THE DYNAMICS OF A VARIABLY COUPLED SYSTEM: THE INTERNATIONALIZATON OF THE COMPAGNONS DU DEVOIR

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RESUME

The aims of this paper are to describe the concept of coupling and to identify its component parts; to apply key ideas of inter, intra and extra organisational coupling to an ancient French institution, Les Compagnons du Devoir and to expand the use of the coupling metaphor by introducing a conceptual link between coupling and system closure. The research focuses particular attention to the need to understand the dynamics of coupled systems and coupling as a continuum rather than as discrete category. We then proceed to a case study of Les Compagnons du Devoir in which we outline our qualitative methodology based on over 70 interviews with key personnel and findings. We analyse it as a highly institutionalised system displaying variable couplings and facing significant changes in its socio-cultural environment and institutional grounding; these have been highlighted by recent moves to internationalize its activities. We distinguish between variable, tight and loose coupling and between induced change and eroded change in organisations. This analytical framework permits a better understanding of the dynamic of organisational systems and thus of problems of change and stability in organisations.

MOTS CLES :
Les Compagnons du Devoir, coupling, institutional change, intenationalization, social systems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aims of this paper are :

- To describe the concept of coupling and to identify its component parts;

- To apply key ideas of inter, intra and extra organizational coupling to an ancient French institution, Les Compagnons du Devoir ;

- To expand the use of the coupling metaphor by introducing a conceptual link between coupling and system closure

The paper opens with a literature review of the coupled system in organization theory in which we draw attention to the partial nature in which the coupling metaphor has been used to date. We draw particular attention to the need to understand the dynamics of coupled systems and coupling as a continuum rather than as discrete category. We then proceed to a case study of Les Compagnons du Devoir (CdD) in which we outline our methodology and findings. We analyse it as a highly institutionalised system displaying variable couplings and facing significant changes in its socio-cultural environment and institutional grounding. This analytical framework permits a better understanding of the dynamic of organizational systems and thus of problems of change and stability in organizations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 COUPLED SYSTEM IN ORGANIZATION THEORY

The idea of coupling between organizations or organizational elements, and especially the concept of loose coupling, first gained popularity in research on educational institutions (Weick, 1976) and was later extended to systems theory within organization studies (Orton and Weick, 1990). In recent years it has been increasingly used to understand complex dynamic systems (Beekun and Glick, 2002; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Rowan, 2002; Staber and Sydow, 2002; Spender and Grevesen, 1999). In brief, a system is made up of elements, and our understanding of any system can be enhanced by examining the degree of coupling between those elements. Following Orton and Weick (1990), we can distinguish four coupling situations. These occur if between elements in a system:

- there is neither responsiveness nor distinctiveness: it is not really a system;

- there is responsiveness without distinctiveness: the elements can be said to be tightly coupled;

- there is distinctiveness without responsiveness: the system is decoupled;

- there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness: the elements can be said to be loosely coupled.

2.2 EXTENDING THE COUPLING METAPHOR

In the present piece, we use the coupling metaphor in an extended way. We propose to examine the development of an organizational system by observing:

- both intra and extra-organizational couplings;

- the relationship between coupling and relative system closure;

- both loose and tight couplings.

Intra- and extra- organizational couplings: in an article on the construction industry as a loosely coupled system, Dubois and Gadde (2002) extend the possible use of the coupling metaphor by stating that

> "*loose coupling may occur in a number of dimensions: among individuals, among subunits, among organizations, between hierarchical levels, between organisations and environments, among ideas, between activities, and between intentions and actions*".(p.623)

The relationship between coupling and relative system closure: neither full closure (i.e. impermeable barriers between the system and the environment) nor full overture (i.e. no barriers between the system and the environment) can be found in organizational systems, but they are located on a closure continuum. Relative closure – or, to be more precise, buffering- can occur in two ways: the first is buffering against the environment (here, the term environment can be understood in both the physical and in the socio-cultural way). The second is buffering against *shifts* in the environment. In other words, the system is embedded in, and relatively open to, its environment but does not follow all of its shifts. Responsiveness to environmental shifts is reduced due to cultural and/or technical inertia. It is here that a link can be established between closure and coupling. In the case of system closure - or buffering - the coupling with the environment is present but loose.

Both loose and tight couplings: Literature typically presents loose coupling as an organization's way to *deal with* uncertainty stemming from unpredictability and interdependence. But tight coupling and system closure act to seal off the organization from its environment thus reducing or avoiding uncertainty altogether. This highlights two opposing views on organizational survival and growth: most contemporary management thought sees the ability to deal with, and embrace, uncertainty as sole path to organizational fitness and growth. Another view holds that organizations can preserve themselves and grow organically by reducing interaction with the its environment. This represents loose coupling from the environment.

2.3 THE FOCUS OF OUR RESEARCH: THE DYNAMICS OF THE COUPLED SYSTEM

Much of current organization theory promotes the idea that the more an organization is coupled with its environment, the more the organization will change. The change could deal with the formal or informal structure, the way of coordinating parts inside the system, or the nature of relations with partners. But when organizations are conceived of as coupled systems, then organizational change is seen as being much more complex. There has been little research in this area for two reasons. First, there is a methodological problem. The notion of change is hard to see when change is a part of the organizing process. Indeed, the notion of coupling integrates the notion of dynamics inside the process of organizing. Coupling is concerned with a loose or tight connection with certain parts of the environment. Therefore change cannot be studied from an outside or inside point of view but as an intrinsic characteristic of the system.

The second problem is theoretical. Theory deals with the change, evolution and adaptation of organization. But the nature of the loose coupled system modifies our understanding of the system and question the relevance of applying the well known conclusions of change theory. The nature of the loose coupled system has a great potential to produce a new way of understanding change dynamics in this kind of system

This does not mean that the researcher should be naïve and study the problem without conceptual framework. A context and a frame of reference is needed. Internationalization is an excellent topic to choose to study problems of change and adaptation. It involves questioning the process of replication of the system in a different cultural context. It can mean

exporting the domestic system abroad with all that that entails – its nature, functioning, purpose. Of necessity this means that the system's managers must deconstruct the system at home in order to rebuild it abroad. Deconstruction renders concrete the visible and invisible parts of the system, illuminates the linkages and identifies the contribution of sub-systems to the performance of the whole. All of these are essential considerations in reconstructing the 'home' system abroad. Understanding the system as a loosely coupled one distils the essence of the problem: is it possible to replicate a loose coupled system?

Internationalization therefore raises the question of system dynamics not in terms of its evolution from a given point, but in terms of replicating the system across cultural boundaries often against deadlines. It provides in a good arena in which to observe the interplay between and within systems and the dynamics of change. Through these we can arrive at a better understanding of loose coupling.

Our research question is: **what are the dynamics of the loosely coupled system?** Can these dynamics be used as part of a goal oriented change management process? A case study of a loose coupled system in a process of internationalization should offer help in answering to this question

3. A CASE STUDY OF A SPECIFIC SYSTEM : THE COMPAGNONS DU DEVOIR

In this section we outline our methodology and describe the main features of Les Compagnons du Devoir (CdD) by means of simple system model showing how the tangible elements of the Compagnons are linked together. The model is extended to demonstrate how the physical elements of the system are held together by the concepts of *le devoir* and *le metier*. The metaphor used is that of a tree with *le devoir* and *le metier* acting as a trunk; we then show how this tree is rooted what has been described as le principe d'honneur (d'Iribane, 1994), thus giving the CdD a rootstock and soil which is essentially French. This model is then used to demonstrate the different types of coupling observed in the CdD. We conclude by analysing some recent attempts of the CdD to internationalize and by drawing attention to the implications of our model for this strategy.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The authors are members of the *Le Conseil Scientifique de l'International Journeyman Programme*. The International Journeyman Programme (IJP) was a project to offer high-skills training in construction and engineering to young people from the north of England by passing them through the CdD. The IJP is supervised by the IJP Project Steering Group which represents small local businesses, Gateshead Borough Council (a local authority), the Department of Trade and Industry. *Le Conseil Scientifique* advises the IJP Steering Group on present and future policies. In this capacity the authors have had unrestricted access to the main participants in the UK and in France, including managers and trainers in factories in France, and the UK apprentices passing through the system. The research draws on over 70 interviews, and visits to plants and to the Houses of the CdD.

Research Strategy

This study aims to gain an understanding of the dynamics of highly-institutionalised social systems. It accommodates research methods such as participant observation, open- ended and semi- structured interviews, and the supporting written documents. The method of grounded theory building is particularly well suited to the study of systems dynamics in that:

> *"The naturalistically oriented data collection methods as well as the [grounded theory] approach's theory-building orientation permit the investigation and theoretical development of new substantive areas as they 'arrive' on the organisational scene" (Locke, 2001: 96).*

The present study follows the method of inductive theory building (see for example Martin and Turner, 1986; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Daft and Buenger, 1991; Das, 1983; Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Isabella, 1990; Locke, 2001; Pettigrew, 1990) In line with this approach, data were collected in parallel with the study of theoretical concepts; we tried continuously to formulate what we saw in the language of theory. From this, the metaphor of coupling emerged as a basis for discussing the phenomenon at hand; at the same time it appears to us that this metaphor could usefully be extended:

- to encompass the notion of variable degrees of coupling;
- and the introduction of a conceptual link between coupling and systems closure.

The Research Method

This was a single-shot case study of the CdD. This strategy can be justified by :

- the focus on organisations in a time of change;
- relatively small numbers of people involved;
- complex and sometimes sensitive nature of the problem;
- unstructured nature of the phenomena under investigation;
- lack of any established theory in key areas (eg the internationalisation of the younger worker) to guide the researchers.

In particular there was a strong cross-cultural dimension to the problem involving, as it did, a wide range of interested parties in France and the UK. These characteristics of the research problem justify a case study approach (Yin, 1989; Alasuutari, 1997).

Research Design

The Research Design embraced semi-structured interviews, premises visits and direct observation. The interviews included:

- The UK managers of the IJP. These included 2 managers of engineering factories who had employed *Compagnons*; 1 senior civil servant working for the Department of Trade and Industry who funded the IJP; the political leader and managers of a local authority interested in establishing a CdD House in the UK.
- Six CdD *Prévots*, a title given to *Compagnons* with management responsibilities; three were responsible for international links, the CdD's UK operations, and training and development strategy. A further three were *Prévôts* in charge of Houses in France which hosted the UK youngsters.
- Interviews with managers and trainers working in two factories located in Lyon and Toulouse employing UK Apprentis3
- Interviews with 13 of the 14 of the young people recruited to the first three cohorts IJP in 2001 and 2002 who participated in the taster phase of the IJP.

- All UK young people who went to France were asked to keep Personal Logs detailing their experiences in France, but for some reason they proved remarkably reluctant to do so. Owing to the failure of this method Nominal Group Technique was used to explore the experiences of the CdD and French factory life of the fourth group on their return to the UK in 2003.

- In depth interviews with the four UK apprentices who returned to France and remained in the CdD after six months service.

- teachers and managers working in the schools and training agencies from which the IJP trainees were recruited.

- managers working in UK state agencies who were involved in the recruitment effort.

Many of these respondents were interviewed on more than one occasion. Most, but not all interviews were recorded. On occasion it was thought that the interview would be better without a recording being made : where this happened detailed notes were made by the researcher and written up immediately after the interview. The tapes were transcribed by the researchers and then subject to content analysis. Topics explored in these interviews varied with the respondent, but in general we explored the actors' motivations, their objectives, constraints and opportunities. With the managers of the IJP, the CdD personnel and the UK politicians and civil servants, the issues explored were more organisational in nature. A limitation of the research is that the UK *Apprentis* were working in a narrow range of engineering trades; it is not known if the data would have been replicated if more trades and therefore a more diverse range of respondents had been involved.

Premises visits to the CdD headquarters in Paris and CdD houses including Lille, Toulouse, Lyon, and Paris. Factory visits were made to units in Lyon and Toulouse. There were limited opportunities for participant observation as one of the researchers was involved in providing some of the acculturation training for the UK *Apprentis* for the first two cohorts during the 'taster' course in France.

The single most important reason why the UK actors launched the IJP and hence initiated a process of internationalising the CdD was a deep dissatisfaction with the UK system of apprentice training. In the next section we turn to a description of this system offering it as

both background information and as a benchmark against which the CdD system can be judged.

3.2 THE UK VET SYSTEM

2001 the responsibility for managing the UK (vocational and education training) VET system for all post-16 year-olds, including colleges, has been given to the Local Skills Council (LSC) for England and Wales and its network of 47 local LSCs. VET is big business: in 1997-98 £4.5 billion of public funds was spent on supporting students at colleges and on work-based training, a figure expected to rise rapidly in the next few years. (Felstead and Unwin, 2001: 91). LSCs have little direct involvement in implementing training policies. Instead it works through a quasi-market of 'providers' such as schools, colleges and private training firms who bid for contracts and are paid by a complex system of funding rules if they reach agreed targets, usually set in terms of pass and retention rates. Prices vary according to courses with top payments being made for engineering and construction students. In the UK VET is structured as a market; in France it is managed as a hierarchy.

The main vehicle in the UK is the Modern Apprentice (MA) scheme, organised around two principles: National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Key Skills. NVQs represent a five-level hierarchy of work-related skills and competences assessed in the workplace by the training provider. There are no rules governing processes through which trainees must pass; accordingly there is neither legal requirement for off-the-job education; and, until recently, no requisite minimum duration of training. The non-statutory, market oriented approach is different to that found in other countries (Ryan, 2000), especially France. Satisfactory completion of an MA depends upon reaching the attainment level needed for a NVQ at Level 3 or 4 depending on the trade followed. The trainee must also show proficiency in six Key Skills including numeracy, communication, IT, and working with others.

Currently (April 2005) the MA system has completed another bout of reform prompted by the Cassels Report (2001) which suggests the inclusion of technical certificates as tests of knowledge and understanding and minimum periods of duration of up to two years. To date few of these changes appear to have been implemented.

While it is possible to argue that a high-skill workforce will be needed for at least some employers in the UK it is difficult to argue that the UK VET system is capable of training them. There are some relatively optimistic assessments (eg. Gospel and Fuller, 1998), but even these are heavily qualified. Since globalisation is the driver for a high-skill workforce, then the benchmarks for the UK's VET system must be international. Steedman's comparison of apprenticeship training in seven European countries states that the British apprenticeship programme: 'falls short of that provided elsewhere in Europe on every important measure of good practice.' (Steedman, 2001). Brown and Keep's (1997) conclusion is that the: 'UK VET system is manifestly incapable of delivering this broad level of upskilling'. Further, the UK system not only falls short of the standards required for a world-class workforce, but elements such as Key Skills are incapable of reform as they guarantee UK youngsters, 'an impoverished form of general education' from which they will emerge deficient in, 'verbal articulacy, logical skills and mathematical literacy' and without foundation of scientific and humanistic culture adequate to the demands of active citizenship in modern societies' (Green, 1998: 40). Green could have been referring to the CdD system in his benchmark for the UK VET system

Amongst the evidence to support these conclusions are that:

- Standards of UK student attainment on vocational courses in mathematics and language fall well below that achieved by their peers in France, Germany and Sweden (Steedman and Hawkins, 1994; Green, 1995).
- NVQ level 1 is set at such a low level that it is unlikely to be accepted as a meaningful qualification elsewhere in Europe (Keep, 1999: 328).
- Numerous professional engineering and scientific institutions have expressed concern over the low standards of maths required by General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ). The maths demanded of mechanical and electrical craft students appear to be much higher in France than the UK (Steedman, 1988).
- Evidence that areas such as the building trades the generic competence of trainees has actually fallen since the introduction of NVQs (Steedman and Hawkins, 1994).
- Non-completion rates of the MA well in excess of forty per cent (Cassels, 2001: 12)

These relatively low standards of educational and skills attainment are achieved despite the fact that on recruitment to their chosen trade UK apprentices appear to be at least as well

qualified as those in France and Germany, and possibly more so than those in Switzerland and Austria. (Steedman, 2001: 23).

The reasons for these failings include:

- the lack of a coherent body of supporting knowledge behind the NVQ approach to competency development (DfEE, 1999);
- that NVQs are designed to meet the job-specific needs of employers rather than the broader needs of individuals (Keep, 1999: 329);
- standards are too narrow and low to meet needs of innovative firms (Keep, 1999; Guile and Fonda, 1998);
- lack of guidance with respect to the teaching and assessment process, the variable use of professional teachers and instructors (Green, 1995);
- the lack of objectivity and consistency in the assessment of workplace competences leading to concerns about how much trainees actually 'know' (Gospel and Fuller, 1998: 12);
- the absence of any systematic provision to introduce UK students in schools and colleges to the career development prospects offered by apprenticeships (Steedman, 2001);
- the absence of a suitable legal framework, the imprecise legal status of the apprentice, no central regulatory body, no joint regulation of work-based training, and the weak powers accorded to employer organisations, trades unions and state agencies. (Ryan, 2000).

A critical failing is the emphasis in UK VET training on skills and the 'practical man'; the idea, mainly held by employers, that VET training has no place for education which is vocational, general and cultural. Inclusion of broad, liberal elements into VET of the type which can be found in continental European countries indicates that they have 'a radically different conception of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are necessary to create a skilled employee and citizen' (Brown and Keep, 1999: 5); and that the UK's failure to combine vocational and academic education for the young substantially impedes the development of broadly skilled polyvalent workers. (Brown and Keep, 1999: 6).   The

exclusion of these elements from the curriculum has the further effect of marginalising UK VET from mainstream education. (Green, 1998: 25).

Therefore a UK employer needing a high-skills VET system might conclude that attention might be better directed. The picture is further complicated by the market approach to VET based on competition. This produces a system which is fragmented, voluntaristic, blinkered, competitive, uncoordinated, focused on the individual and run by people and agencies locked in competition to provide inadequate training which is low in standard, narrow in scope and shallow in breadth. This contrasts unfavourably with the view that learning for anyone is a social process which takes place within a 'community of practice' (Lave, 1991). Fuller and Unwin (1998: 158) argue that VET is a community of practice whose key partners are further education, trainers, employers and apprentices; and that an effective apprenticeship system delivering quality training requires close partnerships between providers, employers and apprentices (Fuller and Unwin, 1998: 167). By these standards the UK VET system falls a short of what is required.

To summarise a UK employer needing for a high-skilled workforce would be confronted with a domestic UK VET system which could not deliver it for him. In this context a search abroad for an appropriate training system, such as the CdD would be a rational response. This was the catalyst for the IJP. A group of UK engineering firms wanted the high-skill products of the CdD. The domestic system was incapable of providing it so they set up the IJP to import it.

3.3 THE CdD TODAY

The CdD is best thought of as a trade guild covering 22 trades in construction, engineering, furniture and food. Its origins are lost in time, but it can be traced back at least 800 years to the building of the great European medieval cathedrals. In 2003 the CdD had nearly 8000 young people at some stage of training and professional development: these were 6000 Apprentis, 1700 Aspirants, and 700 Compagnons working as trainers, administrators and Prévôts in Houses, Head Office and the Centre de Formations d'Apprentis (CFA). It underwent a crisis of recruitment and retention in the 1980s, but since the mid-1990s it has experienced a steady growth in membership. There is some evidence that the CdD training is

a good preparation for future professional development. According to one survey (Icher, 1999: 553) on completing training only about half work as tradesmen. Nearly thirty per cent move in to management and about ten per cent remain as Prévots in the CdD system. Others enter professions such as architecture, engineering or teaching.

3.3.1 The Tangible Elements of the CdD

There are four tangible elements to the CdD. These are:

- The Membership
- The House
- The System of Development, Education and Training *('la formation')*
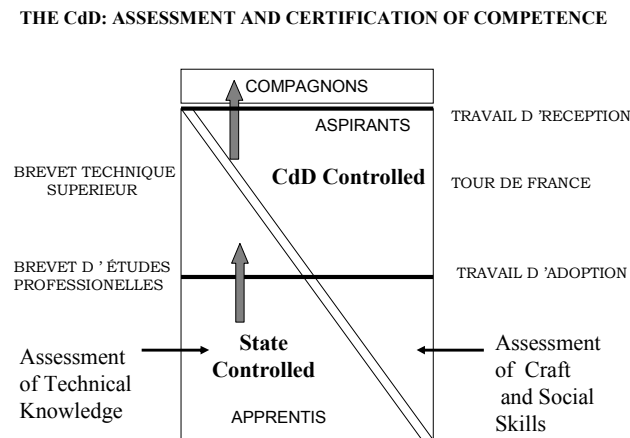- The Workplace

The CdD has three grades of member: These are: Apprenti, Aspirant and Compagnon. Apprentis enter at age of 16; a few enter later. Apprentis complete a training which lasts up to three years. On successful completion of their training they can become an Aspirant, and undertake the Tour de France; this is a period of work, study and training in different parts of France or other countries. Aspirants graduate to full Compagnon status after which they may serve the CdD for a further three years. Progression to a higher grade of membership depends upon certification of competence through trade tests controlled by the CdD.

At the heart of the life of the CdD is the House, a place of residence and training in towns throughout France. Apprentis and Aspirants stay here working for local employers, or following courses offered in the CFA attached to the House. By night Apprentis and Aspirants sleep and eat together at the House. In the evenings they study or work on their test pieces in the House's extensively equipped workshop. Every Compagnon has a responsibility to help the younger members. Young Apprentis share rooms with older members. An important part of every House are the Anciens and Sédentaires, those Compagnons who live near the House and work in local firm.

Education and training runs on an eight-week cycle; six weeks of work followed by two weeks' study in the CFA. The CFAs offer theoretical training and common courses in English, Science, French and Maths. Apprentis take public examinations, but their reputation rests on their certification of competence by the CdD. Most teaching in the CFAs is conducted by Compagnons who work themselves. Grade of membership is linked to certification of

trade skills assessed by trade tests controlled by the CdD. These are set and assessed by the Anciens and Sédentaires attached to each house.

Figure 1: The Assessment and Certification of Competence for a Compagnon

THE CdD: ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION OF COMPETENCE

The system of *formation* defines the membership in hierarchical terms and, in turn, the membership controls the training. It is possible to progress through the Compagnonage system without satisfying any of the State's training requirements; on the other hand all Aspirants and Apprentis wishing to become Companions must satisfy the other Companions in their House that they are ready and fit for promotion. So the linkage between the system of membership and the internal system of accreditation is very strong, but the latter is only loosely coupled with the State controlled external system of accreditation in the form of the BEP and BTS.

Failure is rare. One CdD member explained:

"You cannot not do the job; everybody performs. All our time is spend talking about the job. Girl-friends complain that we only speak about the job."

A key feature of the system of training and development is the Tour de France. This is undertaken by Aspirants wishing to become a Compagnon. The assumption is that Aspirants can only become Compagnons by being exposed to, and learning from, different firm, industry and geographical contexts. The Prévot responsible for the CdD's UK operations explained:
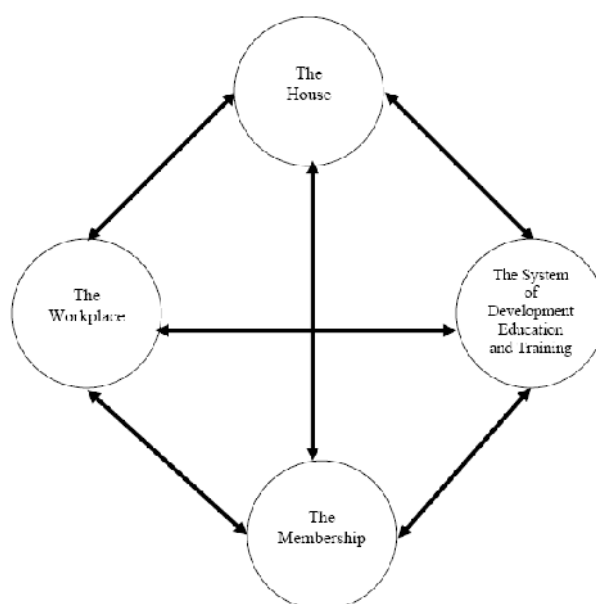
" … on the Tour, they encounter different skills, techniques, people, culture, food and character. Some are easy to acquire; others are hard. You discover who you are and what you must become. From each place we take the good and leave the bad. The important thing about the

Tour is to learn well. Travel teaches one that the craft varies. In Paris roofers use zinc; in Burgundy it is clay tiles; in Nantes, slate is the preferred material. In the Pyrénées it is slate, but a different sort. The techniques vary with the material. You might say that engineering is not like this, that it is all the same material. But other things differ. In engineering there are different methods of organisation; there are different attitudes, tools and procedures. In all regions there are generalities, but in each locale there are particularities. Accept the good and leave the bad and you will become very versatile."

Travel not only broadens the mind; it also expands the skill base, humanity and cultural awareness. It is travel rather than manners which make the man.

During the day Apprentis work as trainees in local firms. It is not essential for the CdD to have formal links with these enterprises. Many are owned and/or managed by Compagnons, but many are not. Workplaces supply a craftsman to oversee the Apprenti's on-the-job training. Liaison between the workplace and the House is by a *carnet de progrès*, a record of the Apprentis training, both on and off-the-job, which follows him on his travels. Apprentis work for six weeks at the end of which they return to the House for two weeks' formal training in the CFA. The tangible elements of the CdD system are shown in the diagram below:

Figure 2: The Tangible Elements of Les Compagnons du Devoir

3.2.2 The non-tangible elements of the CdD: le devoir and le metier

There is more to the CdD than its physical elements. It has a strong sense of mission which crystallises into two related concepts: *le devoir* and *le metier*. *Le devoir* is a complex, polyvalent concept which reaches to the heart of what it means to be a Compagnon. Literally 'devoir' means both 'duty', 'work' and 'craft'; for a non-Compagnon these three meanings are separate, but for the Compagnon they are indissolubly linked. They define both the CdD as a *Compagnonnages*, as an institution; and the Compagnons as individuals. It gives meaning to the Compagnons' roles as professionals, family men and citizens in the wider community. Icher (1999) defines it in the following terms:

> *"Today, as yesterday, devoir, can be conceived as a sacred value by the Compagnons upon whom it bestows an essential identity giving dimensions which eclipses the narrower domains of métier and work." (p.444)*

Icher quotes Jean Bernard, the editor of the journal of *Le Compagnonnage*, writing in 1943, a time of great crisis for the Compagnons, when their very existence was threatened by the German occupier of France:

> *"Le devoir envelops the entire Compagnonnage with its spirit. It is the very expression of its entirety which flows directly from the conscience of Man at work, especially manual work. It is the way in which in one must live and enact the metier, regardless of age or status. From this we can see that le devoir is a very far-reaching context which governs even the most detailed aspects of practice. Indeed le devoir envelopes the whole life of the Compagnon" (1999, p.443).*

Seen in this context, *le devoir* provides a crucial bonding agent which glues together the four elements described in Diagram 1. *Le metier* is a closely related idea. Very loosely it means 'craft' or 'trade' and the Companions, both as individuals and as an organization, have an obligation to *'transmettre le métier'* - to develop, improve and diffuse the trade and the notions of humanity and culture which, in the Compagnons view, must be part and parcel of the practice of their work. The aims of the CdD are summarised by (Icher, 1999) who writes:

> *"the Compagnonnage has always placed the craft at the centre of its concerns and values. Yet it is necessary to define that word which, for the compagnons, cannot and must not be confused with words like 'profession', 'work', 'occupation'; and even less with other words which have no place in the compagnons' vocabulary such as 'job' or 'career'. 'Craft' can be defined in several ways; but first and foremost it is an encounter between man and work, but that meeting does not take place in isolation. We are at the heart of a Compagnonnage system which has as its … aim the transmission of its heritage. For the compagnons the essential part of that inheritance is the heritage and culture of the craft … always work better, teach the craft and help your fellow craftsman" (pp. 440-441).*
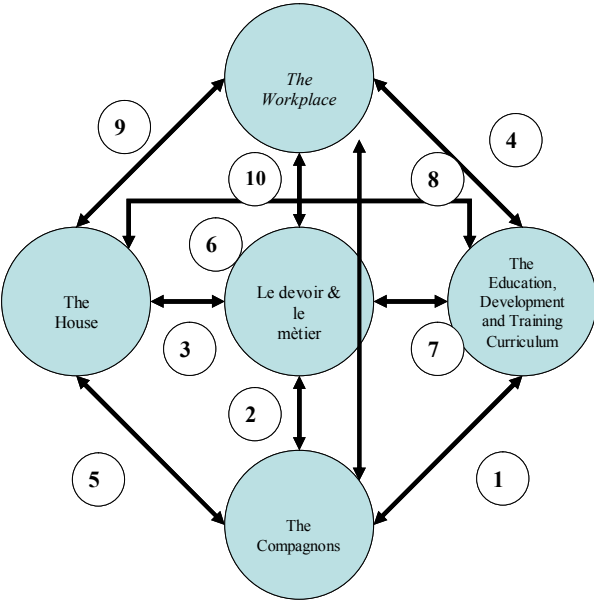
This is not a training organization in the anglo-saxon sense of that term. It is a social system for raising and spreading knowledge and standards. As part of this mission it offers a training which is liberal and wide-ranging. It seeks to develop the whole man, including his humanity and cultural adaptability. His technical skills are only one element in a much larger collection of abilities which rest on a conception of a worker as a citizen in a community rather than as

factor of production to be bought and sold in a market place. For the CdD a good worker is more than excellent technical skills; it is as much concerned with developing a good attitude, awareness and spirit. One member of the CdD explained:

> *"The Compagnons is not like a firm. We do it for the idea of people growing up with us, of taking up the trade and keeping it alive. … The first thing you have to do as a firm is to sell, to make money. We don't have to make anything. Every Compagnon gives a bit of himself."*

Together, *le devoir* and *le métier* provide are intangibles which coalesce to form an important fifth element which lend cohesion to the whole. *Le devoir* and *le metier* can also be understood as what drives 'the whole man'. We can embed these in the model depicted in Figure 2 to show a wider intra- systems view of the CdD and to identify some numbered linkages between the component parts of that system.

Figure 3: A Wider Intra-Systems View of CdD

3.3.3 The CdD and Le Principe d'Honneur

Yet this explanation is incomplete. We contend that *le devoir*, the motive force and the *raison d'être* of the CdD is a tacit, but very powerful expression of the Honour Principle, a concept best described as a sense of duty emanating from membership of a certain caste which can find expression both in the workplace and in citizenship at large. They have important consequences for definitions of 'job', 'career', 'skill' and 'motivation to work'. For d'Iribane (1994) the Honour Principle makes itself manifest in ideals such as 'lover of the craft', 'skill

involved', and 'nobility of work' (p.90). d'Iribane expands on this idea in his analysis of Crozier's (1963) reporting of his interviews with employees in French public sector organizations:

> *"These words give expression to the conflict between the nobility of work done out of love of the craft or skill involved and the lack of nobility of a job done for purely utilitarian purposes. This desire 'to care about the work' out of love for the skill involved rather than for the 'result' required by the hierarchy is associated with 'conscientiousness' and 'professional pride', terms whose use by the interviewers elicits enthusiastic approval from interviewees and sometimes 'a great deal of warmth and emotion' … This combination of group norms, desire to care about work out of love of the skill involved and professional pride matches the form of sense of duty that characterises the honour principle" (p.82)*
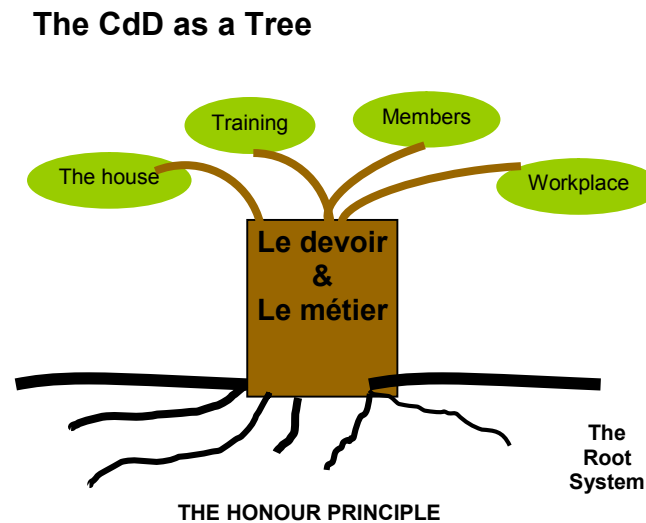
Clearly, the institution of '*transmettre le métier*' is driven by the Honour Principle which, in turn, is deeply embedded in French culture. The Compagnons are essentially a French institution. There is nothing quite like them outside of France, but there are no fewer that three Compagnonnages in France, of which the CdD is the largest. Notions of *le devoir* and *transmettre le métier* were encountered many times during the course of our fieldwork in our meetings with Compagnons and non-Compagnons alike. For many of the UK Apprentis passing through the Houses and factories in France it was the most noticeable aspect of French working life. One commented:

> *"It is different in France. They are mechanical engineers and metal-workers; that's what they want to do and that's what they are. They say "I love my job, I love getting up in the morning"; it's just like a hobby for them, they don't do it for the money. It's strange, it's weird when you first go there."*

Extending the model to embrace *le devoir*, *transmettre le metier* and the Honour Principle invites the use of the tree as a metaphor for the CdD. The branches and leaves are the four tangible elements, the trunk represents *le devoir* and *le metier* with its roots entrenched in the fecund soil of *le principe d'honneur*. The metaphor is diagrammatically modelled overleaf.

Description and discussion of the links within the CdD system not only offers a bigger, richer picture of them, but also explains the precise nature of the couplings in different parts of the CdD system. In turn an understanding of these leads to a better grasp of the problems of internationalizing an institution such as this one. We focus on a limited number of these to make a more general case.

Figure 4: The CdD as a Tree

The CdD as a Tree

THE HONOUR PRINCIPLE

3.4. EXAMPLES OF LOOSE LINKAGES IN THE SYSTEM

With reference to Figure 3 the links between the workplace (4, 8, 9 and 10) and the other three elements of the CdD system were loosely coupled. These existed in the form of:

- the liaisons between the Mâitre de Formation, the workplace employee responsible for the training of the Apprenti and the Aspirant, and the Mâitre de Stage, the Compagnon attached to the House:

- The carnet de progress, the record of the Apprentis' progress in completing work-related assignments set by the Maître de Stage;

- The Encyclopaedia, a detailed guide written and maintained by the Compagnons which gave detailed guidance to its subscribers relating to techniques, materials and tools used in the trades of the Compagnonage.

We can note two features of these links. First, they are highly codified and explicit. Second, they are weak. Both of these are connected to the fact that the workplace belongs to another institution, one rooted not in *le devoir* or *le metier*, but in the world and work of French industry, its owners, product markets and technologies. This world made its own demands on the CdD. Sometimes these were positive for the Compagnonage; for example, shifts in

consumer preferences for more skilled forms of home decoration, such as hand-painted wall murals, had led to an increase in demand for CdD-trained painters and decorators. Other shifts were negative such as the increasing modularisation of product parts, and the growing use of outsourcing, in engineering maintenance; these were considered to have de-skilled many jobs and were causing many French managers in this sector to question the relevance of the high-skill training offered by the CdD.

Another factor complicating the relations between the CdD and the workplace was that many owners and managers of French factories were not Compagnons. Though they were, on the whole, sympathetic to the aims of the CdD they had themselves not passed through the Compagnons system of training and were not attached to any House; there was therefore no guarantee that they fully shared the ideology of the CdD, or that they would be responsive to the implicit, informal controls of the CdD. This constellation of problematic linkages with the workplace legitimised two key features of the CdD as a system. First, it encouraged the use of formal and explicit liaison devices between the CdD and the workplace. Second, it created a need for the other three parts of the CdD system to be loosely coupled with the workplace; for the CdD to continue to maintain its metier it could not afford to be too responsive to the ever-changing needs of the French workplace, its owners and customers.

3.5. EXAMPLES OF STRONG LINKAGES IN THE CDD SYSTEM

On the other hand links from the House to other parts of the CdD system (3, 5 and 6) were strong and implicit. We can evidence this with reference to the Tour de France (link 5); and the role of the House in the formation of Compagnons (link 6). Earlier we drew attention to the importance of the Tour in the transformation of Aspirants to Compagnons. But its importance extends beyond that. The Tour is equally as important for the development of the House. Their migratory status meant that they pumped knowledge around the CdD system. Without them, Houses would only hold only Apprentis and Anciens. Aspirants are seen as being importers of new ideas, bringing innovations in designs, techniques and tools from other geographic locales. Much of this knowledge transfer was implicit and non-codified. Aspirants had key roles, both formally and informally, in the teaching of Apprentis; their relative lack of social distance from the Apprentis gave them a powerful legitimacy.

The House had an important role to play in the education, development and training of Apprentis and Aspirants. The House was as a centre of functional skill-specific formal learning - stages, night classes, off-the-job training for local firms – devoted to particular trades; much of this was highly formalised. There was also informal learning of a cross functional nature which came from different trades living and training together. The skills imparted were not merely those of the trade; the demands of *le devoir* and *le metier* imposed a much wider curriculum for the learner to follow. Life in the House had a social aspect and much learning occurred there. Manners and convention were important parts of House life and were imparted by the older members to the younger ones. One UK Apprenti described dinners; these were semi-formal occasions with dress-codes and rituals.

> *"Everyone has to shake hands with everyone else at the table; collars and ties were expected. The Aspirants are more formal; they try and teach the younger ones. You watched what they did. You've just got to try and follow them."*

Thus learning embraced both *la formation* and *l'education*[1] both of which were required in equal measure to train the whole, cultured man. The evidence here points to links which were both explicit and implict, codified and non-codified. For example, Apprentis and Aspirants wishing to progress in the Compagnonage not only had to satisfy trade tests in the form of Travail d'Adoption and the Travail de Réception for which the assessment criteria were relatively explicit and codified, they also had to satisfy the other members of the House that they would be good Aspirants r Compagnons. On the day of their tests the Compagnons would take soundings in the House as to whether or not the candidate's behaviour had been acceptable to other members of the House. If a candidate attracted sufficient objections then they could be refused progression. One UK Apprenti described the process of the social evaluation in these words:

> *"But to become an Aspirant, it's not all about the work, it's about how you are with other people in the House as well. If you are by yourself all the time or you don't go out with other people then there is a good chance that you will not be accepted. It's most important to become an aspirant - it's how you are with other people. And you also have to do a piece of work as well."*

The coupling in these links was very tight. Evidence of this comes from UK Apprenti who described the general context provided by the House for learning. He said:

> *"I get up at 05h30. At 06h15 I cycle to work and I get there in time for a 07h00 start. We work through without a break until lunchtime. We get a good break for lunch usually over an hour or so, much longer than in the factory where I used to work in Sunderland.. Afternoon shifts usually finish at 16h30, sometimes earlier. I cycle back to the House, arriving about 17h30. Dinner is at 19h00; everyone eats together; it's a bit formal with collars and ties expected. At 20h00*

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[1] L'education means socially acceptable behaviour. It has nothing to do with the acquisition of technical knowledge or skills.

everyone is in the workshop doing homework, which can be a practical piece or theoretical exercises; or in a class following a course. This goes on every night, except Saturday and Sunday, until 22h00. You're also in classes on Saturday mornings between 08h00-12h00. Some Apprentis go out on a Friday night when class is finished, but a lot of them are too knackered. Saturday afternoon and Sunday are free time, but people don't have a lot of money to spend (Matt, UK Apprenti, Lille and Muizon Houses).

Further evidence of the tight coupling comes from the discipline required of the Apprentis to complete their class studies, and the role of Compagnons in enforcing it. One UK Apprenti reported a picture of draconian disciple with attendance at Saturday morning classes enforced by two carpenter Compagnons who went round Apprentis' rooms at 07h30 overturning occupied beds. Others said that they would be asked to account for themselves if found out of class or the workshop during study periods.

The Houses can be considered as a separate sub-system. There were nearly 60 of these scattered throughout France and a handful abroad. Although they were an integral part of the CdD system they were independent in the sense they could be opened and closed without damage to the rest of the system. The functioning of those abroad was adapted to local working conditions. For example the House in Cologne did not run evening workshop sessions; rather it encouraged residents to participate in the life of the local German community.

The loosely couple nature of the Houses provided a valuable buffer against some important environmental shifts. One UK Apprenti described how the firm in which he had been working had been taken over; the new owners had strategies of massification and task simplification resulting in a drying up of the flow of skilled work essential for his personal development. He had raised the matter with his Prévôt and Maitre de Stage and they found him a new job in a different House.

3.6. THE IINTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CdD IN UK

The internationalization of the CdD provides a good lens through which can be observed many of the problems of organizational adaptation. Historically the CdD was an international organization; it has always accepted non-French members into its French Houses and a handful of these were to be found in all the Houses we visited. Houses could be found abroad in Germany, Ireand and Canada. From 2002 the pace of internationalization quickened with

the CdD both broadening and deepening its links with countries like the USA, Japan and New Zealand.

A country of major interest was the United Kingdom. Around this time a Prévôt with special responsibility for the United Kingdom was appointed and Aspirants began to appear in increasing numbers in British factories and workshops. This had the effect of arousing the curiosity of some UK employers and state agencies. As a result, two linked initiatives were established between the United Kingdom. The first was the IJP; the functioning and background to this project has been described elsewhere (Malloch and Redman, 2005; Malloch et al., 2004). In terms of numbers attracted and successfully trained the IJP was not a great success. The second was to establish one of more CdD Houses in the UK and it is to this project that we now turn.

Interest in the CdD's model of training and development brought together a loose coalition of employers; state agencies interested in vocational education and training, and technology transfer; and Gateshead Borough Council (GBC) a local authority. These actors, in conjunction with the CdD provided the resources and the management for the IJP. Between 2003 and 2005 GBC became the lead UK partner between the UK and the CdD. Gateshead historically had been a depressed large town, in Northern England, whose traditional economic base of shipbuilding, heavy engineering and coal-mining had suffered dramatic decline since the 1970s. Unemployment levels were high; paradoxically these existed cheek-by-jowl with skill shortages in many sectors, but especially construction and engineering. In common with many similar European cities it suffered from problems of crime, graffiti and drugs, a large proportion of which involved young people. The conurbation had a housing stock which was old and of low quality and much of which needed to replaced.

However, Gateshead had many potential assets. There were pockets of older properties set next to parkland, designed to a high standard, but in desperate need of refurbishment. The town was set on the banks of the Tyne; its riverside area had huge development potential for cultural, business, leisure and housing purposes. In 2004 many major projects had been completed, were in progress, or had been commissioned - but much remained to be done. Money was available: GBC had been remarkably successful in attracting funds for urban regeneration from the EU, national government and the lottery. The local authority was run by the Labour Party who had a socially progressive agenda and who worked closely with the

trades unions on issues of mutual importance. The day-to-day management of GBC was in the hands of competent, professional managers. As well as assets such as cash and resources the local authority had extensive social capital through its network of political contacts at regional and national level.

The dilemma for the local authority was simple. They needed to invest considerable sums of capital in new buildings and infrastructure, yet they were acutely aware that unless they could improve the supply of skilled labour in construction and engineering, then a large proportion of the money spent would be spent on inflating pay packets. Frequent reference was made to projects such as Canary Wharf and the construction of the Docklands Light Railway in London where a similar phenomenon had been observed. Matching the supply of skilled construction and engineering workers to demand was likely to be a problem.

The idea emerged of establishing a network of CdD Houses in the UK. GBC would build a House on the site of a technical college it owned and managed; the college's workshop could be used by the House and the CdD would provide the management and instructors.

It was recognised that there were many problems. These included :

1. A network of Houses was required: one House on its own would be of limited value. Through the Labour Party discussions were started with other local authorities, who shared GBC's problems and outlook, with a view to establishing Houses in other parts of the UK.
2. How could the CdD's system of formation be calibrated with that of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme, the UK's national framework of apprenticeship training? Work had began on training UK personnel who could accredit the CdD's qualifications in the UK system, but there were reservations about the extent to which the CdD's conception of skill could be reconciled with anglo-saxon notions
3. Could local employers be persuaded to offer employment to Apprentis and Aspirants? The CdD was virtually unknown in the UK. The local authority employed relatively few builders and construction engineers; most were employed by private employers and their co-operation was vital.

But one problem transcended all of these and concerned the key policy makers in the local authority and the CdD as they knowledge of each other grew. Was it possible to transplant an essentially ancient French institution to the UK? We discuss the issues involved in the next section.

4. CASE ANALYSIS : UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF A COUPLED SYSTEM

4.1 THE CdD IS A COUPLED SYSTEM

The CdD can be said to be loosely coupled with its external environment, and displays a mix of loose and tight 'within-couplings', in other words, elements of the CdD display variable degrees of coupling with each other. Weick (1976)has extensively discussed the virtues and downside of especially loose coupling within an organization. Some of his findings can be applied to this case:

4.1.1 Loose Couplings:

Loose coupling of an organization with its overall socio-cultural environment fosters perseverance of the institutional core of the organization, but it might also allow the organization to maintain what Weick (1976) calls 'anachronistic practices' in the sense that there is less pressure to respond to small changes in the environment. This raises the question of how far 'anachronistic practices' should be considered as something inherently negative. They have a positive aspect namely an imperviousness to faddisms and a buffering from shifts in the socio-cultural environment.

It should also be noted that some local adaptations were possible. This included the responsiveness of Houses abroad to local working conditions, both in terms of the set-up of the daily schedule. For example the German House in Cologne did not have the evening workshop sessions, encouraging the resident compagnons to participate in life of the host country instead. Local breakdowns can be sealed off from the rest of the system. Each House is a standalone unit to such an extent that an economic or institutional crisis of a House would not endanger the CdD as such.

4.1.2 Tight Couplings

The CdD displays considerably high institutional within-coupling, where each element represents the whole in an almost holographic way (Hedlund, 1986) The advantage of this high institutional coherence is that such an organization is less likely to succumb to faddisms.

The diffusion of information within a tightly coupled system is very fast. For example, high institutional coherence establishes solid communication links between elements, ensures the willingness of all members to use these links and more generally instils common concerns and a mutually shared outlook on the world and facilitates information exchange through a shared language and a high amount of shared implicit knowledge. On the other hand high institutional coherence could depress innovation.

The CdD is an organization that features a high degree of control and coordination. According to Weick (1976) this does not give actors a sense of self determination. His interpretation is that within the taut command individuals will develop some sort of protective mechanism to establish some slack. The CdD is however highly co-ordinated and controlled. But because of the high degree of institutionalisation of the CdD, members do not possess countervailing mechanisms, nor do they aspire to them. They share a mutually-agreed definition of the CdD and have internalised its practices. Thus, because of the deeply institutionalised nature of the CdD, this organization can reap some of the benefits of tight coupling without suffering from its drawbacks.

Similar phenomena can be observed in military elite units and some religious orders, such as the Jesuits (Hedlund, 1986). There is a strong advantage to tight institutional and organizational coupling, shared mindsets, and a clear hierarchy: it permits swift action and can actually increase organizational actors' ability to deal with unforeseen situations without ever recurring sessions of consensus seeking. In the CdD case, every actor shares a clear blueprint of what the CdD is, and this is part of their innermost mindset, it therefore does not need constant negotiation or consensus seeking. The consensus on the essence of the CdD is universally accepted. This high degree of institutionalisation of the concept of Compagnonnage will actually allow the organization CdD to sometimes maintain looser coupling between some elements; it thus ensures flexibility for local responses while protecting the closed, tightly coupled core.

4.2 INTERNATIONALIZATION : A DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

To understand the CdD as a dynamic system two issues must be distinguished. The first is the past development and the institutional roots of the CdD as a relatively closed system. Second, the key issues which this system is facing in the near future. Again, we can distinguish two challenges: one is the move towards internationalization. The other is that the CdD as a system is facing environmental changes that are essentially different from past changes, and against which tight coupling and relative closure alone cannot protect it, at least in the long run. This is because of what we call 'the erosion of the institutional mother soil', a result of globalisation. We will suggest that in addition to relative closure and tight coupling, the search for new institutional grounding will be necessary, and that possibly this grounding – and social legitimation for further existence- can be found in institutions countervailing to the megatrend of globalisation.

With respect to internationalization, the CdD continues to exist successfully. We can hypothesise that it is precisely the relative closure of the system – its buffering from environmental shifts - that have so far ensured its success. Two seminal writings on the cultural embeddedness of work attitudes are those of d'Iribane (1994)and Kallinikos (2003). They advance two views on workers' attitudes toward their profession and whether or not there exists a link between professional identity and the individual's larger sense of citizenship.

D'Iribarne bases his discussion of the French work ethics on a concept of honour already described by Montesquieu (1748) which is deeply entrenched in French society and which leads the individual to consider himself to be honour-bound to certain behaviour in function of his belonging to an 'estate', or socio-professional class. According to d'Iribarne, there is change over time in what practice or action is precisely considered to be 'noble' or 'right' at a particular point or context, but what does not change is the concept of honour as the basis for action and self-identity of the individual.

In contrast Kallinikos (2003) juxtaposes what he considers to be mainly a characteristic of a historical socio-cultural framework, where an individual's public and private roles constituted a harmonious whole and a worker was:

"a solid individual capable of constantly assimilating and accumulating the lessons of a long-lasting occupational journey" (p.600)

and a post- modern socio-cultural situation, where "modern humans are involved in organizations qua roles, rather than qua persons" (p.595).

It is the variance in couplings between system elements and the closedness of the whole that gives the CdD a survival potential within France – but which makes it very difficult to export the system. The reason for this is that what makes the system integrated and coherent is a meta-institution - the Honour Principle – which, as we have seen from the evidence is extremely tacit. It could be argued that extreme tacitness can be the guarantor of survival, against the odds, of an institution and of its extraordinary strength. But it is also immobile, and highly dependent on a certain institutional external context.

By exporting the CdD system that is by establishing Houses in other countries it is possible to export organizational elements such as hierarchy, house rules, practices and procedures. But, precisely because the pivotal point of the CdD is a principle that is so deeply embedded in French culture, it is nearly impossible to export what could be considered its genetic blueprint. Instead, and to remain in the metaphorical language of aboriculture, exporting a House can be likened to grafting. Hence, in the first generation or space of time after the establishment of a House abroad, we can still expect a very strong phenotypical resemblance to CdD institutions in the mother country, and even a survival of the honour principle, taken with them by the French compagnons that serve as founding fathers of the House abroad. But in the long term, the whole blueprint for further development – and the options for mutations-will be different. The graft will always be qualitatively different from the trunk which depends so strongly on its embeddedness in the fecund soil of French culture.

According to d'Iribarne (1994) and Crozier (1963), the Honour Principle survives change because stakeholders accept that change can only be induced on the basis of an existing meta – principle, a philosophy upon which they are all agreed. Thus, in the French context, what is considered to be 'noble' does change over time, but according to d'Iribane the concept of "honour as base of nobility" does not. (pp.92-3).

4.3 TWO TYPES OF CHANGE

In the present case, there are at least two quite different types of institutional change at work: First, the type of change over time described by d'Iribarne (1994) where the underlying meta-principle has not really changed. This can be called 'induced change'. In induced change, the initiators of the change come mostly from within, and act as countervailing forces. Examples abound in history, such as the Révolution Française or various worker movements in the 1800s in Europe. Even if they come not strictly from within, they act in a clear relation to the system that is to change (e.g. the USA trying to induce cultural changes in Afghanistan).

But the changes facing the CdD and other organizations are more and more frequently of quite another type: This can be called 'diffuse change', which is composed of at least two elements: one, it is composed of impulses for change emanating not just from one or two interest groups that typically come from *within* the same cultural sphere. Instead, it can be conceived as a constant bombardment with exogenously generated ideas, concepts, institutions and postures many of which are contradictory. This is one of the key impacts of globalisation: individuals, groups, organizations, societies are permanently bombarded with these signals.

This is not really a 'change' in the voluntarist sense of the word, but rather an *erosion*. Change implies replacing one thing with another. Erosion means that institutions and ideas to embrace disappear without replacement. Rather than replacement, there is multiple choice without institutional guidance. This is one of the key features of a post-modern world. Marx's (1848) description of the effect of the effects of unrestrained economic development in a capitalist society on institutions and relations is apt:

> *"Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air …"*

Table 1 compares some features of induced change with those of change by erosion.

Table 1: Induced Change and Change by Erosion

Induced change	Change by erosion
- underlying meta-principle remains intact - agents of change frequently come from within the system… (e.g. revolutionaries in French revolution) …or act in close relation with (and against) the established system (e.g. US forces in Afghanistan) - this type of change aims at changing an established order or overthrowing an institutional hegemon - impulse for change mostly from one direction	- multiple impulses for change coming from different directions - impulses are generated exogenously… - impulses often not aimed at institutional change - grounded in meta-institution of "pluralism" or no meta-institution at all - does not aim at institutional replacement

d'Iribarne's (1994) explanation for why an apparently anachronistic Honour Principle has survived can be used to explain partially the CdD's survival to date, but it does not serve as an argument for why it will survive into the future. The contemporary global phenomenon of massive institutional erosion threatens the cultural soil which has given it nurture. Its future lies not in the mainstream of existing cultures and institutions, but possibly as part of a countervailing culture.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has tried to extend the discussion on the dynamics of organizations as social systems by proposing two key concepts whose use can help us to understand internal dynamics of organizational change.

First, it is important to extend the use of the loose coupling metaphor to include other types of couplings, to conceive an organization as a set of *variably coupled*. Coupling must be seen as variable phenomena located on a continuum between *tight* and *loose*. Examining these intra-organizational couplings in this light illuminates the processes of organizing and hence that of organizational dynamics.

The second is that study of these questions, problems and issues introduces the concept of a *'network of sensemaking and sensegiving'*. This takes us beyond an organization conceived in simple terms of nodes and links. These yield an analysis which is essentially static. Understanding the dynamic of change requires a framework of perception built on *sensemaking* and *sensegiving* processes (Gioia and Chittipedi, 1991). These are the processes which drive any organizational dynamic. In other words, essence is as important as structure.

In examining internationalization processes, we must therefore not only look at the structural replication of an organization in a different socio-cultural context, but we must also ask ourselves whether the very processes of sensemaking and sensegiving can be replicated. We have suggested that upon 'grafting' an organization structure onto a different socio-cultural trunk rooted in a foreign soil, the graft will, at the beginning bear phenotypical resemblance to the parent. In the long run the tree will develop quite differently because the institutional 'mother soil' is different. Any organization evolves in function of internal sensemaking and sensegiving processes, which in turn are functions of the institutional environment.

We conclude by indicating that these phenomena are not unique to internationalization, but can also be found any type of institutional change that is characteristic of a post-modern world. Our approach can therefore be used to understand a wide range of organisational change issues.

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