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QWL and the '80s¹

In thinking out what I might say at our last lunch--if not our last supper--I reluctantly concluded that I had better write it out as, in my case, the constraint of time is compounded by a tendency to run out of control very soon after I have opened my mouth. Therefore, I will read this address, accepting that it is better to be dull but brief than to aspire to be more lively but take longer. I also felt I would be incomprehensible without visual support. The choice lay between transparencies and handouts. I have chosen handouts, as transparencies, even with generous projection, would not easily be seen except by those favorably placed in a room of this size.² I hope you will allow, therefore, that my choice of technology has taken the "socio-" into account, and that we may begin in a state of joint optimization.

Whatever the tasks of QWL in the '80s, they will take place in an environment of increasing turbulence, a term which I will explain in a few moments. The degree of societal change at present taking place is very great, at least as great as that accompanying the first industrial revolution. We are now well into the second industrial revolution based on information, rather than simply energy, technologies (Ackoff, 1974). The second industrial revolution is being led by the microprocessor, and still newer technologies will doubtless follow,

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²Two very large connecting ballrooms were filled for this address.

with far-reaching effects on social relations and institutions throughout our societies. We shall, for example, have to give up the idea of full employment, at least as traditionally understood. The recent youth riots in Britain by those of all colors exemplify our unpreparedness to deal with the problems of a partially employed society.

Quality of working life as an international enterprise arose in the early '70s when the assumption of full employment was still valid. We must continue, indeed intensify and accelerate, all we have been doing since then and are preparing to do now; but during the '80s we must, in addition, discover the tasks of QWL in a partially employed society. I will return to this theme toward the end of my presentation.

The societal transition we are in is often referred to as a transition from an industrial to a post-industrial order, though the meaning of post-industrial is far from clear and there is more than one version of it. But, for organizational life, it entails in any case moving away from a departing (old) paradigm, with low QWL for the many, toward an emergent (new) paradigm, with *high* QWL for the many.

Looking at the increasing rate of change, even as far back as the '60s, Fred Emery and I (1965) distinguished four types of environment. The first two, where the change rate was slow, need not be discussed in the present context. The third environmental type, called the *disturbed-reactive*, reflects an accelerating change rate and became increasingly salient as the industrial revolution progressed (Table 1). It zenithed some time after World War II when the science-based industries rose to prominence in the wake of the knowledge and information explosions. The best chances of survival in this world went to large-scale organizations with the capacity to make formidable competitive change through amassed expertise. This enabled them

to maximize their independent power. The organizational form they perfected was the competitive and singular technocratic bureaucracy in which the ideas of Weber and Frederick Taylor were matched and operationalized to fit the requirements of the disturbed-reactive environment.

Table 1

<u>Change in Organizational Paradigm</u>	
<u>From</u>	<u>Toward</u>
A disturbed-reactive environment	A turbulent environment
The redundancy of parts	The redundancy of functions
The old organizational paradigm	The new organizational paradigm
Low QWL for the many	High QWL for the many

The very success of the technocratic bureaucracy has increased the salience of another type of environment, very different from the disturbed-reactive, which is mismatched with technocratic bureaucracy. The new environment is called the *turbulent field* in which large competing organizations, all acting independently in diverse directions, produce unanticipated and dissonant consequences. The result is a contextual commotion that makes it seem as if the "ground" were moving as well as the organizational actors. This is what is meant by turbulence. Subjectively, it is experienced as a "loss of the stable state" as Schon (1971) has put it.

As compared with the disturbed-reactive environment, the turbulent field is characterized by a higher level of interdependence and a higher level of complexity. Together, these generate a much higher level of uncertainty. The higher levels of interdependence,

complexity and uncertainty now to be found in the world environment pass the limits within which technocratic bureaucracies were designed to cope.

This means that we must search for an alternative based on a different design principle. Emery (1967) has shown that there are two basic organizational design principles, both of which display "redundancy" in the sense of reserve capacity, as any system must. In the first, the *redundancy* is of *parts* and is mechanistic. The parts are broken down so that the ultimate elements are as simple and inexpensive as possible, as with the unskilled worker in a narrow job who is cheap to replace and who takes little time to train. The technocratic bureaucracy is founded on this type of design.

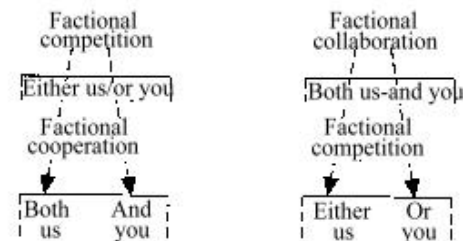
In the second design principle, the *redundancy* is of *functions* and is organic. Any component system has a repertoire that can be put to many uses, so that increased adaptive flexibility is acquired. While redundancy of functions holds at the biological level, as for example in the human body, it becomes far more critical at the organizational level where the components--individual humans and groups of humans--are themselves purposeful systems. Humans have the capacity for self-regulation so that control may become internal rather than external. Only organizations based on the redundancy of functions have the flexibility and innovative potential to give the possibility of adaptation to a rapid change rate, increasing complexity and environmental uncertainty.

This capability makes it imperative to move operationally from the old organizational paradigm toward the new, while the changes taking place in the attitudes and values of the younger generations now in, or soon to enter, the workplace make it additionally necessary that a high QWL be available for the many rather than the privileged few. This the

second design principle makes possible. These changes are mandatory to ensure our survival at any reasonable economic standard. For we already know that at any given technological level the maintenance of, let alone any increase in, productivity is dependent on scope for human development. This is the central message of QWL.

The shift from the old to the new organizational paradigm represents a discontinuity--a shift in the underlying pattern of social values and relations from competition to collaboration. The nature of this shift is shown in Figure 1, which is drawn from the work of Calvin Pava (1980). In the departing paradigm the overriding governing value is competition: factional warfare of varying degrees limits and constrains collaborative relations. Collaboration is required but is only a subordinate value. In the emerging paradigm collaboration becomes the governing value, which limits and constrains factional competition. Competition is still required, but it now expresses the subordinate value. This is what I mean by a discontinuity.

Figure 1
Reversal of competitive
and collaborative relations



In a turbulent environment, no organization is powerful enough, however large, to go it entirely alone or to force its will on others solely by coercion. The interdependencies in which it

is implicated are too many. It has to surrender some sovereignty, to share some power. It has to work out with others what I like to refer to as a *negotiated order*.

In the field of industrial relations this means that labor and management cannot continue in an exclusively adversarial posture in the win/lose mode. Several modes of labor/management collaboration, including QWL, have been accepted for some time in Scandinavia, and co-determination has become the built-in way in countries such as Germany; but during the '70s a collaborative mode began to appear alongside the adversarial mode in countries such as the United States and Canada, where adversarial postures have been a religion--not without some very good reasons. This new collaborative mode has been growing in relation to QWL.

A fundamental condition must be satisfied to permit the growth of collaboration in labor-management relations; the power of labor has to increase vis-a-vis that of management. The more the power balance of the two independent parties approaches equality, the greater the likelihood of their working collaboratively on the unsolved emergent issues on which the welfare of both depends and on which progress to a more democratic form of society also depends. This is a very different story from unions getting in bed with management; or putting QWL in to keep the unions out. That sort of behavior belongs to the old paradigm.

An example of an early step being taken toward the new paradigm is Doug Fraser, the UAW chief, going on the Board of Chrysler. Another is the alternative corporate plan put up by the Combined Shop Stewards Committee of Lucas Aerospace in Britain. Despite stormy initial rejection, this plan not only won some eventual acceptance but lit fires in other prominent British companies that were not doing well, such as Vickers and Parsons where many of the

stewards' proposals were accepted (Coates and Topham, 1980). If one can imagine what would happen much further down the road, it is not entirely fanciful to think that, even in North America, collaboration might become primary in labor/management relations, while competition would be reserved for more familiar contract issues. In a turbulent environment, the finding of common ground provides the basis of survival for both management and labor; thence of the wider society.

Survival in a turbulent environment depends on human development because it requires innovation. Innovation is necessary to meet the rapid change rate and the rising complexity and uncertainty. QWL operates in the direction of making workers more resourceful and more innovative, therefore more capable and more powerful. Management depends on the increased capability of the workforce for the success of the enterprise from which the workforce also benefits. This is to put in first place a win/win mode based on collaboration rather than a win/lose mode based on adversarial competition. This competition is still present but now recedes to second place. So long as a disturbed-reactive environment remained salient, the win/lose adversarial mode appropriately took first place. Given the salience of a turbulent field, it can no longer remain in first place, which belongs to collaboration.

Let me now look at the attributes of the old and new organizational paradigms as related to QWL. They are summarized in Table 2. As we have been discussing these issues throughout the Conference and as an account of them is given in my paper, "The Evolution of Socio-Technical Systems made available by the Ontario QWL Centre (Trist, 1981a), I need not dwell on them but will simply note that a change in these attributes from the old paradigm to the new brings into being conditions that allow commitment to grow and alienation to decrease.

Equally important is the replacement of a climate of low risk-taking with one of innovation. This depends on high trust and openness in relations between management and labor and within both. These qualities are mandatory if we are to transform traditional technocratic bureaucracies into continuous adaptive learning systems.

<i>Old Paradigm</i>	<i>New Paradigm</i>
The technological imperative	Joint optimization
Worker as an extension of the machine	Worker as complementary to the machine
Worker as an expendable spare part	Worker as a resource to be developed
Maximum task breakdown, simple narrow skills	Optimum task grouping, multiple broad skills
External controls (supervisors, specialist staffs, procedures)	Internal controls (self-regulating subsystems)
Tall organization chart, autocratic style	Flat Organization chart, Participative style
Competition, gamesmanship	Collaboration, collegiality
Organization's purposes only	Members' and society's purposes also
Alienation	Commitment
Low risk-taking	Innovation

This transformation is imperative for survival in a fast-changing environment. It involves nothing less than the working out of a new organizational philosophy which all the principal stakeholders, including the unions, can voluntarily accept. The transition from old to new will be a slow and difficult evolution as those holding on to the old are going to resist. They will counterattack. They will sabotage. Some of this destructiveness will be unconscious as well as

conscious, and therefore more difficult to get at.

A key implication of the list is that QWL projects have to be multidimensional. They cannot remain limited to one or two aspects only of organizational life.

Table 3

Four Options for QWL

Rejection
Laissez-faire
Selective development
Corporate-wide commitment

Table 3 shows four main strategic options regarding QWL (Trist, 1981b).

Outright *rejection* is becoming less common and is infeasible as a long-range position in a turbulent environment. *Laissez-faire* was the most common option during the '70s. Innovative managers were allowed to go ahead without organizational support. Many projects faded out as a result. *Selective development* exists in two versions. In the first, there is no overall corporate commitment to QWL, but top management discerns certain work establishments in its purview where it actively encourages QWL projects because it considers success likely and the need significant. This is a pragmatic approach of considerable relevance to large heterogeneous organizations in which different managers and unions espouse different values and have different outlooks. In the second, selective development goes along with the overall *corporate-wide commitment*. A QWL philosophy has been arrived at after much consideration, and public commitment to it has been obtained from the principal stakeholders including the union(s). Even

with this done, QWL projects cannot be started up simultaneously across the board so that the question of site selection again arises. Corporate commitment in conjunction with selective development gives the best chance for QWL projects to endure. This approach is being adopted by such corporations as General Motors and American Telephone and Telegraph. It will, I believe, spread during the '80s.

Let me now list some of the main tasks that QWL faces in the '80s:

- To make more completely the shift toward the new paradigm in established as well as new work organizations (where we have been rather successful during the '70s); to go system-wide in these organizations and to learn better how to do this; to find ways of accomplishing diffusion faster. We need more than ever to use the introduction of advanced technology as a lever.
- To encourage independent union initiatives. It is essential that many more unions than the few who have so far done so should take up QWL on their own terms for their own sake, as unions, and press management to move in the QWL direction--as the UAW did with General Motors in 1973. Otherwise there will be fewer unions around by the year 2000.
- There is a great need to extend community-based QWL as this makes for synergy and not only yields strong network effects but relates work to other areas of life. Similarly, there is need to extend QWL to the sectoral level, as Einar Thorsrud (1981) has done with the Norwegian Merchant Navy and as the steel industry is doing in the United States, so that wider problematiques are addressed that cannot be dealt with at the level of the single organization.

- We need to make greater use of the capabilities of women who are more experienced than men in the intuitive and holistic thinking required to deal with many emergent problems and in the development of nurturant climates necessary to advance our response-capability in turbulent environments.
- We need to learn to work far more with small businesses. This was a priority in projects such as Jamestown (Trist, Vol. III).
- We need to assist Third World countries in skipping from prebureaucratic to postbureaucratic organizational modes. There is no need for these countries to go through several decades of bureaucratic regimentation.
- There is great scope for developing the use of media such as videotape and film to accelerate diffusion and provide widespread learning opportunities. More communication can become two-way and very large numbers of people can be reached.

Quality of working life needs to become related to other forms of organizational democracy. These are shown in Table 4 as at present distributed among selected countries (Trist, 1981a). These forms all represent modes of participation; they all involve power sharing. Power sharing is at the heart of QWL.

Historically, collective bargaining was the first to emerge; employee ownership, often in the form of cooperatives or (more recently) of firms divested from conglomerates followed; then came representative democracy with workers on boards, though not sharing in the equity. The work-linked form has been the last to appear. It is concerned with work restructuring and participation at one's own level of decision making and is that with which

Table 4
Distribution of Forms of Organizational Democracy in Selected Countries,
1980a

<i>Country^b</i>	<i>Collective bargaining</i>	<i>Representative</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Work-linked</i>
Norway	4	3 1/2	1 1/2	2 1/2
Sweden	4	3 1/2	1 1/2	2 1/2
Holland	3	2	1	1 1/2
Australia	2 1/2	1	1	1 1/2
Germany	2 1/2	4	- 1	- 1
France	2 1/2	1	- 1	- 1
Britain	4	0	1	0+
U. S.	2	0+	1	1 1/2
Canada	2 1/2	0+	1 1/2	- 1
Yugoslavia	0	4	4	0+

a Ratings, on a scale 0-4, are personal estimates of the author (Trist, 1981 a).

b Norway and Sweden exemplify a congruent Scandinavian pattern which Holland and Australia approximate. The larger European countries show no consistency. The U.S. and Canada express a North American form. Yugoslavia is very different with no independent unions.

QWL has been most closely associated as it directly affects the quality of work experience. The four forms have evolved independently. Some of them are regarded as contradictory in certain countries.

In what may be called the Scandinavian pattern, which Holland and Australia

approximate, there is a trend to *confluence*. I would expect the work-linked form, as the only form directly affecting the texture of immediate work experience, to spread in combination with other forms. Combinations of three, if not four (foursomes are beginning to occur in smaller firms), are likely to become more common in more countries during the '80s. Workers will tend to demand a greater share in the strategic decisions of their organizations as they become more self-managing. The means will vary; there is room for pluralism. In the uncertainty of a turbulent environment, people become increasingly uneasy when they are without any degree of control over large decisions that affect their main life chances. The spread of unemployment and the increasing number of mergers and of plant locations overseas will increase these feelings. More workers may, therefore, be expected to seek representation on boards and participation in the equity of their firms, while advancing union strength and restructuring their jobs. Nevertheless, many will remain content with the last two and others will not press even for these.

All the tasks I have mentioned so far are underway to some extent and will proceed during the '80s in the teeth of opposition from the old paradigm which still has hold on most of the world. But there is a new task: to establish a dissociation between the concept of employment and the concept of work – a consequence of the microprocessor and related technological revolutions. This makes it incumbent upon us to bring into being *a partially employed yet fully engaged society*. As yet, we do not know how to do this. It is a task which requires fresh appreciations. We must legitimate and respect the work that people do when they are not in places of paid employment. We must eliminate their shame and their guilt over not being in such a place. We must assure them a standard of living sufficient for them to take their full place as members of society. We shall have to find some new words, new generative

metaphors as Don Schon (1981) calls them, to express the reframing required.

Simplifications and cost reduction are possible in some sections of the engineering industry where layoffs have been estimated at over 50 percent. Word processing is likely to occasion similar personnel shrinkages in many white collar occupations, which will not be able to absorb those made redundant from manufacturing as they did during the first round of automation. Jenkins and Sherman (1979) forecast an overall reduction of 23.2 percent in the British labor force by the year 2000 and identify high risk jobs and sectors. They titled their book *The Collapse of work*. The senior author is a major trade union leader. His would appear to be the most comprehensive statement on the issue from a union standpoint. If the present economic slowdown continues, the level of employment forecast will be reached by the early '90s, with women being disproportionately affected.

Simply to shorten the work week by a day or to propose some equivalent device, such as work sharing or a new norm of working part time, is necessary but not sufficient to provide a solution to unemployment on the scale anticipated, particularly when, in addition to microprocessors and industrial robots, further displacement of older industry to the Third World is taken into account. The meaning of work itself will need reconsideration. Sachs (1980), the development economist, has suggested that work in the sense of paid employment will have to be rationed--though it would presumably be possible for the work addicted to purchase work stamps from the less addicted! In addition to his or her paid work, an individual would have an occupation in what Sachs calls the "civil society," i.e., the community. This concept is consonant with that of the dual economy in which gift and barter arrangements grow up in a "social economy" that exists in parallel with the market economy (Robertson, 1981). Transactions in

this nonmarket domain may come to equal those in the market domain.

The social economy includes activities which people undertake for themselves by way of self-reliance. They may involve community workshops and many new types of social arrangement. "Jobs" in this area tend to be of high quality and to promote personal growth. They are likely to make the ordinary world of work less central and to make ambition or status in it less preoccupying than it is at present, at least for some kinds of people. There will be more choices in lifestyles, more types of career paths open. Allied to this is a reassessment of the household as a work field that reflects the changing roles of men and women in the domestic socio-technical system and the links of this system with outside employment. The divorce between home and work, which has been so complete in industrial societies, may be less complete in the post-industrial order.

I will not attempt to go into the question of the decentralization, not only of organizations but of society, which microelectronic technologies make possible. They could, of course, also take us toward greater centralization--to the end of the pier that George Orwell called "1984." The choice is ours. There is no doubt regarding which road QWL bids us take.

I would like to close by briefly mentioning a project in a district of Edinburgh, to which I have been going as research adviser during the last five years, as this experience has greatly influenced my search for alternatives (Trist and Burgess, 1979, Vol. III). The district is called Craigmillar; it has its own castle where the haggis was invented. Nevertheless, it is a low income public housing estate where some 25,000 people have lived without amenities in an isolated area on the edge of the city. Industry has gone: the two mines are long closed; the breweries, except one bottling and distribution plant, have gone elsewhere. Unemployment of

young adult males varies between 20 and 30 percent; for women, unemployment is far higher and too few adolescents have known what it is like to work. Yet this community is at the leading edge of post-industrial innovation and does an enormous amount of work without much in the way of employment.

Some years ago a mother and housewife called Helen Crummy was annoyed because her son, who had some talent for music, could not get music lessons at school. There was no music in the curriculum in such a place as Craigmillar. She got music lessons going and, with others, held a small festival at which local talent could perform. They found they were as good as many other folks. This has led in time to a vast development in community arts that has now become internationally famous. They write and produce musicals and dramas on social issues arising locally and take them touring in the rest of Scotland and in continental Europe.

Their organization is called the Craigmillar Festival Society and Mrs. Crummy is Organizing Secretary. Their activities, under local resident control, have transformed a once negative identity into a positive identity. They have gone on to undertake many forms of social service using neighborhood workers, again local residents, who give better attention at lower cost than official departments. They have, with the support of a grant from the European Economic Community, developed a comprehensive action plan for the future of Craigmillar. They have won acceptance for many of their proposals from local, regional and national authorities, often after severe conflict (which still goes on), although their aim for the Festival Society is shared government, not the replacement of statutory bodies. They have won a high school and a community center and have stopped the planning authority from driving a freeway through the middle of their community.

They have turned a dilapidated church into a community arts center and other buildings into community workshops and meeting places for youth. They have constructed play sculptures for children and have painted bright murals (which have remained unvandalized) in several dull public places.

The jobs in the establishments that have created these amenities, indeed in all Festival Society activities, have high QWL. I have seen many ordinary people grow amazingly in the last few years. Many hundreds have been involved in one way or another, at any given time, in making constructive use of government schemes.

All this is work but not employment. What is it if not QWL? The Craigmillar way is one way toward a fully engaged, if partially employed, society. Moreover, the Festival Society has won the cooperation of several large firms in Edinburgh, who have taken on Craigmillar people because they have become resourceful and committed. A way back to the market place has been opened for quite a few.

The QWL mission is to foster human development through work that is better and more economically executed as a result. The QWL mission can be carried out beyond employment as well as within it. Each can reinforce the other.

We must continue to create jobs of high quality and bring into being organizations and communities through the new paradigm that provide the enabling conditions for such jobs to come into existence in both the market and social economies. Otherwise we are not likely to fare too well in countervailing the turbulent environment that increasingly surrounds us.

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