary functional imperatives. “Everything is negotiable” was opposed to “nothing is negotiable” (Day and Day 1977; Dingwall and Strong 1985).

On the other hand, however, work done by more “structuralist” symbolic interactionists, from Blumer himself (1990) or Hughes (1945, 1958) to Freidson (1976, 1986), developed a less “subjectivist” framework than that of theoreticians more attracted by social psychology, such as Shibutani. As shown by Maines (1977), symbolic interactionist work taking into account the social structure relies on a less rigid and less stable conception of the structure than does the functionalist tradition (which is why, from the latter perspective, the symbolic interactionist definition of the structure seems nonexistent). Symbolic interactionist theorists raise the question of the structure in terms of institutional constraints influencing actors’ negotiation of identities. The latter is a component of the “definition of the situation,” and the link between the structure of the social setting and the interactive processes that take place within them is theorized by this negotiation. For authors like McCall and Simmons (1966), this preliminary orientation of behavior through identity negotiation is a central step in the creation of roles, and in any interactions. Most interactions take place in situations that are never completely structured, or clearly defined in the actors’ minds; this ambiguity in the definition of the situation involves the fact that actors do not always know which of their multiple identities will be involved in an interaction, and which behavior is more appropriate given the choice of identity. The step of mutual identification, of identity definition, is necessary for interactions to take place.

In sum, the symbolic interactionist theory defines the structure of an organized setting in terms of constraints put on identity negotiations; these negotiations are considered to be the key variable relating structure and process. For the sociology of knowledge, their existence means that the struggle for control of knowledge claims takes as many forms as the negotiation of multiple identities will allow. In effect, what is at stake in this identity work is authority and accountability. But, the “old” symbolic interactionism has been criticized for its lack of interest in power and inequality in access to resources (Benson and Day 1976); and, with exceptions like Freidson, this organizational approach remains somehow timid in its conceptualization of authority and power. Therefore, in order to develop the connection between negotiation of identity and authority relation-

ships, I will rely on the contribution of the strategic approach (Crozier and Friedberg 1977; Sainsaulieu 1972, 1977), which describes the system of authority relationships in organized settings and uses a relational definition of power. Symbolic interactionism is a theory of social control, understood in a phenomenological sense; the strategic perspective provides a theory of authority relationships that displays what can be at stake in such identity negotiations.

Authority relationships (defined in terms of social control and accountability, not necessarily in terms of raw power) are built through the negotiations of identities. In the following section, I show that the strategic perspective, by adding an explicit micropolitical (in the sense of "internal politics") dimension to identity negotiations, adds to our understanding of the relationship between structure and process. It does so by inferring different types of relationships toward authority from the limitations and constraints that groups put on identity negotiations.

IDENTITY, POWER VARIANCE, AND RELATIONSHIPS TOWARD AUTHORITY

Following the Weberian tradition, there are many studies of power in organizations for which hierarchy and compliance are considered so central that they become the basis for a general classification of organizations. For instance, Etzioni (1961) builds a classification of organizations based on how superiors obtain compliance from their subordinates, and the reasons for this conformity. Compliance is said to result from two factors: the type of power exercised (coercive, remunerative, or normative) and the attitude of the members toward this power (alienated, pragmatic, or moral). The cross-classification of these dimensions produces nine "compliance structures" across which organizations are classified. Only three of them exist in a stable way (mainly because they are compatible with the requirements of efficiency and goal-oriented rationality). Thus, for instance, coercive organizations clearly separate conception and execution of tasks, those who elaborate rules and those who obey them; whereas normative organizations stress the assimilation of their members and their participation in the control system. Etzioni's classification considers power relationships as a key structural dimension upon which a general classification of organization can be based.

In such approaches, however, the way power is exercised is considered as a dimension of the compliance structure. They do not focus on the dynamics of the struggle for power itself. From a

strategic perspective, attempts to control knowledge claims are part of a general struggle for control. As such it is usually not an open and egalitarian struggle. In any social setting, some members are in a better position to try to control others directly, whether voluntarily or not. The same is true of indirect control, although here the struggle may take different forms and the outcomes may be less predictable. Some members are given a right to put pressure on others' knowledge claims and to back this pressure with formal authority or power. But claims always generate counterclaims, whether public or private, which are capable of drawing some legitimacy from a constituency.

The strategic perspective (Crozier 1963; Crozier and Friedberg 1977), which can be linked to the symbolic interactionist approach as a development of the relationship between identity and authority, provides a more flexible approach to this question of structure. It has also developed as a critique of the notion of formal structure. It introduces ideas that are useful here because it does not reify the structure of an organized setting. It lets authority be defined as the capacity to use an institutional authority argument (not necessarily as its actual use) in the interaction with others.

The strategic perspective focuses on power and authority relationships, which are at the heart of any social setting seen as an "action system." It raises the question of power, its sources, and its exercise as a central problem of any organized setting (as opposed to needs or motivations, for instance). The structure is sometimes defined as the formal system around which informal power struggles develop. The sources of power are the uncertainties with which actors are confronted in their everyday work life. Power is produced by the control of uncertainty, and sociological analysis therefore goes from the description of the economic and technical uncertainties at the level of the organization to the study of their use as sources of power at the level of actors (Sainsaulieu 1985).

By trying to show the power games underlying actors' behavior, this perspective does not deny the importance of legitimate and institutional authority, of formal power. Rather, this legitimate authority is seen as an important resource distributed within the group and to which only some members have access. Having the right to use an institutional authority argument is an advantage provided by the formal structure in negotiations taking place in work relationships. The goal of a strategic analysis is not to pretend that all the members of an organized setting have the same amount of authority or power. Power relationships are asymmetrical due to the difference in resources available to superiors compared to those available to subordinates. Formal power results from a position in the hierarchy,

but also from better control of communications and the environment, a network of contacts, and the knowledge of institutional rules and the way they are interpreted. This asymmetry does not mean, however, that subordinates have no power (or, for instance, a negative one), but simply that they have less, or sometimes far less, power (Mechanic 1962; Morgan 1986). Neither does it mean that superiors can exercise their power as if it were a personal attribute (Knights and Roberts 1982).

For instance, part of formal power usually includes a formal authority to know, the right and duty to define the situation for others, which traditionally has been attributed to the leader. This, however, does not mean that subordinates do not have their own definitions of the situation. Even if these carry less weight, they do challenge or compete with that of superiors. Having a formal authority to know is usually not enough to win in a conflict of definitions of the situation.

It seems therefore more interesting for my purpose to think about the structure in terms of members' relationships toward this authority to know rather than in terms of formal entitlement. The symbolic interactionist perspective, which shows that actors negotiate their identity, is also useful here because it introduces a role distance between the actors and their status: members may choose to interact on a formal or informal level, using an institutional or noninstitutional identity. Thus the question of the structure becomes a question of dominant relationships toward authority.

The structure of the organized setting may therefore be based on a set of identities, which corresponds to the distribution of the legitimate access to institutional authority. Consequently this structure puts some actors in a better position than others for asserting or defending their authority to know when challenged by other members of the group. A group can be considered structured to the extent that it regulates how actors use authority arguments in their discussions and negotiations, and this by defining statuses and identities as sources of legitimate authority.

Power Differentials

The emphasis placed by this approach on the capacity of actors, whether relatively powerful or powerless, to use others' uncertainty and to seize strategic opportunities makes it possible to articulate different levels of analysis (individual, group, and organization levels). At the group level, this strategic approach uses power differentials (Bacharach and Lawler 1981) as the most critical dimen-

sion for analyzing the relationship between structure and behavior. Power differentiation refers to the differences in potential influence among actors. At the micro level this corresponds to the relative power or resources of an actor vis-à-vis allies and adversaries. Power differentiation is power variance across actors. Low variance in power means relatively equal power among actors vying for influence, while high variance involves power inequalities among at least some of the actors. The variance of power follows from a formal distribution (Lawler and Bacharach 1983), without considering it as the only parameter characterizing power struggles.²

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the theoretical link between the structure of the workgroup and the process of the definition of the situation resides in the constraints imposed on the actors in the negotiation of their identity. Taking into account the contribution of the strategic approach, the structure of the organized setting must be defined in terms of authority relationships. The notion of power variance is important to connect both identity negotiations and authority relationships in the context of different types of workgroups. This conception of the structural dimension qualifies for my purpose because of its flexibility. It allows more accurate description of what is expected from the hypotheses about the relationship between the structure of a workgroup and types of knowledge claims made by its members.

When members of workgroups try to control each other, indirectly or directly, in a struggle to define a situation, to control appropriateness judgments and reality claims, some are put in a better position than others to do so. The way members take the authority to know depends on their relationship toward authority, which itself is a result of power differentials within the group. Relationships toward authority are essential determinants in the choice of knowledge claims. Depending on the context, actors without access to an authority argument may build constituencies or epistemic coalitions that provide informal but strong legitimacy to their claims; whereas actors with access to an authority argument may be reluctant to use it to back their own claims. The following section provides a more elaborate theory of these relationships toward authority.

Relationships Toward Authority

Both the distribution of identities and power differentials create different relationships toward authority. In theory, members can "choose" their relationship toward authority by negotiating their identity: they can choose an "institutional" identity and set the

relationship with others on a formal level; or, on the contrary, choose a "noninstitutional" identity and set their relationship with others on an informal level. From a strategic point of view, identity negotiations are motivated by power and authority considerations. Actors try to negotiate identities that will put them in the best possible position of authority in anticipation of decisions to make and interests to promote. Some can do so in a way that entitles them to use an authority argument. In general, to choose an identity is to create a relationship toward authority. In this study, I consider the distribution of the possibility of using an institutional authority argument as the main structural characteristic of a workgroup.

What does "authority relationship" mean here? From a Weberian perspective, it may be defined as one's attitude toward the use of a legitimate authority, i.e., the use of one's institutional status (hierarchical or professional, for instance), during a discussion, a negotiation, or a decision-making process to try to close the discussion and have the last word (Bourricaud 1961; Nisbet 1967). The interesting point here is that the strategic approach does not only make it possible to focus on the structure of organized settings in terms of authority relationships (by allowing a description of the way organizations regulate the use of authority arguments in the negotiations). It also describes different types of relationships toward forms of institutional authority (professional and hierarchical). The importance of such a distinction is that, given the distribution of institutional authority, the members of the organized settings develop relationships toward authority (expressed by their identity choices), which in turn have structuring effects. Actors choose—when they have a choice—to place their interactions on a formal, institutional level, or, contrarily, on an informal level. This choice will have constraining repercussions on interactive behavior and processes. In order to show how, I classify these relationships toward authority into two types: *strategic* and *tactical*³. Under one name or another, these relationships toward authority have been described by the sociological literature (for instance Gouldner, Etzioni, Sainsaulieu). An example may be useful here.

Sainsaulieu (1972) focuses on the relationship between how power is distributed and its actual use; he studies authority relationships more from the point of view of the subordinate. He is attentive to the attitude of the actor toward the superior, and classifies socioprofessional categories according to the independence or the dependence asserted by their members in their relationships to institutional authority. In his description of the complexity of social relationships in the organization, Sainsaulieu shows that types of authority relationships are a powerful criterion for comparing occupational categories

ries in organized settings. For instance, an overinvested dependence relationship toward the superior appears among office employees, in some marginalized blue-collar worker milieux, and among low-rank supervisors, and this for various reasons linked to the relationships between subordinates themselves. Members here are more likely to accept an authoritarian superior designated from outside. In other blue-collar milieux, where members have more solidarity, and among managers, Sainsaulieu describes a very independent relationship with the superior; superiors designated from outside are less accepted, as members wish to choose them themselves and evaluate their competence. Some categories occupy an intermediary place in this classification according to dependence on superiors; technicians, for instance, strongly depend on the chief, but only accept an attentive and liberal style of leadership.⁴

These examples confirm the existence of at least two relationships toward authority: one in which the actors can assert their rank or use their professional status, another in which they cannot. The strategic relationship toward authority allows members to pull rank or to "professionalize" problems met by their organization, to use openly their professional authority in discussions, which is only possible if the organization recognizes their status as a source of legitimate authority. For instance, professionals can usually afford, among themselves or vis-à-vis the other members of the organized setting, to take a strategic attitude toward authority. The tactical relationship toward authority encourages different behavior. Actors who depend on others will tend to choose a context where they can exploit this dependence, either by covering themselves, or by manipulating feelings and building a positive relationship with one another (Goodstadt and Hjelle 1973), avoiding relational risks, personalizing the relations so that they can try to have more control over them.⁵

One good reason to consider power differentials and the distribution of relationships toward authority as a basic structural dimension is that it is a discriminant one. The dominant relationship toward authority is an efficient criterion for classifying organized settings. One of the most researched areas in sociology, the debate between bureaucracy and the professions, can again be used here. It helps in formulating hypotheses about the relationship between structure and process. The sociology of organizations associates high power variance with the bureaucratic organizational form, and low power variance with the collegial (or bureauprofessional⁶) form. These types of organizational form represent contexts in which a specific relationship toward authority is dominant. In the first type, tactical relationships toward authority are dominant; in the second type, strategic relationships are dominant. This criterion is certainly insufficient for

a general classification of organized settings, but it is useful for the purpose of this study.⁷

BUREAUCRATIC AND COLLEGIAL STRUCTURES

These concepts describing the central structural dimension of an organized setting are rooted in a theory of social control. Belonging to an organized setting exposes the members to authorities, rules, procedures, all sorts of specifications, i.e., a set of means of control of their activity more or less strictly enforced by other members to ensure both coordination and integration. This additional theory gives the definition of the structure a discriminant quality, the capacity to ground a comparative analysis. Organized settings like workgroups can be differentiated according to whether the dominant relationship toward authority among their members is strategic or tactical. In the first type, the majority of members have access to an institutional authority argument; in the other type the majority do not have access to such an argument. The workgroups described in Chapter 2 are simple enough to represent each of these types. They will be used here as examples of each organizational form.

The literature recognizes two basic types of institutional authority in the mainly "rational-legal" context created by organizations: professional and hierarchical. The *bureaucratic form* of organization was considered by Weber as the dominant form in the modern world.⁸ It is the most studied form in the sociology of organizations. In the Weberian definition, actors' behavior follows a rational analysis in terms of means and ends; authority is exercised through a system of rules and impersonal procedures. Bureaucracies are set up to deal with routine and standardized tasks; they put in place controls and a system of accountability, a hierarchical decision-making structure. They rely mainly on rational-legal authority, although other sources of authority, such as charisma, tradition, or influence on subordinates' careers, are present in it as well. However, as many sociologists show, the Weberian ideal of bureaucratic form is never actually realized (Perrow 1986). The conditions for the exercise of hierarchical authority in the organizational context have also been extensively observed. Studies of leadership, as well as the strategic approach, describe hierarchical authority and the problems of exercising it.⁹ In workgroups particularly, the Weberian idea of impersonality has been shown to be inadequate (Homans 1950; Sainsaulieu 1977). The interesting property of this structure is that it forces most of its members into a tactical relationship toward authority.

The *collegial form* of organization was considered by Weber himself to be embedded in the bureaucratic form to counterbalance the power and lack of expertise of the hierarchy. The idea of predominant rational-legal authority itself has been rendered more complex since then. Parsons (1939, 1954) differentiates it into two separate sources of institutional authority. He distinguishes between bureaucracy and profession by stating that the authority of expertise is a specific problem for bureaucracy in the organization. He then develops the notion of profession in a more detailed analysis (1954) in which he contrasts professions with the business world. In the former, the relationship between the professional and the client is supposed to be based on mutual trust and the perspective of continuity in the interaction, where conflict and negotiations are controlled and contained, defined as a temporary and punctual (but not constitutive) reality.

Merton's students (Blau, Selznick, Gouldner) also develop this perspective in their critique of the Weberian belief in the efficiency of bureaucracy. Conditions for the exercise of both types of authority have been extensively studied since the 1960s. Professionals have been studied, as well as their situation in organized settings where they have to face employers or managers controlling considerable resources (employment, promotion, income, instruments). In general, professionals have more discretion and autonomy than employees who specialize as a result of the division of work within the organization (Freidson 1986; Rothman 1979). An important literature deals with this autonomy, and with professional knowledge as a source of autonomy, for instance, concerning scientists, medical doctors, lawyers, and other types of professionals who share certain characteristics: competence, knowledge, expertise; a sense of professional community; a period of training and socialization that stresses autonomy and individual internalized standards of performance and accountability (Rothman 1979). Given this orientation that such professionals bring with them to their jobs, they tend to have conflicts with the hierarchy, coordination, and standardization of procedures (Benson 1973; Hall 1968).¹⁰

More direct interest in the collegial form of organization has come out of this body of work on the relationship between bureaucracy and the professionals.¹¹ Waters (1989) constructs an ideal-type representation of collegial structures. Based on a selective reading of Weber and Parsons, he defines collegial structures as "those in which there is dominant orientation to a consensus achieved between the members of a body of experts who are theoretically equal in their level of expertise but who are specialized by area of expertise" (1989: 956). The important point here is that collegiality in professional organiza-

tions limits or modifies the powers of formal leaders. It does so by providing enough members with a strategic relationship toward authority. This in turn indirectly affects processes involving individual and collective definitions of the situation.

In sum, in one case, the structure of the organized setting, as it is imposed by the distribution of identities and legitimate authority, gives most actors a choice between two attitudes toward authority; it allows the actor to choose between a formal and an informal game, strategic or tactical. In the other case, it does not give most actors any other choice than defending their autonomy in a tactical way.

The two workgroups presented in the previous chapters will be used again to illustrate the relationship between structure and knowledge claims. The distribution of the statuses and identities that allow the use of an institutional authority argument is obviously different in each group. The tax office has the characteristics of the bureaucratic workgroup. In this workgroup, only the chief, his deputy, and the accountant (that is, three persons out of eleven) may legitimately use an institutional authority argument to protect their autonomy and power in discussions and interactions with the other members. This position defines their strategic relationship toward authority. The rest of the group will tend to develop a tactical relationship toward authority.

The social work unit, however, shows the characteristics of the collegial workgroup; both managers as well as the seven social workers (that is, nine members out of thirteen) have a status that allows them to use an institutional authority argument, either hierarchical or professional. This position gives them a strategic relationship toward authority. Only a minority of four persons will be more or less constrained to develop a tactical relationship toward authority to defend its autonomy in its relations with the other members. Knowledge claims in each type of group should illustrate the influence of this fact.

HYPOTHESES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS

This theorization about structure started with the idea of distribution of identities and institutional authority. It relies on assumptions about members' (whether formally powerful or powerless) capacity to vie for influence in the process of definition of the situation, about the development of strategic relationships toward authority in contexts of low power variance (for instance, a collegial workgroup), and of

tactical relationships toward authority in contexts of high power variance (for instance, a bureaucratic workgroup). In each context, knowledge claims should take specific forms.

If in both types of groups members constantly renegotiate the criteria they use for making claims or appropriateness judgments, I will hypothesize that they are induced to do so in different ways. My basic hypothesis about these micropolitics of knowledge is that different types of knowledge claims are dominant in different interactive contexts (i.e., different types of workgroup). More precisely, the greater the proportion of members with a strategic relationship toward authority, the greater the *homogeneity* of knowledge claims made in the group: members tend to secure their authority to know and to judge the appropriateness of a claim by playing on the internal boundaries and compartmentalizations of the group in a predictable (for the other members) and stable manner. Whereas the greater the proportion of members with a tactical relationship toward authority, the greater the *diversity* of knowledge claims made in the group: members tend to secure their authority to know and to judge the appropriateness of a claim by playing on the internal boundaries and compartmentalizations of the group in an unstable, differentiated, and unpredictable (to other members) manner.

This general hypothesis is based on the following assumptions. In Bacharach and Lawler's terms, a political alignment is the result of absorption and insulation processes.¹² In each type of workgroup, members try to create epistemic alignments (or epistemic coalitions, or epistemic constituencies) that will support their claims and delegitimize others' claims. Efforts by social actors to mobilize support for (or opposition to) knowledge claims in which they have some stake concentrate on coalition building. Realistic claims, for instance, attempt to build coalitions by absorption; they blur the differences with those co-opted. Initiated claims attempt to build coalitions by insulation (sometimes even self-insulation); they sharpen the differences dividing the coalition members from nonmembers. In between, expert and polemical claims use both processes.

As discussed above, most members in a bureaucratic workgroup do not have access to an institutional authority argument. This high power differentiation is likely to lead a group into diversification of knowledge claims because the structure puts most of the members in a tactical relationship toward authority. I will argue that, as a consequence, members' boundary work in this situation does not revolve around predictable and formal differences within the group because nobody can create coalitions in which he or she has enough control. Nobody can secure his or her respective authority to know and the appropriateness of his or her claims by controlling potential

challengers, creating stable alignments or coalitions deriving their strength from their internal cohesion. In this context, diversification of claims becomes a way of preventing others from imposing their conception of what an informed decision is, or from creating systematic consensus around their own claims. Both insulation and absorption are used here to create coalitions.

By contrast, most members in a collegial workgroup have formally relatively equal power and access to an institutional authority argument. The low power differentiation is likely to lead a group to homogenization of knowledge claims because the structure puts most of the members in a strategic relationship toward authority. I will argue that, as a consequence, members' boundary work in this situation does revolve around predictable and formal differences within the group because most members are in a position to create coalitions in which they have enough control. They can secure their respective authority to know and the appropriateness of their claims by controlling potential challengers and creating stable alignments. In this context, homogenization of claims becomes a way of creating systematic consensus around their own claims or their conception of what an informed decision is. Insulation and self-insulation are used here to create coalitions.

The next chapters illustrate these hypotheses about the micropolitics of knowledge in the two different types of workgroups.

NOTES

1. This chapter owes much to Robert Dingwall's advice.
2. As stressed by Lawler and Bacharach, power differentiation reflects the problem of control within the coalition and influence outside it. In general, actors will prefer coalitions with less powerful others because they are likely to have more control over the internal affairs of the coalition. Also, such power lays the groundwork for absorbing coalition partners. Power inside versus power outside presents a high-power actor with a dilemma. Coalitions with less powerful actors can forestall alliances of less powerful actors against more powerful ones (e.g., subordinate revolts), but they may not allow one powerful actor to overcome the opposition of another.
3. I have not found better terms to express this difference between two types of relationships toward authority. The idea of a "sovereign" relationship toward institutional authority as opposed to a "marginal" one could also account for the meaning to these formula. *Tactical* does not have here the usual meaning of an application of strategy in the field, but the meaning of a noninstitutional attitude in a field defined as institutional. The term *strategic* as applied here to authority relationships has a different meaning than that

which, according to Crozier, generally qualifies actors' behavior (the "strategic perspective").

4. For instance, when actors have no professional authority to oppose to a hierarchical superior in a discussion, they can be brought to defend their individual autonomy and interests in a tactical way, by trying to set the discussion on an informal and noninstitutional level, where their interlocutors cannot systematically assert their formal authority. On the other hand, hierarchical superiors, who are supposed to motivate and commit their subordinates, cannot systematically set discussions on a formal level by asserting their strategic authority (pulling rank, for instance) without provoking the resistance or the withdrawal of their subordinates.

5. For the literature on compliance-gaining, particularly the tactical side (when the noninstitutional level is the only one where actors can be satisfied with their work, influence, be recognized, convince, make suggestions, push through, obtain what they want), see the behavior described by Kipnis Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, and Wilkinson (1984). Actors can be tactical through playing on esteem, guilt, ethics, flattery, deception, and many other means (see Marwell and Schmitt 1967; Wheeless, Barraclough, and Stewart, 1983; Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin 1981).

6. This expression is borrowed from Parry and Parry (1979); it is quoted and developed by Dingwall (1982). Parry and Parry call an organization *bureauprofessional* when, as its name indicates, it represents a mixture,

a blending of elements of professionalism and bureaucratic organization. Neither autonomous professionalism nor purely bureaucratic hierarchies. . . . Instead, . . . a conflation of both elements, manifesting something of the strains and complexities which such a mixture involves. This mode of organization which has already developed in other important departments of state provision—such as education and health—is a hybrid which we shall refer to as *bureauprofessionalism*. . . . *Bureauprofessionalism* has thus offered a chance to create a unified social work profession but within a "humanized" bureaucratic structure. By this method, the social work elite hoped to establish a position of definite, if limited, professional control. (1979; quoted by Dingwall 1982:7)

7. The relationship toward authority of the majority of the members varies from one case to the other, i.e., according to whether the group to which they belong is of the bureaucratic or collegial type. Dingwall (1982) associates each type of organization with different styles of supervision. Dingwall and Strong (1985) interpret this difference between two types of organization as a result of the tension between occupational licenses and organizational charters. The terms *license* and *charter* are used to describe the type of authorization to which participants refer in order to coordinate and legitimate their action. A tension exists between these two authorizations since professionals' open claims to autonomy handicap the development of a chain of responsible actors from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy (Strong and Dingwall 1983).

8. By Weberian standards, any type of organization has an administrative and bureaucratic component. My use of this concept is also ideal-typical. As shown by Perrow's (1986) description of factory bureaucracy, the structure

actually closest to this form is the Taylorian pyramid, with a professional at the top and unskilled workers as subordinates.

9. See for instance, in the huge literature about the relationship between superior and subordinate, for instance Dansereau and Markham (1987), Green and Mitchell (1979), and Mitchell and Wood (1980).

10. The tension between professional and hierarchical authority was studied by many sociologists during the 1960s and 1970s. This is not the place for a description of this research. Reviews and comments on the 1960s and 1970s debates on the tensions between profession and bureaucracy can be found in Bauer and Cohen (1980, 1982), Benson, (1977), Davies (1983), Dingwall (1976), Freidson (1986), Johnson (1972), Larson-Sarfatti (1977), Rothman (1979), Scott (1965, 1966), and many others.

11. Waters (1989) and others consider collegiality as the organizational form, or principle of collective action, that is capable of countering the overwhelming dominance of bureaucracy in our society. Waters also considers collegiality to be an organizational form that helped the professions maintain their closure and monopolies.

12. Bacharach and Lawler think that while the stability of an "absorptive" coalition is based primarily on internal solidarity generated by the absorption process (which enhances internal cohesion), the stability of the "insulative" coalition is based on the external threat handled by the coalition (which isolates the outsider). Actors can use coalitions as tactics of insulation or as tactics of absorption. Their major hypothesis is that with few actors and low power differentiation, members are likely to use coalitions as tactics of insulation; with many actors and high power differentiation, members are likely to use coalitions as tactics of absorption.

Chapter 4

Knowledge Claims in a Bureaucratic Workgroup

The previous chapters had as their theoretical and constructivist goal the development of a minimal set of categories. This chapter attempts to illustrate these categories and the general hypotheses based upon them. It does so by looking at knowledge claims in a bureaucratic workgroup.

To understand what it means to the members of an administrative workgroup to "know well," I describe the office relationships among members of the group and observe the way a single organizational problem—which is recognized as such by all the members of the group—is defined by each member. The particular problem used here as an analyzer is the persistence of a backlog, a major delay in work with which the group fails to catch up. I look at how members identify the problem (there are conflicts or divergences about what the problem "really is") and the relational climate, built around authority relationships, in which they discuss it with the other members of the group (there are various ways to recognize or deny legitimacy to the assertion of particular claims).

In Emerson and Messinger's (1977) language, the problem will be considered a "trouble," and each member a "troubleshooter" who defines the trouble and tries to share this definition with others. I identify different versions of the trouble and the types of knowledge claims that carry these versions. Then I try to interpret members' efforts to diversify their claims, as well as the overall consequences of such a diversification. This troubleshooting activity and the conflicting interpretations of what is going wrong show the complexity of a situation in which members of the same group have different criteria in mind as to what counts as information to be taken into account in the problem-solving process. I also look at the coexistence of these

criteria and at some consequences of this diversification within the group.

A TAX OFFICE

The administrative unit that is in trouble is the tax office presented in Chapter 2. A short description of the members' tasks, interdependence, and accountability is provided below. It must be stressed that the composition of this workgroup shows a majority of nonprofessional employees and the dominant relationship toward hierarchical authority is a tactical one.

At the beginning of the chain, three employees are responsible for updating the taxpayers' files and finding new taxpayers. Two investigators are responsible for providing the unit with all the information about the taxpayers that is needed for it to function effectively. They work separately, having divided the city into two areas. They spot new potential taxpayers, open a file on each of them, and go talk to them. They have to collect enough information about these businesses to register them and send a preliminary invoice. In their description of their work, they insist that talking with the taxpayers gives their job a public relations dimension for the department. They explain to taxpayers the nature of their specific tax, and how to fill in and send the declaration with their accounts. They have to be able to calculate approximately the amount of preliminary tax owed so that the taxpayers can have an idea in advance. Then they bring back part of this information to the employee in charge of the databank. They can receive work from all members of the department who need further information about taxpayers. They work in the morning at the office; during the afternoon they are out investigating. They have therefore more autonomy than most subordinates in the workgroup. They are quite secretive about how they work and are not accountable for their movements, which they organize as they like: "We are not supervised, the manager trusts us, that's the spirit of the department." Their relationship toward institutional authority is tactical: no formal opposition, respect for the manager, but as much informal autonomy as possible.

The third employee is responsible for the databank; he identifies new taxpayers in the newspapers (through advertisements for business) and opens a file for the investigators. He centralizes, classifies, and files in the databank the information returned to him. His work is indirectly controlled by the tax officers, who can, each time they open a file, check whether the information it contains is complete.

This job does not require high qualifications. He is directly accountable to the deputy, particularly for technical problems with the computerized databank. His relationship toward authority is mainly tactical; he can only present an informal resistance.

Next in the chain are the four tax officers, who receive the incoming declarations, classify them, and process them. They examine the taxpayers' declarations and accounts, compare them with the information they already have on the taxpayers (for instance, former declarations), and tax them according to legally defined rates. Once the amount is calculated, the invoice is automatically sent to the taxpayer. They process each file from the beginning to the end. Their attention is concentrated on reading the taxpayers' accounts and avoiding errors in choosing what rates to apply. They have to know both simple and complex rules of taxation, as well as a set of exceptions. They may interpret in one way or another some details in the accounts, ask the taxpayers for more information, and be more or less flexible with small taxpayers about their accounts. They are directly accountable to the deputy, and indirectly controlled by the taxpayers themselves, as well as by the accountant. The manager and the deputy emphasize both the quality of the tax officers' work and the quantity of files processed each day. All the members of the department know and tell Goffmanesque horror stories about memorable mistakes. The tax officers themselves think that delays are more forgivable than mistakes. They depend upon each other and have to consult each other for the processing of nonstandard and complex cases. The deputy knows their work in detail and complains that they are too frequently happy with overly simple solutions. Their relationship toward authority is tactical; they can only present an informal resistance to institutional authority.

The persons mentioned above do not have any prospect of promotion within the administration. All have reached a formal ceiling, even though seniority brings increases in salary.

At the end of the chain, the accountant is in charge of "managing the debtors," from the simple reminder to taking legal actions against some taxpayers. He receives payments, keeps the accounts, works on invoices to figure out new deadlines, and deals with repayments. He prepares a monthly balance sheet for the manager, and a file on the accounts of all the companies asking for reductions. Indirectly he verifies the work of the tax officers; he is theoretically accountable to the manager, but he works independently and benefits from his professional status. His relationship toward institutional authority is strategic.

The manager's secretary works on the mail, particularly the mail concerning complaints and appeals involving dates and deadlines

that must be observed. She dispatches phone calls, and manages the personnel files (salaries, holidays, insurance). Her informal role seems less important than that of her counterpart in the social services department, but she also "knows what's going on." She is exclusively the manager's secretary, and depends entirely upon her for the organization of her work. Her relationship toward authority is tactical.

The manager is accountable to the city administrative board for running the place and operating the whole process as smoothly as possible. The law has to be observed and money has to come in. She prepares an annual budget and estimates a year in advance the amounts that the department should be able to collect. From then on, her role is to supervise and control her department's work so that these objectives are met or even surpassed. "They [the Board] leave me alone as long as they don't hear about my department, as long as there are no personnel problems, and as long as I give back my figure at the end of the year. But the figure is one that I have estimated, as long as I can justify it." As a lawyer, she handles difficult cases or disputes not foreseen by the tax law, which raise complex legal problems. She also represents the department in different administrative committees. She herself takes care of personnel problems (timetables, holidays, discipline). With regard to other members of the group, she represents at the same time hierarchical and professional authority. She has therefore a strategic relationship toward authority, which does not mean that she always behaves in a formal way. Her main concern, however, is to motivate the members of the team as much as possible without making use of her institutional authority, without starting the well-known vicious circles involved in the use of such power, control and countercontrol (Knights and Roberts 1982).

The deputy manager has the most polyvalent job in the department, because of the division of work between himself and the manager. He is the link and the filter between the manager and most of the other members of the department. He replaces his hierarchical superior when the latter is absent and represents the department in different committees. He also deals with difficult cases and taxpayers' complaints delegated to him by the manager. While personnel matters are taken care of by the manager, the deputy is more in charge of procedures; he puts mechanisms in place, elaborates internal rules, controls their application, and supervises the work of members more directly. He is also in charge of the information system of the department, and as such he is more available than the manager to answer questions from the personnel, particularly concerning taxation problems. As a lawyer, he has the autonomy of the profes-

sional, but he also must account for his supervision of the group. His relations with the manager are often tense, requiring periodic clarifications and reciprocal concession since their functions tend to conflate them. His relationship toward authority is strategic, but it should be stressed that he cannot openly question the hierarchical authority of his superior without undermining his own among his subordinates; on the other hand he can also use, in his relation with his manager, his superior knowledge of what is going on in the everyday life of the department.

Two more aspects of the group's organization are of interest:

The official authority system involves a tight supervision style, which limits the autonomy of most employees by presenting a set of procedural rules, a strict hierarchy, and control of their performance. Bureaucratization is strong. On the other hand, the complexity of the role of the manager may be considered, as indicated below, to be an indirect form of social control that is as constraining as the Weberian form.

The formal communication system consists of a daily meeting at coffee time, which everybody attends. The official channel is sometimes used for upward and downward transmission of messages between manager and employees via the deputy. For some professional problems, the members confine themselves to a formal procedure. If it happens, for example, that a mistake is made by a tax officer, the person who discovers it informs the deputy, who informs the manager, who calls in the person who made the error. It can also happen that the person who discovers the mistake directly informs the person who made it, which allows him or her to correct it while there is still time, without further consequences.

The detailed description of the workgroup and the tasks performed by its members is important to understand the organized and unorganized vested interests underlying members' knowledge claims described below. As important as the formal organization of work are the internal relationships among members, particularly because they shed light on the relative instability of their hierarchy of allegiances within the group.

OFFICE WORK RELATIONSHIPS

In this administrative department the relational climate is similar to that described by Sainsaulieu (1977) in his analysis of work relationships in offices. The nature of the work and its impersonality,

members' difficulty in respecting this rule of impersonality, and remaining motivated at the same time are at the center of these work relationships. The Weberian model of administration usually associates with the work's impersonality an extreme impersonality in work relationships themselves: its objective is to ground decisions as much as possible in the competence of individuals, mediated through specialization, the hierarchy of controls, and formalization of procedures. But well-known dysfunctions in the most rationally designed organizations question the reality of such impersonality. Protective behavior against the manager, avoidance of confrontation, clique solidarity, and other phenomena are not at all impersonal. Instead, the vicious circles of bureaucracy are produced by routine and members' ritualism (in the Mertonian sense), "resulting from very logical behavior in a context of specialized and relatively uninteresting tasks, of promotion by seniority, where individuals have nothing to gain from investing more in the present situation" (Sainsaulieu 1977: 118). In response to this routine, counterstrategies coming from above formulate new rules and procedures to improve the rationality of the organization. This redefinition of rules produces in turn new strategies of resistance and protective behavior against superiors, which after a while trigger new interventions from above.

The work itself is usually presented lightly and deprecatingly. It is contrasted with one's individual originality: "I am worth more than what I am doing." Members expect from one another a recognition of their personal value, but others are not always prepared to meet these expectations, which generates deep-seated frustration. Judgments about the relations between colleagues stress the difficulty of understanding each other in general—even though there is much talk. The narcissistic demand for acknowledgment or recognition often clashes with the "political" dimension of work life; to try to know each other is often perceived as potentially threatening, something that could be used against one. Members say that they persistently rediscover that such a relationship is uncomfortable and that it can even be dangerous. Most of them reestablish confidence by "withdrawing." The role of the manager, or rather the various roles that the manager plays or is expected to play (arbitrator, advisor, friend, technical example, judge, supervisor, mother and father), are an indication of the complexity of the interpersonal relations that emerge in these supposedly impersonal settings.

Therefore, one of the values that appears to have great priority in office life is the "good working environment," "good morale." Everyone's obsession becomes "not to upset morale." If you break it, "everything comes out." A lid is put on members' frustrations,

withdrawal takes place, compromise becomes very important, as well as avoidance of conflicts and disagreements. Joking relationships are developed, and members who are able to ease the atmosphere are highly appreciated.

The work relationships at the office that I observed, the interpersonal games that develop around formal and impersonal rules, are just as complex. I found there the same paradox of task impersonality and high personalization of relations. This description of the workgroup, of members' tasks, and of their patterns of relationships is important to understand the content of their versions of the trouble and their choice of knowledge claims. These relations have an influence on the knowing processes that are reconstituted below.

In order to understand what it means to members of such a workgroup to know well, and how the structure of the group influences this process, the way a specific organizational problem is framed by each member will be analyzed. The particular problem used here to focus on members' claims is a major backlog with which the group fails to catch up. To understand some of the members' versions presented below, the reader needs a minimal description of the "trouble."

THREE VERSIONS OF THE TROUBLE

The problem under consideration was created by a delay in the taxation process. The current delay is due to an external constraint imposed on the department two years before by changes in the tax law. These changes were made for political reasons: the city needed more resources and increased tax rates, effective immediately, for the current year. For the department, this meant revising the taxation of 25 percent of their taxpayers, redoing work already done once in addition to the normal workload. Technically, this change created overlaps and delays. At the time the department considered this increase in its work load to be unfair, since the timing of these changes did not take into account constraints under which it had to operate. The changes could have been spread out in time. The main point here is that the reasons for the delay were clear. The problem with which members of the group are (or seem to be) preoccupied is not so much why the delay but rather, why the group has not been able to catch up on this additional work load in the last eighteen months. Paradoxically, legal deadlines for sending out invoices threatened the administration with losing money. The head of the

department had to make sure that the delay would not spill over into the following year. But at the time of the fieldwork (halfway through the next fiscal year), they were not only late with the normal work load of the current fiscal year; they had not yet caught up with the preceding fiscal year's work load.

This section looks at how the members identify the trouble (since there are conflicts or divergences about what the problem "really is") and how they contribute to the collective troubleshooting. This includes how they try to share their definitions, and to discuss them with the other members of the group. Given their respective relationship toward authority, all members do not involve themselves publicly in these micropolitics, but in one way or another they all make up their minds and express an opinion. In this context, few become overtly vocal and confrontational; most members withdraw behind the "good morale" rule.

Opinions among the members of the department varied about why the backlog persisted. Three categories of explanations were provided. Some attributed it to an "attitude problem" in the tax officers, their laziness and civil servant mentality, their lack of discipline and motivation. Others attributed it to organizational problems closely linked to the nature of the job, such as a new information system acquired by the unit and to the necessary adaptation time, lack of personnel, or lack of training of some available personnel. Still others attributed it to the manager's leadership, which did not encourage cooperation, but scapegoating and rivalries instead.

To catch up without external help would require a dramatic mobilization and many hours of overtime, both unprecedented for tenured office workers. The manager and her deputy were particularly concerned with encouraging the tax officers to make a special effort; they were insisting on the quota every week, to create an atmosphere of urgency and to impose more discipline. But other members of the group thought that this evaded the "real problems." They attributed the persistence of the backlog to the reasons given above. Interpersonal conflicts and withdrawal were attributed to the fact that the "real problems" of the group were not addressed and were even covered up.

Here are the terms in which the main versions of the trouble were expressed during individual interviews, and members' ideas about what the solution should be. Each person was asked to identify the main causes for the persistence of the backlog and to report when and how they talked about this with other members, or let them know what they thought about this situation.

Blaming "Attitude Problems"

The manager attributes the persistence of the backlog to the laziness and civil servant mentality of the tax officers:

- (1) *Manager:* They are not overwhelmed by the quantity of work they have to do. In general they are good, they know what they have to do. I set up this structure and there is no reason why it shouldn't work. Except that some people work less than others, they leave at five on the dot, they don't want to put in an extra minute. Last year I said that they should pitch in, do extra hours, but soon after I had alarm signals from the investigators and the accountant who told me: "But you know they don't work that hard, we're not going to make it," because they check up on each other, you know, that's why I don't really need to be there. It always comes out in the end, and I am here and they come and tell me. It's very funny. I don't want you to think that it is backstabbing or hypocritical, because they know about it, they know what people think and they know what we talk about.

As a consequence, the manager wants the tax officers to work harder:

- (2) *Manager:* Twice in a row I've already told the tax officers that they had to give it a push, that they have to stop reading the paper during work hours, stop making private phone calls, and it didn't do anything. So one day I really got angry, I got everyone together, and I took them one after the other, and I told them what I thought of them and what I thought of the way they work, and that it had to stop or I would take serious steps. I said it in front of everyone: "Stop reading the paper, stop your private phone calls, and work." I let people be as long as the work is done. But when the work is really at stake, I step in. Now everyone knows where they stand. When something doesn't work, even if it's hard for me—because there are some tense moments—I tell people immediately what's wrong, I don't keep it to myself. There are a lot of department heads who just sit on it and say, "It will all work out." I have to get it out. I have to tell people what I think. It's either that or get a stomach ulcer. They understand pretty quickly, I can tell you. Because there have been some bloody run-ins in my office that I let out in the open.

I said what I had to say, and people saw, "She is there, she takes her responsibilities seriously."

Other members, like the accountant, also blame the tax officers' attitude:

- (3) *Accountant*: My opinion is that something is wrong with the tax officers. There are problems, snags, they are stuck. There are no people with a "Civil servant mentality" here, except for the girls. I think it's wrong to take a vacation when you have such a backlog of work. I don't mean to be nasty, it's only inside of taxation that it doesn't work. They each take turns answering the phone for a week. If it's X's week and X is busy, Y doesn't answer the phone. I hate that. The only frictions we have here, it's among tax officers. If Jane has a phone call and she isn't the one who handled that file, she doesn't answer the taxpayer's questions. She leaves a note on someone else's desk that says "Call them back." This simply comes from the fact that you leave two women together and things are messed up. I've noticed since I've been here that women are a lot more concerned with their rights than with their responsibilities. The problem is with them. Karen and Jane, they see work as a chore. I don't mean to be personal about this, but they know what I think. We talk about this almost everyday, here [at the coffee break], just so that they don't forget. You see, they don't participate like we participate. Even if we go away for a weekend once a year, it's hard to get them to come.

Blaming Technical Contingencies

Another view describes the trouble in different terms. The deputy sees the persistence of the backlog simply as a result of the quantity of work, and changes in the information systems used by the tax officers:

- (4) *Deputy Manager*: And I would also say that before the changes in the law the tax officers were very often satisfied with simplistic solutions, perhaps even false ones, that didn't respect the law but were easier to figure out. They talked very little with the taxpayers before they sent them their invoices, and they didn't ask them any questions. They made many mistakes and our image with accounting firms wasn't good. Now we have computers, which help a lot in that respect, although they are not yet used at full capacity. But the tax officers now look at the

taxpayers' accounts, they insist on having the taxpayers' accounts with the declaration, whereas before that wasn't done. This increases the taxation work, they request additional information, mail, etc. It slows things down. I think that's as far as you have to go to find the basic reason [for the persistence of the backlog].

One tax officer blames the limits put on their performance by the nature of the tasks:

- (5) *Tax officer*: If they gave us more time this backlog would sort itself out. In the long run with four tax officers it's enough if we continue as usual, with the new computer programs, which make the work easier. If we want to go faster, we need a fifth person. We have a lot to do. Our days are completely full with the work we have. We work at our own pace, everyone at his own pace. When we have nothing left on our desks we go and find more in the pool. You cannot force anyone to do thirty taxpayers a day if they are at capacity doing twenty. When you put quantity before quality, you make mistakes and you spend a lot of time afterwards trying to correct them. Mistakes make more work for everyone, more phone calls, more letters. That's why there is no benefit in pushing for quantity. The administration always looks bad if there are mistakes, we look like fools. Better be late than wrong.

As a result, the tax officers holding this view think that the unit should hire an additional tax officer:

- (6) *Another tax officer*: The manager told us, You talk too much, you make too many phone calls. Or makes comments like "How does one go faster?" That's really unfair. There are no miracles. If you want the work done, you have to have enough people to do it. They tell us that ten years ago there were only two tax officers and they did the job, and now there are four of us and we don't. But that's unfair. The job is very different now, and we do it better, more seriously.

Another example of the same version relates to the issue of training:

- (7) *Tax officer*: It's very clear that in the old team, for the same amount of work, there were two people in taxation and at the end of the year they were all done on time. Everything was done.

Now they are four, even five if you count the deputy, and at the end of the year I can't tell you how many declarations are late, up to four thousand. If it only happened one year that would be OK, but the second time you think, There is a snag. And what's the snag? Everything revolves around that now. The tax officers are uneasy because they know that something doesn't work. What doesn't work is a problem of qualifications. I am not making it up, it's true. There is something wrong about taxing without having accounting skills. Before there were qualified accountants. Now there are people who are tax officers and have no idea of accounting. You can learn on the job, but sometimes there are things that they haven't learned to see in the accounts.

As a result, several subordinates want more training, particularly for two of the tax officers.

- (8) *Tax officer:* There are four of us tax officers. But the two in the other office don't have much experience, and they are not well trained. So they constantly come for help, fifty times for the same thing, How do you do this? and How do you do that? There are written procedures on how to handle their problems, but they don't read them. So after a while you get fed up with these interruptions. Either they are too lazy to go through their own files to find an answer, or they don't know where it is in the files. And then when I help, they go to someone else because they do not trust what I tell them, and in fact they are happy only when the deputy has decided for them. So they are covered. So now I tell them, "There is a memo [about that specific issue]." It's not very efficient. The only way to get somewhere is to give them more training.

Blaming the Leadership Style

Finally, some members developed a criticism of the leadership of the unit, the way it is run. The manager and her deputy are accused of lack of coordination, of playing favorites, of listening to gossip, of using a divide-and-rule policy:

- (9) *Investigator:* The manager divides us for her own advantage. The big ones always divide the small people below them, they don't want us to be strong. That's true with the tax officers too. They divide the tax officers themselves, they play favorites. They always delegate to the same persons, they show the others that

they don't trust their work. The deputy told me, "Taxation is not your business," but that's not true. I am the one who goes and talks to the taxpayers. That's not a team approach.

The manager is also accused by a tax officer of ignoring problems of cooperation among employees.

- (10) *Tax officer:* Michele hates working with women. The manager does not dare tell her to go and work with us, in the tax officers' room, because in the other room, they resist together, they stick together and close ranks. She wants to stay there with the investigators. And the manager likes them, she likes to go there, they joke, they keep her in a good mood. But she should be tougher with them. They make unpleasant comments all the time. They have been here for a long time, they are the ones who make the rules. She should tell them to cooperate. That would help, for a change. I told it to the manager, and she said, "I am the one who calls the shots here not you."

Some want the manager to be more humane and understanding; some say that she should not listen to what people tell her about each other. As mentioned above, complaints about the leader and dependence upon her are almost a defining characteristic of this type of office relationship (Sainsaulieu 1977).

Each version has its own implications for how to solve the problem. Explicitly or tacitly, the members propose as many solutions as there are definitions of the trouble. It is thus possible to read the politics behind each version. The reason for the diversity of versions is that members seem to prefer solutions in which they see some advantage for themselves, while presenting them as advantageous for the group. From this perspective, they all try to get what they want by presenting their own goals as a contribution to the solution of the backlog.

THE LINK BETWEEN VERSIONS AND CLAIMS

These versions are asserted as knowledge claims, which can be classified based on the typology presented in Chapter 2. This section shows how the members of a bureaucratic workgroup tend to produce knowledge claims that fall into all the types defined by this classification. The group tends to diversify the types of appropriateness judgments underlying particular assertions, thus covering the

whole range of types. I then speculate about the reasons for and consequences of such a diversification in a group with this particular structure.

Members' descriptions of how they discuss the trouble with others, and how and where they assert their respective views, are very informative in terms of identifying the types of claims used by them. In the interviews, the respondents stage their assertions about their versions. I interpret these descriptions as indications of their understanding of the coalition or constituency supporting their claim, or protecting their authority to know. I use what they say about how they discuss and defend their version with others, and what others they involve in this discussion.

The version focusing on the tax officers' attitude problem almost inevitably tends to be carried by procedural types of claims because it singles out a subgroup as a cause for the trouble. If we look at the manager's statements about the trouble and its solution (laziness of tax officers and the need to work harder), and at the way she tries to impose and implement it, we can identify two types of claims carrying this version: a polemical type, and an initiated one. Statement (2) describes a *polemical* type of claim: the manager represents herself defining the situation for the benefit of all, and in a way that does not suffer any challenge. She does not entitle anybody else to contribute to the definition of the trouble, unless they agree with her. Nobody is allowed to answer back. In statements (1) and many others,¹ the manager describes herself as defining the trouble for the benefit of a more limited audience, the tax officers only or a particular person summoned into her office. The description also suggests that, again, she does not allow her interlocutors to contribute to the definition of the trouble. These indications being together the attributes of an *initiated* type of claim. Her accounts do not refer to any substantive discussion about the issue itself (no reference to the nature of the work or the nature of the tasks, the production system itself, the detail of the taxation). The only parameter that varies is the extent to which the discussions that she stages are public. She plays on the boundary between the public and the private. In the first type of claim everyone who agrees is entitled to participate, there is the assumption that in such a small office everything becomes public anyway, nothing can be kept secret, so things might as well be public. In the second type of claim only a few are entitled to be part of the discussion, to challenge, and (in her mind) ultimately to agree. Acquiescence to her version of the trouble is requested when this version is developed in public, or sought from other members only when she entitles them to participate in the discussion, almost as a favor.

The content of the accountant's statements about the trouble is approximately the same as the manager's (tax officers' attitude problem), and the type of claim carrying his version is also a polemical one. Despite his technical expertise in the matters related to taxation, the claims that he stages in his accounts (see, for example, statement 3) are not substantive (not linked to the nature of the tasks). The discussions are presented as public; everyone is entitled to participate in the discussion of the trouble. There is the assumption that participation should be encouraged in general. Acquiescence is sought from everyone despite the fact that people who are blamed and feel targeted by this version will not provide it (in office relationships, polemical claims made by someone other than the manager are seen by the tax officers as a provocation).

Here we have another *initiated* claim of the same type of version, this time by one of the investigators:

- (11) *Investigator*: You have to admit, there are two persons here, it's difficult with them. You have to be careful. There is a social barrier and an age barrier.

Interviewer: Do you discuss the backlog with others?

Investigator: Maybe we'll talk to each other about some problems: "Did you see what she did? My God, that's unbelievable, is she kidding or what? and that doesn't make everyone happy. Sometimes my friend and I have a pretty good time laughing about it. We have a sense of humor at least, but with some people you can't do that because they don't have much of a sense of humor.

Another investigator stages *polemical* claims of this version:

- (12) *Investigator*: I participate a lot. During coffee break, on the subject of the backlog, I started asking, "What on earth are you women in the tax bureau doing? Now there are four of you and we're still just as far behind. This has got to stop." Distributionwise, maybe there are two blocks of workers in the office, but that doesn't mean there have to be factions. There's the coffee break, everyone meets then, we have discussions and all that. Sometimes maybe we're a little hard on some of our coworkers because we like to tease them, but not in a mean way. It's more teasing than anything else. At least it's straightforward. But even if it's the manager who does something stupid, she gets it too, even more than the others because we never miss her. Personally, I put everyone on the same, equal footing.

The version focusing on technical contingencies tends to be carried by substantive types of claims because it refers to the nature of the tasks and the organization of work imposed from the outside. For instance, while the manager describes the trouble in terms of attitude problems on the subordinates' side, statement (4) shows that her deputy has a different version. He sees the trouble in more substantive terms, assessing the detail of the taxation job, how tasks are performed, and how procedures are applied. The claims that he stages within the office are of the *expert* type. The backlog is monitored during discussions with tax officers exclusively. From the deputy's point of view, they are the only ones entitled to participate in the definition of the problem.²

Some tax officers, as statements (4) and (15) show, make more mistakes than others, which—when discovered—require additional work to correct them and to deal with the taxpayer. *Expert* claims carrying this version stage the following type of boundary work:

- (13) *Tax officer*: Sometimes I'm pretty biting, pretty tough when there's something that's not working out, but I say so to the person concerned. I'm not shy, I tell them, "Listen, that's not right, you screwed up," and I like them to do the same for me, which isn't always the case. I don't like it when they go spreading it around, or running to the deputy manager. I like to hear it face to face.
- (14) *Tax officer*: There aren't enough meetings between the tax officers to discuss our problems. It's really a shame. If there were more of them, that would avoid the problem of different methods, it would clear things up. So this means if I have something to say I go to the person involved. Or else I go see the deputy. I think the head manager has other problems, problems that are too important for us to bother her with whatever problems we might have with our coworkers. So Alan [the deputy] is there to sort of act as a buffer, to take care of that kind of problem without having to bother the head manager. If it's only a question about taxation, I wouldn't bring it up during the coffee break. But sometimes I don't know how to deal with people, sometimes I can't say what I think right away, and then it's too late, so I hold it in, I hold it in, and then one day I tell the person to go to hell, and that's not good either. I gotta tell you, these days I'm trying to restrain myself.

The tax officers often make *realistic* claims of the following type, in which they assert that despite the inconvenience of making the issue an

open and public one, it is somehow considered to be everyone's business:

- (15) *Tax officer*: It is true that we've made more mistakes recently, and that doesn't help. But the kind of mistakes that we make are not accounting mistakes; they are mistakes caused by lack of attention, a lack of concentration, because we are constantly under pressure. That's a big factor, and everyone can see it. But these days, each time there is a little mistake, no matter what, they don't care, they show it to the deputy, who shows it to the manager, who calls us into her office. There are no secrets around here. If someone makes a mistake, people crack up, they're in hysterics. You put a blue stamp where there's supposed to be a red stamp, it's a catastrophe. There are lots of little details like that. Our work in general is good, but you get the feeling that they focus only on this 3 percent of mistakes that we've made. They only see the negative side. Among the tax officers, there are those who shut up, who don't say anything; I am not like that. When I have something to say, I say it. That's been causing me problems for a long time.

The version focusing on the management's leadership style tends to be carried by procedural types of claims because it also singles out the manager or her deputy as a cause for the trouble. In addition to assertions (9) and (10), here are examples of such a version carried by an *initiated* claim:

- (16) *Tax officer*: Between the management and the others it's like grade school. There are very clear preferences. The manager listens to some people more easily than to others. Often Jane would have little problems and I went several times to ask for concessions for one thing or another, and I was the one who went because she knew she wouldn't be heard, so she liked it better when I was the one who went. And that's the reason why I sort of got on the manager's bad side. She probably thought I'm the one who always complains, who wants everything. I didn't think about that, I didn't realize. Jane would always say, "Go ahead, she likes you anyway." Since then, she doesn't listen to us anymore. She isn't interested in anything we have to say. So now we go to the deputy manager. We try not to bother the head manager.
- (17) *Deputy manager*: Yesterday I spoke with the guys in the tax office about the problem, How come the women are always at

each other's throats and not the men? Professionally, the women support one another less than the men do, that can be verified in this unit. That confirms or covers up personal problems between taxation and investigation. Some women have the impression that they aren't very well supported by the manager compared to the men, and they associate this with the idea that "women don't support each other." That's pretty much true. I've seen the manager yelling at men and women and it's true that with men, it's more like "You're an adult for heaven's sake, you're reasonable." With a woman it's more quickly in a tone like, "That's the fiftieth time I've told you, you idiot."

In conclusion, the members of this group make claims that vary in content (versions), but also in ways of constructing their own appropriateness using boundary work. This variation covers the whole range of types. The relationship between versions and claims in this group tends to be quite loose, which favors a process of diversification. The fact that versions and claims are not tightly coupled is an indication that, despite their tone, claims do not narrowly articulate versions and individual interests. Instead, they connect interests and versions in a way that takes into account the kind of support that such a connection can anticipate from selected others, and given the relationship toward authority of the member making the claim.

The next section offers an explanation for this diversification. It does so by focusing on the type of coalition building and constituencies defined by the members to create alignments protecting their versions and promoting their authority to know.

AUTHORITY RELATIONSHIPS AND EPISTEMIC ALIGNMENTS

A look at the versions that blame the tax officers shows that they are usually of the polemical and initiated types; they use divisions within the group to secure their own survival. Versions blaming the leadership and the general climate are also usually of the initiated type. Versions blaming technical issues tend to be of the expert and realistic types. Members' contributions to the collective troubleshooting can be seen as attempts to impose—or at least secure the survival of—the version in which they think that they have a vested interest. They try to do so by using some types of claims, and not others. The question of interest here is how their type of interactions (especially

their relationship toward institutional authority) constrains their choices.

The manager's strategy sets the tone and deserves another closer look. Her relationship toward authority is by definition strategic. Her version of the trouble is mainly to blame the tax officers (see statements 1 and 2 and note 1). Her claims are procedural (initiated and polemical), which is consistent with her supervision style. She has responsibilities outside her unit as counsel to the city financial board, and she is not a hands-on supervisor. Her supervision is based primarily on end-of-the-month statistics and on what the deputy tells her. She keeps her distance from the other members, and stresses the fact that she is careful not to go into details when talking about work with them: "I've got my work, they've got theirs; I don't want to be dragged into taxation tasks." Substantive explanations for the persistence of the backlog would not be consistent with this attitude. She put a deputy between her and the members of the group, and they mostly go to him when they have problems. She plays down the separation that this distance creates. However, as a result of this, she is also defensive concerning her authority and her adversarial way of using it:

- (18) *Manager:* When I raise my voice, it has its effect. It's a lot less accepted in the administration than in the private sector that the heads of departments fight back. There are a lot who hold back. Instantly he is a jerk of a boss who is picking on the poor people. I've got to get it out, I have to tell people what I think; it's either that or get a stomach ulcer.

When people do not work as she thinks they should, her strategy is to talk to the person privately (closed context, what is being said is nobody else's business), and then to mention the issue in public at the coffee break (open context, what is being said is everyone's business), hopeful that peer pressure will induce the person to work more and better. Here, the production of procedural claims serves the purpose of centralizing as much epistemic authority as possible in her position. Polemical and initiated types of claims are strong attempts to control who may become a challenger and who may not. With the initiated type, she entitles only a few interlocutors to contribute to the definition of the trouble. With the polemical claim, the manager entitles everyone to contribute, provided that they agree with her version. Focusing on substantive issues and making realistic or expert claims could provide potential challengers with more epistemic authority than she is willing to share. She certainly sees her attempt at centralizing this authority as the most likely way to produce acquies-

cence or alignments in a context where tactical relationships toward authority are dominant. As seen above, the relational context created among office workers puts many conflicting demands on the leader. In this context, the use of an authority argument may be perceived by the leadership as the only tool available for keeping the production process under control. This in turn has its consequences for the leader's way of securing her authority to know, and on the shape of the distribution of this authority.

The types of claims chosen show that she assumes that the constituency from which these claims draw their authority is either the unit as a whole (since she formally represents it) or a subunit (the management). The two types of claims presented here use some sort of differentiation (hierarchy and gender differences³, within the group in order to carry their respective versions. This choice of identity and entitlements seems to be an authoritarian way of containing challenges to the version that blames the tax officers (mostly women) for the trouble. It can be seen as an indirect attempt to insulate the tax officers from participating in the definition of the trouble, which would otherwise give them the opportunity to explain it differently.

The deputy's relationship toward authority is also strategic, although his style is more unobtrusive than the manager's. His way of asserting his authority shows more expertise than pulling rank.⁴ His version of the trouble focuses mainly on technical contingencies (see statement 4). His claims are substantive, mainly expert ones. He is more concerned with the division of work than his superior. This is consistent with his position between the unit and its manager. He is in charge of improving efficiency, not with problems of discipline and motivation. His version is not expressed in public because he partially disagrees with his own superior (about the timing for passing the new tax law) and does not want to make a public issue out of this disagreement. He is also very much involved in everyone's work, particularly the tax officers' work, and therefore potentially compromised as well from her point of view. The choice of an expert claim is a way to keep quiet about the trouble, a way to avoid personalizing the matter or taking a position openly challenging that of the manager. Given his relationship toward authority, such expert claims may be seen as more efficient in protecting this version; they are backed by a constituency that, while pretending to open up the discussion about the trouble, practically entitles only the tax officers to contribute to it. With his relationship toward authority and his version competing with that of the manager (he is also supposed to be her spokesperson), the expert claim makes sense because it has a self-insulating property, which is used here to avoid confrontation.

The tax officers' relationship toward authority is a tactical one.

Their versions of the trouble focus either on technical issues (see statement 5), like the deputy's, or on the failure of the leadership to enforce cooperation among themselves (see statement 10). Their claims are substantive, both expert and realistic ones. But given their relationship toward authority, they are to be interpreted differently. In this situation, being realistic is a last resort for members in a position of weakness.⁵ In terms of coalition building, realistic claims like statement 15 represent an absorptive and confrontational strategy. The only constituency that can back realistic claims is the group as a whole, and it is unlikely that members without institutional authority can create the consensus needed to support a claim of this type, especially when they are themselves being blamed by the manager. On the one hand, realistic claims do not carry much weight in themselves because they entitle all the members of the group to support or challenge the versions that they assert (the trouble is everyone's business); but on the other hand they maintain an openness that is sometimes the only guarantee of access to formal discussion about the trouble. Here realistic claims are used defensively by members in a position of weakness, who are not allowed to challenge the manager's polemic claims, which do not provide the support expected for their own. Nevertheless, their claims are seen as efficient because they are protected by the fact that the manager is known to be uninterested in substantive issues. It is not unusual for tax officers to complain about not being listened to by their superiors,⁶ in a context dominated by the hierarchical power of a manager who dismisses their assertions, and by the vocal influence of more senior and macho investigators. Tax officers' expert claims have the same logic as the deputy's claims, although they are based on a constituency that does not include him. With this version blaming the management for not enforcing cooperation among themselves, and with their relationship toward authority, these claims tend to be self-insulating, and to avoid confrontation.⁷

The investigators' relationship toward authority is also tactical, although they sometimes behave as if their seniority and gender puts them in a strategic relationship toward authority.⁸ Their version of the trouble focuses mainly on the tax officers' attitude problem and on the manager's leadership style (see statements 11 and 12). Since they work half their time outside the office, they are very protective of their own autonomy, and oppose substantive intrusions in anybody's business, including the tax officers'. They do not discuss substantive issues related to the taxation process and remain procedural. On the one hand, they tend to favor official and open discussions about the trouble, where they can catch up with the latest developments and become the protectors of office morale. Thus their claims about

the tax officers' attitude problem tend to be polemical. These claims are absorptive, entitling everyone to participate in the discussion, provided though that they agree with the investigators' version. On the other hand, when they blame the manager, their claims also show an attempt to avoid confrontation, becoming more private and gossipy, and therefore of the initiated and insulating type. Given their relationship toward authority, they play different games in their definition of the trouble. They base their polemical and initiated claims on different constituencies. With initiated claims, they try to exercise much more control over the right of others to participate than they do with polemical ones.

I do not account in this section for everyone's claims and versions of the trouble in detail, for instance, the secretary's, the accountant's, or every tax officer's or investigator's taken individually. Nor do I give a dynamic picture of the debate, of claims and counterclaims as they unfold in time and across boundaries, because the method is not designed for this purpose. The main objective is to show how the choices of claims are subject to structural constraints or, in other words, how the relationship toward authority is a decisive factor in the type of claim chosen to carry one's version of the trouble.

The members as troubleshooters provide different versions of the trouble (procedural or substantive) and identify different contexts in which they would express and discuss them (closed or open). Given their vested interests as they perceive them, their relationship toward authority, and other members' positions, members try to control "whose business" it is to deal with the trouble. All are confronted with constraints in the sense that it is difficult to secure the survival of their respective versions with types of claims other than those identified. In addition, as a consequence of very limited access to an institutional authority argument, most members' hierarchy of allegiances is not fixed; it is redefined in several epistemic alignments. In terms of boundary work and coalition building, both insulation and absorption are used systematically in this group to create such alignments.

The next section focuses on the diversification of types of claims emerging in this group to support the different versions of the trouble.

DIVERSIFICATION OF CLAIMS AND INFORMED DECISIONS IN A BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE

In summary, this case study illustrates how the structure of this work group has an indirect influence on the process of defining the

situation. Several versions compete to become the underlying "facts" shaping the policy designed to handle the trouble. These versions are not always debated in the same forum and the claims that carry them do not always make themselves challengeable by others. Absorption and insulation are boundary work that aims at selecting the persons whose business it is to challenge or support one's version. Given most members' tactical relationship toward authority, the trend is to avoid conflicts with others supporting different versions, and to take the authority to know away from each other. They do so by matching their versions with several types of claims, thus avoiding open and public confrontations by excluding potential challengers and including likely supporters. This seems to be considered as a good way to secure the survival of a specific version in which the members have some vested interest. Thus, the authority relationships that the structure creates tend to fragment the group into even smaller epistemic cliques. In these constituencies members develop different senses of appropriateness supporting the claims, or securing the influence of various versions of the trouble.

In such micropolitics, each claim is perceived by the claimants as grounding their authority to know, as more likely to produce some acquiescence, some legitimacy, or some support for a specific version, within the boundaries of an epistemic alignment. Therefore diversification of claims means that the members assume the existence of different epistemic alignments, or attempt to create them, as a basis of support for their versions. In this context, members' boundary work does not create stable epistemic alignments or coalitions deriving their strength from their internal cohesion. Instead the diversification of claims becomes a way of preventing others from imposing their conception of what an informed decision is, or from creating systematic consensus around their claims. Thus, the lack of consensus (ultimately about what an informed decision would be) comes not only from the fact that particular versions are partisan and contested, but also from the fact that members arrange their discussions in a way that makes it even more difficult to agree on the "right" time, place, and interlocutors with whom to discuss the issue at hand. As a result, they do not build an authoritative "knowledge base" on which a consensual policy could be defined. The manager's purely procedural solutions are used in this context as "default" solutions, which are easy to agree upon but also to denounce as arbitrary.

It is not possible here to measure and compare the weight of each claim and version in the discussion about the trouble. For example, tax officers' realistic claims may seem to be inefficient attempts to push their agenda. When their claims are mostly informal, substantive, and public, they do not carry much weight in an official

discussion; but this may be enough to create some epistemic inertia, and passively undermine others' attempts to shape the troubleshooting policy.

This diversification and the coexistence in the same group of several versions and claims have consequences for a theory of collective action. Such diversity of claims using all sorts of differentiations within the group (in this case hierarchy, division of work, gender, seniority, geography) to select who is entitled to make contributions to the common definition of the situation will certainly not create much "co-orientation" among members. Given such internal politics, members may have difficulty exercising epistemic control upon one another. Speculations about these consequences will be made in the next chapter.

For comparative purposes, Chapter 5 looks at the same process occurring in a collegial workgroup, where a different distribution of claims is linked to different relations toward institutional authority.

NOTES

1. For instance:

(19) *Manager*: I got into the habit of making my announcements at the coffee break so everyone knows and everyone gets the message. If I have something to say to one particular person, I say it in my office. But anyway, just from the fact that someone's in my office, everyone knows something's up and they have their ears glued to the door. You can see by their expression when they come out, everyone can tell what happened. We're a small unit, everyone knows what's going on, everyone is interested and everyone feels concerned. If it concerns everyone, I announce it during the coffee break. For example, regarding the backlog, everyone feels concerned because that has repercussions for everybody, so I announce that directly at the coffee break.

2. These boundaries are sometimes difficult to keep under control, as indicated by the following assertion:

Deputy Manager: In these conflicts, I have more of a mediation role. I try as much as possible to stay outside them, in other words not to take a stand. When the investigators come and tell me "So and so told me such and such," or "I think it's strange, I think you should do something about it, there is backlog in the taxation," and so on and so on, I short-circuit all of that.

3. For instance:

(20) *Manager*: I think that being a woman helps me. Even if I said things very frankly and very directly, if I really blew my top sometimes—a lot more than I thought I'd be able to—I knew just when I had to impress people, to "scare them," they knew that was how it was, how things were going to be and no other way. But at the same time I think that the fact of being a woman made them feel like there was still a human aspect, I think that played a part.

4. For example:

(20) *Deputy Manager*: They have a strong respect for management. Often I was afraid, I told myself, It's not going to fly if I bawl them out, no way, they won't let themselves be bawled out by a guy who's fifteen years younger than they are. And in fact, that wasn't the case at all. If they don't like a decision made on the management level, they never question it openly; maybe it won't get applied, but that's a minimal form of respect as far as contestation goes. You do it on the side, you don't get confrontational. It's like the kid who lies to his parents because he doesn't dare cross them. But it's a respect for the hierarchy, not a challenge.

5. All sorts of tactics are used by members in weak positions to assert themselves and their claims, including a "dramatization" of their versions, which also contains realistic elements.

6. See statement 16 or, for instance:

(22) *Tax officer*: Often I found some of Michele's little taxation mistakes because, according to her, she's never wrong, she never makes a mistake. And if you show her mistakes to the deputy, he always minimizes them. I don't think that's fair either. He says, "Oh, it's nothing."

7. Given their relationship toward authority, it is difficult to secure the survival of their versions with other types of claims.

8. An example of this attitude appears in this statement:

(23) *Investigator*: Everything depends on the head manager. I think she's the one who sets the mood in the unit. Things went badly in the beginning, relations were very tense, she didn't dare say much; we were a little bit phallogratic, if you know what I mean. So a woman—we'd always had a man as manager, I myself always had a man as a boss, so being very independent I always managed to do what I wanted because they trusted me and we got along well—so then when she arrived I told her on the first day, "If you leave me alone while I do my work we might get along." OK, so things were a little tense at the beginning, but she really did a great job, she managed to give the unit a new energy, a real boost.

Chapter 5

Knowledge Claims in a Collegial Workgroup

A second case study provides an illustration of the other part of the general hypothesis of this essay, through looking at knowledge claims in a collegial workgroup. Again, an organizational problem is used to analyze the process that distributes types of knowledge claims among the members of the group. This time the trouble is the restructuring of a team of social workers. Conflicts of definitions arise when members identify the problem, and the relational system in which the troubleshooting activity takes place fosters the emergence of a narrower set of claims than in the previous workgroup. More members seem to share the same criteria for what it means to know well. At the end of the chapter I try to look at the overall consequences of such a process of homogenization.

A SOCIAL WORK UNIT

The collegial unit in trouble is the other workgroup presented in Chapter 2, which includes thirteen members operating in an organization comparable to Goffman's "total institution." As indicated before, the institution helps people from different cultures adjust to the Swiss life-style, but also to the temporary community life in the institution. It is situated outside the town in relative isolation, which tends to accentuate a sense of autonomy among the team responsible for running it. It is divided into four separate houses, three of which are managed by two social workers each, and the fourth by one social worker.

The first house settles the newcomers for their first three months, after which they move to the second and third houses. They are then

encouraged to look for jobs and to start integrating, learning the language, getting to know the administrative system they will have to deal with; the stay at this stage is not limited. The fourth house consists of apartments for residents who have found a job, can live relatively independently, and pay rent. The administration, including the director, is housed in separate offices in the main building.

The team comprises a director, who is a social worker; his deputy, who is an administrator; and a team working under their supervision. The director has under his responsibility the professional team of seven social workers; the deputy manages the administration and has under her responsibility a secretary and three maintenance persons. The various members depend upon each other. The composition of this workgroup shows a dominant proportion of professionals [or "semiprofessionals", in Etzioni's (1969) classification of social workers], who are in a strategic relationship toward hierarchical authority (Sainsaulieu and Périnel 1979; Troutot 1982).

A short description of the division of labor in the group and of the members' relationships toward authority shows the interdependence of the members of the team, and the work relationships that they build around the performance of their tasks are very different from those encountered in the tax office.

The tasks of the social workers have intra- and interhouse components. The first consists of running the house in the most autonomous way possible. This includes a varied set of tasks, among them to establish a personalized relationship with the newcomers, the residents, and their families, to help in their dealings with various administrations (for example, insurance, hospital, immigration authorities, or employers), to evaluate the financial assistance they need to receive, to organize community activities in the houses, to distribute household tasks, and to maintain a quasi-permanent presence. In the first three houses, a division of work is defined between the two social workers. The more senior has the title of senior social worker, the more junior—younger and less experienced—that of junior social worker. For the time being, this slight hierarchical distinction is usually underplayed in the working relationships and discussions taking place in each house. But there is still a small difference in salary between senior social workers and junior social workers.

In addition to these in-house tasks, each of the members organizes activities in which residents of different houses participate, such as language courses, and special activities for children and for unemployed residents. On behalf of their interhouse activities, the social workers often intervene in their colleagues' houses. This is sometimes perceived as interference, but the residents "belong" to the institution as much as to the houses or to the social workers in charge. The social

workers also need each other's network of contacts outside the institution, for example, with local services and authorities, to solve the problems of their respective residents. Mutual help is necessary when foreign languages are used to deal with difficult situations, and the social workers also depend on each other for information about what is happening in other houses, or about residents when they leave one house to settle in another.¹

The social workers also depend upon the "support staff." The decisions of the administrator in charge of the financial assistance to the residents can affect everyday life in each house. For instance, the administrative and external criteria for financial assistance do not link the amount of help with residents' contributions to the functioning of their respective house (household tasks and participation in social activities), but are calculated in terms of "basic and minimal needs of individuals and their human dignity." Therefore, the results of the work of the social worker partly depend upon the interpretation, by the administrator of the institution, of the rules to be applied in this type of decision. This question of financial aid crystallizes many bureauprofessional tensions between the social workers, who try to defend their autonomy in the management of their respective houses and increase their leverage on the residents, and the administrator, who supervises and coordinates their work. The social workers also need the maintenance workers for equipment, repairs of the facilities (sanitary, kitchen, etc.), and acquisition and installation of furniture.

As semiprofessionals, the social workers are accountable to themselves and their peers; there is an annual peer review process for each member of the team. But as members of the workgroup in which activities have to be coordinated, they accept a certain hierarchical supervision and interference. They have to justify their activities and decisions before their peers and before the hierarchy.

The director, who had been with this team for six months when the fieldwork was conducted, supervises the budget, the activities of the workgroup, and the relationships between houses. He represents the institution vis-à-vis the outside (public relations), and collects and circulates information. The director and his administrator answer questions from the team, and make decisions concerning the many aspects of life in a "total institution" in a way that tries to maintain some continuity. They depend upon the members of the group for their information and account for their work to the board of the nonprofit organization that funds the institution.

The director's relationship toward authority is a strategic one.² The administrator's relationship toward authority is also strategic; she can use her hierarchical status when interacting with all the members of the group except the director.

The members of the group employed on the administrative side receive their work instructions from the administrator, to whom they are directly accountable, although this is sometimes unclear because they exchange favors with the social workers. Whatever their technical know-how or their informal influence, they are not openly autonomous. They cannot use a professional status to negotiate and discuss the instructions they receive. Their only resort is to resist the hierarchical control in an informal and invisible way, and to establish a tactical relationship toward authority.

For example, the secretary's job is to take care of the official mail—which includes typing the social workers' outgoing mail, taking and dispatching phone calls, managing the residents' files, and taking notes during the group's meetings. Officially, she is accountable to and depends upon the administrator, who decides her priorities. The administrator can use her time to help in the accounts. However, her informal role in the management of the unit, as well as her importance for a positive working climate, are considerable. In this unit, she manages information, listens to complaints without really taking sides, tries not to get involved in one side or the other of troubleshooting activity, and attempts to keep her priorities without provoking excessive frustration among the social workers. The fact that she centralizes and knows part of the residents' files makes each member dependent upon her at one stage or another. But this role and her informal importance do not provide an institutional authority to defend her autonomy, discuss the instructions she receives, or avoid others' interference with her work. On the contrary, when she deals, for instance, with the social workers, she uses her superiors' authority to cover herself, which gives priority to this type of authority.

Three members are responsible for the maintenance of the buildings. They shop, make inventories, do repairs, paint, and do part of the cleaning. They help the residents to settle in or to leave, give technical advice, and take care of the material organization of social events. They receive their instructions from the administrator, for whom they also gather information. They are in a position to negotiate their priorities with the social workers, who need them constantly, and they tend to prefer the social workers who are not "paperwork oriented" and are efficient in running their house, thus reducing the distance between the semiprofessional worker and the simple employee. When the question of priorities raises tensions, they cover themselves by referring the social workers to the administrator. Their relationship toward authority is tactical, but the other members consider legitimate the fact that they prefer tasks that

provide more autonomy, such as managing technical workshops for unemployed residents.

Two more aspects of the organization of the unit are of interest here.

The official authority system is represented by a supervision style that is more *laissez-faire* than in the previous workgroup. The tension between both institutional authorities is handled by a certain form of decentralization. A distance is maintained, in particular by the director, between the administrative center and the semiautonomous houses, which largely encourages the social workers to consider the quality of their work as a matter of professional ethics and personal judgment. From the point of view of this compromise, the management tacitly limits its supervision to the interhouse activities, although it would be inappropriate to consider these houses as "privatized" settings.

In the social workers' unit, one can differentiate two levels of activity. On the interhouse level, hierarchical positions are clearly defined among the administrator, the secretary, and the maintenance workers on the one hand, and between the director and the social workers on the other hand—clearly defined if not really respected, particularly by the social workers, mainly because they have autonomy in the definition of their own roles and because of their semi-professional status and rhetoric. Supervision works through control of resources and their allocation more than by control of the professional practice of the members. On the intrahouse level, an ill-defined hierarchical relation exists between senior social workers and junior social workers, but their mutual dependence for running the house (forty people approximately) is such that things get done informally.

In this unit, formal communication works through weekly meetings of the whole workgroup, as well as through biweekly meetings of the members responsible for interunit activities. Work and work relationships are also based on intense informal communication in the institution. Concerning the social workers, the director is informed only when he asks specific questions (for instance, during local meetings with the members of each house) or when they need help or cover. Members communicate directly among themselves without insisting on signs of status. A certain formality is maintained by the members on the administrative side vis-à-vis the management.

COLLEGIAL WORK RELATIONSHIPS

The relational climate described in the bureaucratic group differs greatly from that of the social workers' unit. It can be described by

using the profile provided by Sainsaulieu and Périnel (1979) of social work in organized settings. This practice is characterized by a complex interinstitutional game, personalized contact with the residents, and the organization of everyday work in the unit itself. In order to get things done, social workers cannot avoid situating their actions on the following three levels (which, of course, interfere with one another), with all their specific constraints:

1. Relationships with outside institutions, which are not always clear or easy (for example, different administrations, including police and insurance companies).
2. Relationships with the residents, which raise a number of problems. The social workers have a choice between at least two conceptions of their profession: a "take charge," privatized, individual, and often quasi-emotional assistance, in which the resident "belongs" to the social worker; or a more impersonal helping relationship in which the resident "belongs" to the organization. Within the workgroup, both styles and job conceptions are represented.
3. Relationships with other social workers: most social workers need to use their colleagues' networks to do their work, especially junior social workers, who have not had time to develop large networks of their own.

In order to control the uncertainties created by these different types of relationships, social workers try to resist bureaucratization and rely on their professional authority. An organization of social workers can resist pressures toward increasing bureaucratization because its members can always openly use (at least theoretically) a professional or semiprofessional authority to oppose the hierarchical or managerial authority. Therefore, problems of organization and administration of the unit are discussed in terms of professional experience and conceptions of the profession. As soon as questions are raised about cooperation among social workers, superior-subordinate relationships, or training, members refer to different theories of the nature and function of social work. These divergences are sometimes radical enough to make coexistence difficult. It is this permanent debate that represents the specificity of the relational climate in a workgroup such as the social work unit.

In the case of this specific workgroup, social workers pay the same price for trying to control the uncertainties linked to the performance of their tasks: they try to resist the bureaucratization of their unit and engage in permanent—sometimes very confusing—redefinitions and debates (although not often public ones) about the nature of their work and the best way to perform it. Social workers do not have any

interest in clearly defining their professional practices, in a stable and transparent way (assuming that this is possible and that rationalization does have a meaning here). This transparency would make them too dependent upon the administrative authority and reduce their autonomy.³ Because they encounter real problems with their residents and because they try to assert a professional status, social workers have to fuel a debate about their conception of their work—but without producing principles that could be used to constrain them individually. In their organization, social workers promise more transparency; they more or less pretend that they value it, and let others believe that it is possible. The use of this device accounts, it seems to me, for much of the relational climate observed in this social work unit. Social workers often handle the uncertainties they face by using smoke screens such as asserting a desire for transparency vis-à-vis the hierarchy. This allows debates to perpetuate themselves indefinitely.

The distribution of status and identities that organizes the use of institutional authority arguments obviously differs in this collegial group. The tax office has the characteristics of the bureaucratic workgroup, whereas the social workers' unit has many characteristics of the collegial or bureauprofessional workgroup: both managers as well as the seven social workers (that is, nine members out of thirteen) are allowed to use an institutional authority argument, either hierarchical or (semi-)professional. This position gives them a strategic relationship toward authority. Only a minority of four persons are more or less constrained to develop a tactical relationship toward authority when dealing with other members.⁴

The work relationships at the institution observed follow these patterns. I found there the same tension between organization and profession. The description of the workgroup, of members' tasks, and patterns of relationships is important in understanding the content of their versions of problems and their choice of knowledge claims. As in the preceding chapter, to see how the structure of the group influences this process, members' conceptions of what it means to know well are analyzed in the next pages (through their claims about a specific problem), as well as the relationship between the structure of the group and the types of claims emerging from this analysis. The analyzer used here to focus on members' claims is the reorganization of the team by the newly appointed director. To understand some of the members' versions presented below, the reader needs a minimal description of the "trouble." Again, members' descriptions of how and where they discuss the trouble with others or assert their respective views provide the clues identifying their claims.

VERSIONS OF THE TROUBLE AND CLAIMS

In this case conflict was created by the director's decision to reorganize the team: first, to give more autonomy to each house (this move was called "decentralization"), and second, simultaneously to "tighten things up" and create a real hierarchy between senior and junior social workers, thus setting up stronger controls. At the time of the fieldwork, the division of work within the group, i.e., the allocation of functions and tasks to all members, was under revision by the institution's parent nonprofit organization, at the director's request. The director justified these changes by saying that the functioning of the group was too loose and informal. This informality was considered to be a source of inefficiency and a factor increasing the risks of press scandals involving the residents. At the time, the political climate and the public attitude toward asylum-seekers was hostile, and the nonprofit organization wanted its units to keep a low profile.

This change was meant to solve problems of functioning identified as costly by the director: absence of homogeneity in professional activities, inertia in the collective decision-making process, fuzziness concerning interunit responsibilities, repeated identification of problems without resolution. Strengthening the hierarchy between senior and junior social workers in each house, and the simultaneous decentralization and autonomization of these units vis-à-vis management were supposed to make supervision easier for the director, particularly by decreasing the number of people reporting to the center. These changes included a new system of communication: a weekly meeting during which the director and the senior social workers would discuss current affairs, and in which the other members of the group (including junior social workers) did not participate. The director was planning to differentiate some responsibilities, mainly interunit ones, in a way easier for management to control. Making positions inside each unit more hierarchical involved a redefinition of the division of labor and tasks, enabling the senior social workers to define the policy of their respective units and control their own budgets. As a consequence, a new and strong tension between junior and senior social workers overlapped with the tension between administration and profession.

As in the preceding workgroup, members have different conceptions about what the problem "really is." Several versions emerge from the interviews. Some attribute it to the current structure of the group, others to bad leadership, still others to the lack of a work ethic

and discipline. Following are the terms in which the main versions are expressed and the types of claims that carry them.

Blaming the Current Structure of the Group

Here is the director's version, describing the changes that he is implementing.⁵ It focuses on issues of efficiency and accountability within the group. It is typically carried by *polemical* claims; it is a procedural definition of the situation, and it is public.

- (1) *Director:* At this point, I have to make decisions that should in fact be made at the house level; people's positions are vague, there's a mobility in the hierarchy as well as in the roles, it's totally vague. Until now, the senior and junior social workers shared the work in their house, however they wanted to. What's needed is a clarification of contracts to clarify everything else. When everything is informal, there's a dispersal of power. When there's a dispersal of power, there's an incredible loss of energy at the production level, in people's work. A system for delegating responsibilities would reinforce checks and balances, set up authorities so that things get done quietly, so we don't have people not knowing what they're doing because everybody does everything and nothing. I see houses where everyone does everything and gets involved in everything. The first day I arrived, I couldn't tell who was the cleaning lady and who was in charge of the house. The result is inertia due to decisions that never get made or kept; nobody knows who decides and who makes people stick to the decisions. Now, every decision made in the meetings gets sabotaged on the job. Problems come up over and over again in discussions, but they don't get solved. Everyone has good intentions; they say they want things to work, that they want to stand by decisions, but it doesn't happen. I don't want any more of these endless meetings where no one holds to the decisions afterwards. What I want is one person who guarantees me the smooth functioning of the house, to know who's to be held accountable. That's why we need to decentralize and set up a new structure with four autonomous houses, with job descriptions that are more clear about the division of labor, and that reinforce the role of the senior social worker; we need clearer responsibilities.

Interviewer: These are things you've already mentioned to your team?

Director: As soon as I knew enough to have my own opinion about the way this place operates. What is essential for cooperation is communication, an exchange of information. No gray areas, or when there is one, try to clear it up as quickly as possible. I want to establish clear contracts, a clear game plan.

The director's relationship toward authority is by definition strategic and his claim is polemical. This combination seems to make sense for the following reasons: Substantive explanations for the trouble may not be perceived as an efficient move given the tension between profession and administration. Initiated and polemical types of claims are strong attempts to control who may become a challenger and who may not. They try to impose restrictions on who is entitled to contribute to the definition of the trouble: only a few interlocutors in the first case, everyone in the second (provided that they agree with his version). These particular claims are seen as carrying the most weight in this relational context, i.e., as a likely way to produce acquiescence or alignments where strategic relationships toward authority are dominant. The director assumes that the constituency from which his claims draw their authority is the unit as a whole. Polemical claims are dismissive of potential counterclaims; they represent an authoritarian way of containing challenges to one's version of the trouble. They attempt to absorb other members of the group within the coalition of supporters.

An interesting characteristic of the claim staged here is that it sometimes hints at substantive issues, but these issues are not used in a way that leaves room for counterclaims, and the claim remains polemical. As in the preceding group, the director tries to use his institutional authority to stop the process of claims and counterclaims. He uses authority as an instrument for transforming substantive claims into procedural ones. As mentioned before, polemical arguments are paradoxical: they try to build a "coalition of the whole" to create a universal entity supporting one's claims, while at the same time assuming that these claims are not based on such a coalition. They are at the same time absorptive toward members who concur with this definition of the trouble and insulating for those who do not.

The senior social workers supported this plan for their own reasons. It gave them more independence from the administrator, and more authority over the junior social workers. Here are the terms in which they describe the trouble and justify the changes. These versions focus on the issue of centralization and are carried by an *initiated* type of claim:

(2) *Senior social worker:* The house doesn't function well anymore. We need renewal and for this we have to get some independence. What I want is to have autonomy as far as the budget is concerned, to have our own program. For example, right now the administrator is the one who decides whether or not to countersign the checks distributed to each resident, within a margin fixed by the state. The power of discretion left by this margin should belong to the senior social worker, not to the administrator, because that can help him to manage the house dynamics. If I give the administrator a check, she shouldn't give me an opinion under normal circumstances. She should fill it out and sign it, because I am authorized to ask for checks. Her signature should be a bureaucratic formality, not an obstruction. That's where we have to decentralize, to give more decision-making power to the senior social workers, more independence vis-à-vis the administration.

Interviewer: Have you already said what you think at the meetings?

Senior social worker: Not yet. For the moment, you have to work that out with the director.

Here is another example of the same version, which focuses on the division of work and is also carried by an *initiated* claim:

(3) *Senior social worker:* Now it's an incredible mix-up, we're working badly. Each person does a little of this, a little of that, and in the end there are lots of things that slip by. You share the tasks with your junior social worker and afterwards you see whether these things get done or not, but verification isn't systematic. We need a new way of working. We need a clearer definition of duties. Each one should know what he has to do; and if something doesn't get done, you know right away who didn't do it. We simply need to rationalize the work. The house can function better than it does now. I think of the residents here: if the residents' standard of living improves, it means that things have become more efficient. If you could see how many times the residents get the runaround because of stupid mistakes, just because of our dysfunctioning . . .

Interviewer: Did you say what you think about this at the meetings?

Senior social worker: Yes . . . I mean, you don't go into detail because if people dealt with the problems of my house openly, it would be a free-for-all and every idiot would jump in and give an opinion.

The procedural nature of the claims staged by the senior social workers can be understood as with these of the director: they try to avoid making themselves challengeable and rely on their strategic relationship toward authority to legitimate their attempt to "privatize" the debate (using initiated as opposed to polemical claims). The coalitions represented here as these members' constituencies are not absorptive. Given the tension between junior and senior social workers, initiated claims seem to keep confrontations between professionals under control. The senior social workers use hierarchical arguments more than professional ones, because they do not want to discuss professional practices with their own "subordinates." But initiated claims also help in isolating the administrator. Thus, it makes sense to say that senior social workers use their strategic relationship toward authority to insulate the other members of the group (except the director), and define their decisions and policies in a somewhat exclusive way.

Blaming Bad Leadership

For the junior social workers, the changes involve a loss of status and the risk of being left with all the chores.⁶ They refer to the fact that, as professionals, they need to be able to work according to their own standards, especially since they have to try to use as much authority as they can in their relationship with the residents. If this authority were to be taken away from them, and a bureaucratic supervision installed, they would lose not only control, but interest in their work. The junior members think they would lose their influence on the allocation of resources, their capacity to resist hierarchical authority, and some of the privileges associated with their position of semiprofessional employees, as opposed to the unskilled members of the team.

Their versions are also carried by claims that oscillate between the *polemical* and *initiated* types:

- (4) *Junior social worker*: It's true that things are hazy at the moment about the division of labor; it's not very efficient, there are flaws in all this, often we work twice as hard, sometimes the residents play us off against one another to get their way. It's partly due to the fact that the group is too large. That's why I think we should divide up the residents, not the work. If we don't, the residents will take advantage of us even more; I have my doubts about the effectiveness of this rehierarchy. I think the difference between a senior and a junior social worker is a bunch of hot air.

I spent two months alone in my house last year and I did everything. Our tasks and functions are the same. To my mind, if the director wants to be able to yell at someone who's in charge, he can yell at two of us just as well. I don't know if you noticed, but the director comes out with these theories from a book he has on his shelf, *How to Be a Leader*. If you ask me, what's causing the problems is the practice, the execution of the tasks. Thirteen people is not a big team. You can manage it without setting up a hierarchy. It's been working for two years, there haven't been any scandals vis-à-vis the outside community, there were never any big problems, everything goes along fine; so it works.

Interviewer: You said what you think about this in the meetings?

Junior social worker: At the meetings everyone should take a position, but there are some who don't express themselves. It's not that people are embarrassed, it's simply that they don't want to talk to us. They don't want to have to explain themselves to the junior social workers. If someone asks them directly, they give a nonsensical answer. If you get a nonsensical answer, you accept it and discuss it after the meeting. You have to realize that they always hammered it into our heads that the four houses were independent. I personally never believed that, but they want it to really be that way. It's supposedly time to really separate the houses: "It's your problem with Michael, it's your house, it's not our place to say anything."

Still another example of this type of claim:

- (5) *Junior social worker*: I was here long before the senior social worker; for more than six months I did everything by myself, I took on all the responsibilities. When he arrived, I taught him everything. OK, so there's a formal hierarchy, but no way am I not going to have anything to say anymore. When the senior social workers aren't there, they're replaced, someone else does their work. In my opinion, the reason why it isn't working is precisely because there are senior social workers who don't do their jobs. We've done too much to be put down like this. We've invested ourselves too much not to be recognized and to have the senior social workers take away all the advantages. They want to take a whole interesting part of social work away from us, the creative, stimulating part, our personal investment in the politics of the house, because the senior social workers haven't worked hard enough. We pay for the senior social workers who haven't

worked, and we find ourselves waiting for them to tell us what to do. The director's analysis of the dysfunctioning is the real glitch. Is it so important to establish a new structure? In the house we'll continue to do the same thing anyway, we fill in the gaps on each side, there's always cooperation. With this change in structure, it won't be more efficient; this structure doesn't respond to any real need in the team. Nothing is changing except on the structural level, but the content stays the same. If you look at the population we have here, we don't need this distinction between senior and junior social workers, it's not efficient. I work well with John, and no restructuring is going to make me work better with him. It depends on the personal relations between the senior and junior social workers. They're cutting the ground out from under our feet.

Interviewer: Have you said what you think about this?

Junior social worker: I was part of a group that spontaneously rose up against this. But it's hard to talk in the meetings without playing their game. I'm not someone who says things directly. I try to use diplomacy. I think that in the meetings, if you criticize your senior social worker, you call other people in as witnesses and that changes everything, it's not the same any more. The senior social workers are very defensive; they react very, very badly; they immediately take it to be something that's against them. This oversensitivity is inappropriate in the workplace. I can't say at the meeting, "I don't want my senior social worker to tell me 'do this' or 'do that' because I don't like the way he works." I couldn't do that, it's not my role. Because everything is in the way you do it. I say this because I don't like to keep things to myself, but I'm not going to attack someone personally in the meetings.

Junior social workers see themselves as facing two potential opponents. Assertions such as statement 5 show that the reason for the junior social workers not to speak up in the meetings and for making initiated claims is that they do not want to jeopardize good working relationships within their respective houses. This tendency not to speak up in the meetings is not surprising—even coming from members who do have access to a professional authority argument—given the dependence of junior social workers upon seniors' broader outside networks. This combination of a strategic relationship toward authority and type of claim makes sense, however, for the reasons given by the junior social workers themselves: it is their way of answering the polemic claims used by the director or the senior social

workers (dismissive claims, which do not expose themselves to any challenge from the other members of the group). The junior social workers react with the initiated claims, thus creating coalitions with which the director will presumably have to deal at some stage or other. In addition, their initiated claims may signal a defensive position designed to avoid providing the administrative side with too many arguments in its quest for more efficiency and control of the way the institution operates. Again, at this stage insulation is used to avoid confrontation.

The administrator's version of the trouble is that there is a lack of direction, goals are unclear, too much discretion is given to the social workers, and no coherent philosophy of how to manage the different houses has yet emerged. The new policy and organization should be evaluated against clear goals. Without such a policy, decentralization would bring unfairness, and hierarchization is only an empty move. Here again, as with the social workers, this version is carried by claims that oscillate between the *polemical* and *initiated* types:

- (6) *Administrator:* The director wants to set up a new structure without analyzing the content of the tasks. I think it's a mistake to proceed this way. A change of structure for its own sake is generally useless. One can say, for example, that there is cooperation between two people who work in the same house, you can question whether there should be a senior and a junior social worker, and say that there are two colleagues. The entire history of the house proves this. The problem is that the professional capacities of some people have been exhausted to compensate for the professional incapacities of others, and now they want to ignore this, act as if nothing happened. Some of us feel taken advantage of, used up, because these capacities are suddenly less recognized, forgotten. They use people when they need them, and then they throw them away. . . . Here, everything got started without a well-defined policy: I think people started their jobs, did what there was to do, each one thinking he was doing the right thing, but without adhering to an overall policy concerning professional practices here. There are great differences between practices. I am responsible for the money. I know about everything that costs money. People submit plans to me, for which I release funds. But sometimes I don't even know what criteria to use to evaluate projects. There is no global house policy. Everyone has ideas about the professional practices we should have here, and these ideas aren't the same. In my opinion, it's not important that the four houses have the same policy. What's important is that each one of them is consistent.

This is not the case. What bothers me is that the policy of each house depends on the personalities of the social workers. They decide everything on the job. They don't take account of past experiences, they don't care whether it's fair or not.

Interviewer: Did you say anything about this?

Administrator: There's been a lot of explaining at the meetings. But there are criticisms that would make me say, "Yeah, right, but for Christ's sake you can't even do your job properly." When you get to the bottom of a problem, it's hard not to get personal. I did say this won't amount to anything useful unless the professional practices here in this house get defined. But I can't say in the meetings, "This reorganization is just a way for the director to flex his muscles." But if things keep going like this, it's going to come out.

The administrator's relationship toward authority is also strategic and her claims are procedural. The whole version is not expressed in public because she partially disagrees with the director, her direct superior in the management of the institution. She does not want, for instance, to decentralize as much as he wants to, to let the different houses have and manage their own budgets and do their own accounting. These issues are formally within her jurisdiction and can be carried by public claims. Given the tensions between profession and administration, and because she is not a social worker, substantive claims would not carry much weight. On the other hand initiated claims make sense for the same reasons as for the junior social workers, as a defensive and fence-sitting reaction to polemical claims made by the director.

The debate between the administrator and the social workers can be summarized as follows. Polemical claims are less intimidating in this context than in the bureaucratic workgroup: statements 4 and 6 show that the junior social workers and the administrator are in a position to challenge their respective "superiors" to be more substantive (realistic or expert) during the meetings, but do not succeed. Statement 6 shows that the administrator wants the reorganization to provide a definition of the specific type of social work being done in each house.⁷ The senior social workers answer that it is none of her business to know what's going on in their respective houses, that they do not need more control and criticism. Each house is supposed to be different, to have its own problems, and therefore it is not possible to generalize about professional practices from the "center." The senior workers invoke the autonomy of their respective houses; they refuse to be accountable for their activities to the rest of the

group, mainly because they want to prevent the administrator from imposing bureaucratic norms and interfering with professional practices.

Blaming the Lack of Discipline

The only substantive versions are those presented by the members of the maintenance team. They have still another view of the functioning of the organization, and in general they agree with the move toward reorganization. Here is such a version carried by an expert claim:

(7) *Maintenance person:* The problem is that some people [the social workers] are not used to discipline. When I get an order from the director, I carry it out, I don't wait until tomorrow. Here they wait two weeks, they even forget. There's someone in the house who was supposed to take care of the curtains eight months ago and I haven't yet heard a thing from her. I'm not criticizing individual people, I'm criticizing the group, the organization. The other day some kids broke some lamps. The senior social worker never once told me they were broken; the electric wires were hanging out in the open. So I took the fuses out of all the lamps. The senior social worker didn't even know about the damage. It was the night watchman who told me about it. The moral of this story is that the senior social worker should have intervened and told people to tell me about the damage. So now I only repair damage they tell me about in writing. If they don't tell me, I don't repair it. Otherwise the management doesn't know when there's damage. The senior social workers aren't used to this kind of discipline. And they aren't too anxious to put papers in my box because that proves that they have a lot of damage. And you know, when there is damage, it's not an accident, it's dissatisfaction, twisted handles everywhere, broken windows. Here, they don't help each other out, there's no cooperation, people are too lazy.

Interviewer: Have you expressed your opinion on this subject? In the meetings, for example?

Maintenance person: I criticize people in front of them because that's how I am, I'm very direct. Then, if there's a problem, I tell the administrator. But I don't go to the meetings. I always find an excuse not to go there.

The maintenance workers' relationship toward authority is a tactical one. Their versions of the trouble discuss more substantive issues

and are mostly of the expert type. In terms of coalition building, expert claims like statement 7 represent a less insulating strategy, even though it is without much absorptive efficiency. Maintenance workers do not operate as autonomously as social workers, and thus do not have a vested interest in the changes announced by the director. The politics of their claims are not simple, however. The fact that their claims tend to be more substantive means that they are more challengeable, but also that to challenge them on their own terms could cut both ways: challengers would be drawn precisely into the substantive types of claims that they have been trying to avoid so as to control the direction taken by the debate. Still, even though expert claims do not attempt to exercise as much control over the right of others to participate as polemical or initiated ones do, the only constituency that can back or challenge expert claims is an alliance of other experts. Thus the substantive character of such claims does not seem too threatening here to the professional side of the team (even though they can be used as a threat, the threat of realistic claims, as suggested by statement 7). But again, since realistic claims need the support of all the members to carry some weight, there is either a certain naivete in their use, since general consensus is rarely compatible with strategic and conflictual work relationships; or a false naivete, since they can be used by powerless members in (often inefficient) attempts to frame controversial issues on their own terms.

In summary, opinions among the members of the team vary about the need for such a reorganization. Some, including the director and the senior social workers, attribute this need to the inefficiency of the organization. Others, including the administrator and the junior social workers, want more explanation about the changes that this reorganization would introduce, and question the real motives behind the whole operation. Given the relational context in which they operate, most members would base their decisions on procedural (polemical and initiated) claims, thus preventing the other side from challenging their respective definitions of the situation. As a result, the director and the senior social workers push for changes but do not want to discuss their implications with the other side (who are put in a subordinate position after having been considered equals for a long time); the administrator and the junior social workers try to challenge the first coalition to provide a substantive and professionally sound rationale for such changes. Within the second coalition, the administrator and the junior workers ask for the same explanations, but they have different agendas: the former wants more control over heterogeneous practices across the institution, whereas the latter want to reassert their professional status. Insulation strategies predominate in the coalition building activity that accompanies these claims.

HOMOGENIZATION OF CLAIMS AND EPISTEMIC ENTRENCHMENT

As far as they can be reconstituted based on this sketch, the dynamics of the debate point to mechanisms of social control that are less confrontational than in the bureaucratic group, despite the fact that all parties say that differences should be settled openly in the meetings. Most members complain that meetings do not produce a real discussion of the problem and that gossip replaces open and direct discussions.⁸ Members do not keep things to themselves, but neither do they get them out in the open. The coalitions on which they rely to participate in the process of defining the situation seem set once and for all; internal boundaries are stable and impermeable. Within such coalitions they can more or less secretly complain, criticize, check reality, and prepare their next moves. In this adversarial situation, policy is designed and decisions are made without accountability to the other side (at least for one's definition of the situation).⁹ Thus, the type of knowledge claims used reflects the fact that, in this type of structure, different types of institutional authority arguments may neutralize each other.

As in the bureaucratic workgroup, disagreements may become emotional at the meetings, but here the management does not succeed in acting as a third and disinterested party¹⁰. An interesting phenomenon occurs in this group, which is almost a functional equivalent of the "good morale" rule in the bureaucratic workgroup. Especially when the trouble is personalized and linked to attitudes and personality problems, the issue is considered to be too problematic in a context of work relationships, and is left unaddressed. Members condemn each other for their respective definitions of the situation, and pretend to strive for reconciliation when meeting publicly once a week.

The use of the word *pretend* is not judgmental here. As mentioned in statement 4, bluff—or "nonsense answers"—in public meetings becomes a way of avoiding confrontation. The nature of the debate surrounding the restructuring also indicates this: it was set at the beginning at an organizational level (rationalize, clarify, coordinate, reduce costs), but was rapidly translated into "professional" terms, linking the status of the junior social workers to basic micropolitical issues. This "professionalization" of the problem is based on arguments such as: residents would try to play the social workers against one another; it would be difficult to preserve a sense of community in an institution where autonomous units would be managed according to their senior social worker's personal philosophy; and inequalities,

double standards, and equity problems in the treatment of residents (particularly allocation of financial resources).

Thus, the result of the use of procedural knowledge claims is an entrenchment on both sides. One interesting consequence of the development of these alignments and simulations is that solutions are often considered to be indefinitely renegotiable. Procedural claims do not create an open debate about the trouble. They take away from members of other coalitions the right to challenge one's claims. This attitude is perceived as efficient for the protection of one's own version. They understand compromise as surrender of one's authority to know and one's right to shape the troubleshooting policy. These are defensive strategies that create a risk of "epistemic entrenchment." This risk is perceived and denounced by the members themselves.

Given members' strategic relationship toward authority, the process of defining the situation cannot be stopped by any side, even simply procedurally (as is the case in the previous workgroup). Coalitions here are much more rigidly defined than in the bureaucratic example; the number of coalitions in which members can belong, which they can use as constituencies for their claims, is more limited. As a consequence the risk—for the group as a whole—of not developing the efficient mechanisms of co-orientation needed for collective action seems greater here.

In sum, this case also illustrates the indirect influence of the structure of this workgroup on the process of defining the situation. In this group, most members' relationship toward authority is strategic. They base what they consider to be their informed decisions on a narrower range of claims than in the bureaucratic group. Most versions of the trouble, regardless of the vested interest that they promote, are carried by polemical or initiated knowledge claims. The homogenization of claims used to carry the different versions of the trouble can be interpreted as an indication that members tend to create the same type of coalitions as a basis of support for their versions. In this context, members' boundary work creates stable epistemic alignments or coalitions deriving their strength from their internal cohesion. Thus, the authority relationships that the structure creates tend to fragment the group into two epistemic factions.

To summarize, Chapters 4 and 5 present sketches of workgroups dealing, at one moment of their history, with definitions of troubles. These sketches illustrate the general hypotheses provided at the end of Chapter 3 on the relationship between the structure of the workgroup and the knowing process. They also suggest additional insight into structural constraints on knowledge claims. Such con-

straints are detected in members' way of coping with their relationship toward authority. The latter is used to protect one's authority to know and organize interactions in a way that does not make one's claims too challengeable by potential opponents. The description of the politics behind members' claims provides an understanding of the linkage among their relationship toward authority, their choice of claims, and some of the consequences of such choices at the aggregate level.

The comparison between the two groups suggests that, on the one hand, when decisions considered to be informed are based on very diversified types of knowledge claims, coalition building does not stabilize itself, and mutual epistemic control among members tends to be weak. Decisions themselves are more likely to be unpredictable, since different claims are usually based on different types of constituencies, which are likely to promote different agendas. This does not mean that there is, as a result, a shortage of authoritarian decision-making by the hierarchy. However, the style of such interventions can fail to create a strong co-orientation among members. For instance, one consequence or risk of the use of institutional authority in a bureaucratic group is that it can block the process of defining the situation without necessarily mobilizing and creating consensus among members about what counts as an informed decision. In this case coalitions are unstable, and members may try to challenge many definitions of the situation (which grow within these coalitions) at the same time. In a group where members make claims that tend to be challengeable by most others, consensus may be difficult to reach, and the definition of the situation by the leader may be used procedurally, more as a fallback or a default, rather than be acknowledged as a "good" solution. I have suggested that the reason for this type of diversification may be that members with a tactical relationship toward authority try to create an informal context where members with institutional authority do not use it, or only procedurally.

On the other hand, when decisions considered to be informed are based on very limited and procedural types of knowledge claims, coalition building tends to create stable alignments, and mutual epistemic control among members tends to be strong. Decisions are more likely to be predictable since the same claims tend to be supported by the same coalitions, and with stable agendas. One possible consequence of this use of institutional authority in a collegial workgroup may be that the process of defining the situation cannot be formally stopped by any leader, and therefore co-orientation is achieved only in factions, in a way that enhances the polarization of the group. In a group where members make claims that are not liable

to challenge by most other members, consensus about what counts as an informed decision is only reached locally. Coalitions are much more stable than in the previous type of group. This tends to limit the number of constituencies on which members try to rely, and in which it is appropriate for them to discuss and contribute to a definition of the situation.

One tentative conclusion may be that a collegial group as a whole does not necessarily have more efficient mechanisms of co-orientation needed for collective action than a bureaucratic group does. In addition, although it seems that workgroups only have a choice between procedural and superficial co-orientation or absence of co-orientation when collectively defining a problem, this impression is probably misleading. I have only focused on the process of defining the situation at one time, without studying it as an ongoing process. Such a dynamic view could provide a more comprehensive understanding of co-orientation processes, and therefore deserves more attention and research.

NOTES

1. The social workers' written files following or preceding all residents in their movements contain remarkably little information interesting to their colleagues; the social workers provide reasons for this that can be interpreted as a protection of their professional status: no time to write things down, no standardization of the information to be written. Thus they do not make it easy for external authorities who might wish to interfere with the life of the institution by having a look at these files. But these means also "appropriate" the residents, personalizing the relationships to avoid organizational controls, so that the residents "belong" individually to the social worker and not to the institution itself. The uninformative character of these files, to other colleagues as well as to the administrator, may be interpreted as a move in the social workers' struggle for autonomy, and as a sign of a strategic relationship toward institutional authority.

2. On the specific nature of power in collegial organizations, see Waters (1989).

3. See Etzioni (1969) and Rothman (1979), who make the same observations for other types of semiprofessionals, like teachers.

4. The classification of the social service unit in the bureau-professional type may seem questionable. This raises the question of the professional or semiprofessional status of social workers (Etzioni 1969; Ion and Tricart 1985; Smith 1970; Troutot 1982). For the purpose of this exploratory study, I stress the fact that these social workers have many of the characteristics of the professional employee described by Freidson (1986) and presented in Chap-

ter 3. All the members on the administrative side—apart from the administrator herself—lack formal credentials or qualifications.

5. As in the previous workgroup, each member was asked to describe the trouble and to report when and how he or she discussed it with other members.

6. The following assertions describe what is at stake with the director's move, according to the junior social workers:

Junior social worker: With the new system, we will not even participate in the meetings with the management. The senior social worker will have the power to organize the unit and make all the important decisions. We junior social workers won't have any say, no right to speak up. We're going to become gofers. I find this hierarchy very rigid and I don't know how it's going to end up. Obviously we'll be very dependent on the senior social workers for everything. Now they will be the ones who think and decide; they've taken away the challenging and creative part of our jobs. They talk about how their sphere of activity would enlarge if the junior social workers didn't participate in the meetings, even joking remarks like "You'll have more time for housework." In the beginning they'll all try to get us to do the cleaning. Then everything will depend on the rapport inside the house; if you don't have a good relationship with the senior social worker, you're screwed. With this sort of division of labor, I don't feel like I'm recognized as a professional. They could take unqualified people to do the work of a junior social worker. I want power sharing.

Junior social worker: There are already indications as to how things will be after the changes, if they take place. For example, my senior social worker went away on vacation; she told me, "We absolutely have to find somewhere for so and so to go, he works, he's single, he can fend for himself, we need his spot." So I write him a letter and ask him to find something elsewhere. What I don't like is that he asked for a meeting with the director, a meeting I wasn't asked to attend. The director called me up and asked me for some information about this request for dismissal, but that's it. I should have been in his office to explain things, to confront the guy. Finally, they made an agreement, he managed to win them over, he stays until the end of December, and they notify me long afterwards. And this guy comes back and gives me an attitude whenever he goes by me. Why they don't ask my opinion, I don't know.

7. *Administrator:* I raised the question of professional practices at the meeting, but they wouldn't take it up: "What's next, what's next, let's get on with it." Social workers don't say much about how they work, about what they actually do, and a lot about their relations with each other. For example, Jeff didn't say anything, not a word, nothing, nothing, nothing. He doesn't talk when things are tense. He didn't open his mouth during the whole meeting.

8. For instance:

Senior social worker: The problem is that we criticize each other all the time. We criticize, but not directly, that's what bothers me. When people are direct, it's OK, it helps consolidate the team. But I hear a lot of gossip. People don't say things openly: someone says something to someone who repeats it to someone else. I just heard that the junior social workers want to organize their own meeting. This is a childish reaction. If they think it is necessary, why don't they talk about it at the meeting? Why do things separately and not say anything about it?

9. A junior social workers explains why the meetings are frustrating: "They don't want to hear criticism about the quality of their work, they just don't want to go into this. For instance Peter does not take criticism well. In fact he takes it so badly that turns it into an attack on everything he does. So if they perceive any criticism coming, they become defensive, they close up, and it's too difficult."

10. About this point, see Tucker (1991).

Conclusion

Issues of strategic knowledge and indirect control are important to a sociological theory of action. This study examines a related question, What do individual and social actors consider to be an informed decision? from a microsociological and organizational perspective. To do so it offers both a theory of "information elaboration" and knowledge claims, and hypotheses about the constraints imposed by the structure of a workgroup on members' knowing processes or choices of claims.

A main purpose of the study is to use insights offered by contemporary sociology of knowledge to identify the types of knowledge claims generated by the different processes of interactive elaboration of information in workgroups. This approach emphasizes that the elaboration of information is socially organized, particularly through the manner in which members perceive social control and involve themselves in the internal politics of their social setting, i.e., the consistent adoption of a particular relationship toward authority.

The contribution of this essay to the study of the knowing process is mainly theoretical. The method is constructivist: to reconstitute the elaboration of information, it uses the theory of the definition of the situation to break appropriateness judgments down into components that are observed separately. Data were collected to develop and illustrate this theory, but no attempt was made during the collection to focus on conflictual discussions, and to gain a sequential or dynamic perspective on this process. More research is now under way on the dynamics of the interactive elaboration of information, on the rhetoric of knowledge claims and counterclaims among actors involved in the decision process, and on hypotheses about the linkage among authority relationships, boundary work, and knowledge claims. Obviously research is needed in more groups, on their reactions to different analyzers, and on their different decision-making processes, so as to evaluate

some of the suggestions made here about the co-orientation of their members, and their capacity to act as collective actors. More research is also needed on the structure of such groups: an inductive conception of the structure of organized settings (such as that provided by network analysis) could also account for the linkage between the structure of particular social settings and the strategies of indirect control exercised by and on their respective members.

This theoretical approach may have ramifications in several fields of study. In conclusion, I would like to highlight one such area. The choice of a claim may partially be understood as the result of a conflict between actors competing for the primacy of their respective policy (or the promotion of their interests). Thus, a more sophisticated rhetorical analysis could use the typology of claims for an analysis of these discussions or negotiations, understood as attempts to influence and control. This should help to describe more precisely how the choice of a claim is based upon assumptions about the policies or decisions that others are supporting, upon an evaluation of members' authority to know and trustworthiness within the group, and upon other factors identified by a theory of indirect social control. Such an approach can contribute to the understanding of internal politics and processes of indirect control in organizations. This is particularly interesting in a period when much thought is being given to the limits of organizational forms such as the Weberian bureaucracy, and much attention focused, for instance, on the issues of "flat hierarchies," organizational democracy, autonomous workgroups, and collegiality.

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