

## CHAPTER 3

### SELF-MANAGEMENT IN SERVICE TEAMS: BANKING, INSURANCE, AND MANUFACTURING

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the case study teams and describe their history, composition, tasks, and organizational position. The descriptions aim at providing a context for the analysis of gendered processes that follows, beginning with Chapter 4. However, by describing each team in detail, I also offer a snapshot of the different stages of development of self-managing teams. My objective is not to rank the teams in terms of their maturity as self-managing teams, but instead, to communicate to the reader that there is a diversity of ways in which the concept of self-management has been put to practice.

The policy and practice of self-management vary across industries and organizations, as well as teams, and the extent to which teams are self-directed may differ even within the same organization. At first glance, self-managing teams in the service sector appear to include a diverse set of practices that managers label “self-management” or “self-direction,” regardless of the degree to which the characteristics, work processes, and decision-making power of a team meet some basic elements of self-management.

The case study teams present no exception to the variety of self-management practices characteristic of the service sector. Although the teams I interviewed in the three site organizations (Omni Insurance, Eastern Alliance, and Motorcol) all were named by management as “self-directed,” they differed in various respects, ranging from the way they were created to their decision-making power and autonomy. In spite of these differences, the interviews revealed a common theme: a pursuit of greater self-determination. For example, many respondents had a very clear mental image of what a “self-directed team” should be, even if their own team did not fully meet what they considered were the standards for self-management.

The main task of this chapter is to introduce the four case teams and also highlight their different approaches to self-management. Delving into the history of each team will both reveal the differences in their evolution and touch upon many similarities. I found that gender shaped work in each team quite differently, depending, for example, on the teams’ tasks, structure, organizational placement, and the amount of the team’s autonomy.

The team introductions are structured so that each team will be described in terms of its history, gender and race composition, tasks, and organizational position. In addition to describing the demographic make-up and tasks of each team, I use the voices of the team members themselves to briefly review how each team came together. Using the members’ own narratives of team histories conveys important information about the teams’ organizational context as well as provides insight into the larger socio-economic environment in which these companies operate.

Although I consider the degree of self-management in each team,<sup>23</sup> I wish to emphasize the different evolution of the team before I interviewed their members, instead of the mere extent of their autonomy. It is equally important to describe and discuss how the specific organizational context of each team shaped its version of--or stage on the continuum toward--an ideal-typical self-management team. The organizational context of each team also is important for the order in which I introduce the teams. Because my observations and understanding of work and interaction in each team was based on what I had encountered in the other teams, I introduce them in the order I interviewed them. Also, I include a brief description of the organizational position of each team in order for the reader to develop a more vivid contextual understanding of how gendering processes vary across different organizational levels; in other words, how the interplay of gender and organizational (hierarchical) status produces and reproduces different kinds of organizational inequalities.

In general, my objective is to show how gender can be a critical mediating factor in the process of becoming a team. According to my theoretical premise, self-managing teams may imply more egalitarian gender power relations; however, teams emerge and are developed within organizations that are already gendered in many ways (Acker 1990, 1992). Therefore, I demonstrate how the development toward self-management in many of the teams followed already extant gender patterns. The discussion of the self-managing status of each team is thus meant to provide the reader a more detailed understanding of gendering processes in the specific context of self-management.

### **3.2. Bank Services: Two Approaches to Self-Managing Teams at Eastern Alliance**

Two of the four case teams in this study work in a large commercial bank, "Eastern Alliance," which operates in the eastern and southern United States. The specific site of the two teams, the Special Projects team and the Employee Credit team, is a Consumer Credit Operation Center of the bank located in a mid-size southern city. Both teams worked in customer service and were specifically focused on serving their "internal customers," that is, other employees in the bank. The Special Projects team's daily tasks were to maintain the bank's various automated systems and to provide hardware and software services throughout the consumer credit operation. The Employee Credit team processed and approved applications for loans and credit cards for the bank's own employees. Both teams were established as a result of the organization's effort to restructure the work flow in different operations and to shift and consolidate services around its southern service centers.

#### 3.2.1. Special Projects Team: History and Composition

The restructuring of work (called "Work Design") at Eastern Alliance took place in 1995 and instituted the first steps toward teamwork in the organization. It also shaped the birth of the

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<sup>23</sup> I describe each team along a continuum from traditionally managed employees to a self-managing entity. By taking this approach I presume that this development is a (curvi)linear progression toward a more complete fulfillment of the ideal-typical team characteristics (described in Ch. 1). The interviews showed that all four teams had their own idea of what the process of becoming a (full-fledged) self-managing team was like, even though they were not at all certain of the final outcome, that is, whether or not they would one day become what they considered an ideal-typical team.

Special Projects and Employee Credit teams. The Special Projects team was put together to provide business automation services to the bank's internal clients, that is, other employees in the organization, and to help with mergers and acquisitions and other miscellaneous projects. From the beginning, the Special Projects team (although it was officially named "Business Automation Team," members referred to it as "Special Projects") employed technical experts that had previously worked either as individual contributors in the organization or held management positions in the bank's other departments. Gary, a Special Projects team member, described how a group of previously independent employees (who were not part of any particular department) were brought together to form the team:

As they [management] chose up teams, there were a lot of [employees] that didn't fall into what the organization had first been designed; I was one of them. We had an important job to do, but we kind of were just out of sight, on our own. I'd basically been all alone for the past couple of years. ...[F]inally, as the structure began to settle down, guys like me and [names other team members] who all were system support people, made our way over to what they called "Special Projects" (Gary, white man, 33).

Another member, Victoria, also recalled this process of grouping together a set of individuals who previously had specialized functions in the organization:

When it came down to it, it's almost as if they didn't know what to do with people who had these specialized functions. So, then they came up with Special Projects team, because we didn't fit in (Victoria, black woman, 46).

United in not being a good fit for any specific task description and team, the current members of the Special Projects found themselves in a group loosely defined as performing "systems support."

At the time of my research, the Special Projects team was made up of six members--three men and three women--and had a man as team leader. In terms of racial-ethnic diversity, the team was relatively homogeneous, with five white members--three men and two women--and one black woman. All team members were seasoned employees who were experienced in supporting automated systems. They possessed specialized knowledge of business automation (for example, mainframe and personal computers) and had assisted, for example, in designing and implementing the bank's mergers and acquisitions. All of them had joined the team at the same time, except for one man who had been hired by the team a few months after it was formed.

Table 3.1.

Eastern Alliance Special Projects Team Composition

Barbara, consumer credit systems analyst	White woman, 43/ 25 yrs in the Bank
Gary, system administrator	White man, 33/ 9 yrs in the Bank
Gloria, system specialist	White woman, 48/ 29 yrs in the Bank
John, team leader	White man
Mel, system technical analyst	White man, 32/ 2,5 yrs in the Bank
Mike, system administrator	White man, 46/ 8 mo. in the Bank
Victoria, business analyst	Black woman, 46/ 25 yrs in the Bank

The forming of the Special Projects team in many ways reflects the current trend of reducing organizational layers by trimming away middle-management positions and reorganizing employees into teams (e.g., Heckscher and Applegate, 1994: 5-6). Transforming middle-management into self-management may have been at least one motivation underlying the restructuring of the Alliance’s operation center. This is shown by the fact that many Special Projects members ended up in the team as a result of downsizing--either in Eastern Alliance or in another financial institution. For example, Barbara, a team member who had been a branch manager before joining the team, described the teaming process as based on the “elimination of middle management”:

...[B]asically, to put it in simplest terms, there were levels of middle management that were more or less eliminated. I ended up in the kind of grey area, and I could make a decision as to whether I wanted to be a team leader for a small team out on the floor or whether I wanted to work on a Special Projects team which handles a lot of system-related things (Barbara, white woman, 43).

Another member, Gloria, described how she first came to be employed by Eastern Alliance as a result of a large merger and had worked as a supervisor, only to lose her position in the “Work Design” reorganization. While other supervisors were given the job of a team leader, she was designated to be in the Special Projects team, where she could use her expertise in supporting the mainframe computer systems. In addition to Barbara and Gloria, another team member, Mike, also had sought employment in the Special Projects team after his job in another area bank had been relocated out of the city.

The experiences of these members indicate that teams like Special Projects may provide a convenient way for companies to retain important skills and expertise while downsizing and restructuring. Nevertheless, becoming a team member in the process of organizational restructuring may cause employees to view their team membership as a dubious benefit, as they attempt to negotiate between the demand of team commitment and their future job security. Team

membership, therefore, acquires a meaning that is intricately linked to the instability of organizational structures in the financial sector.

In spite of some initial uncertainty about the future of the Special Projects team, its organizational position became secured under a new division manager. Three months after my field research, Special Projects became a part of a larger, 22-member virtual team which combined three southern operation centers and held meetings through phone conferences. Although this study examines the Special Projects team as it was in the spring of 1997, such sudden reorganizations are not uncommon in the fast-changing financial sector. Incidentally, since the interviews, the Eastern Alliance Corporation went through yet another merger, further expanding the size and geographical coverage of the bank's operations.

### 3.2.2. Team Tasks and Organizational Position

The main task of the Special Projects team was to assist with the various components of business automation in the bank's Consumer Credit systems. The team was responsible, for example, for assisting with daily operations, testing hardware and software, as well as planning for the future automation needs for Consumer Credit. To perform these tasks, the team consisted of Technical Analysts and Consultants (Position Overview, Eastern Alliance).

Although each Special Projects team member held skills that were critical for supporting the bank's technical operations, their individual work tasks were very different. The diversity of job descriptions was acknowledged by several members, and they often referred to it as a source of confusion. All of them were responsible for supporting automated business operations, but their tasks differed in terms of the type of a computer system each supported: the main frame or personal computers (PCs). These systems required different experience and skills and therefore, while 'systems support' was the common thread that tied the members into the team, they lacked detailed knowledge of each other's expertise. Each member had a specialized function, which others in the team did not know how to perform. This lack of common skills was frustrating to some members who felt that no one would be able to fill in if they were not available. For example, Victoria brought up the problem of back-up:

[W]e all had these specialized duties, and you think of the word "team"--everyone is supposed to be able to back each other up. You basically know the same things, and we found that we didn't because we all had these little specialized functions that we ... had performed for years. So, when it came down to trying to make sure you had back up: for example, I'm on a team and if I'm out sick, who is going to handle my client? (Victoria, black woman, 46)

This sentiment was echoed among the team members, although they had begun cross-training one another. After having worked as a team for over a year, Special Projects members felt confident enough to respond to each other's telephone requests and to provide information on some basic questions concerning each others' tasks.

The members' technical expertise, along with their previous supervisory positions, helped designate the team's organizational position. Although no official description of the team's status in the organizational hierarchy existed, through my participant observation and interviews, I was

able to establish that, at least informally, this group of former managers and supervisors had a fairly high status. One indicator of the team's organizational status was the fact that the members often interacted with the upper management. For instance, after working on the technical implementation of a merger, one member recalled having been personally thanked by the bank's CEO. Other indications of status included the team's access to information. During my visit with the team, I witnessed a situation where the team was gathered together to watch a new Eastern Alliance television commercial that was shown by the center's public relations officer. While the commercials may have been shown to other audiences, this informal and clearly private screening symbolized the teams' special status, which became all the more evident when Special Projects was compared to Employee Credit, the other team I studied at Eastern Alliance.

### 3.2.3. Employee Credit Team: History and Composition

The Employee Credit and Special Projects teams worked on the same floor and were separated from each other only by a hallway. However, their histories were quite different. The Employee Credit team also was formed during Work Design, although the employee credit services had been in the company longer. The members who made up the Employee Credit team in the spring of 1997 had, up to that point, worked together for approximately one year and a half--roughly the same length of time as the Special Projects team.

Reflecting the typical gender composition of clerical service work (e.g., Reskin and Padavich, 1994), the Employee Credit team was dominated by women. Of the ten members in the clerical positions of customer service, eight were women and two were men. The racial-ethnic composition of the team included, in addition to the team's white woman leader and a white man coach, six white women, two white men, and two black women in customer service.

The Employee Credit team consisted of workers who had experience with over-the-phone loan services in different departments. Many of them knew each other from having worked together in other positions in the bank, while some came into the team from another bank that had merged with Eastern Alliance. All members, however, were familiar with corporate downsizing and reorganization. For example, Patricia, a newcomer to the team, described her experience with reorganization as follows:

I worked in Legal Recovery, I guess that was what they call it. It used to be Collections, but then Collections moved to [another city]. So the Collection people became a part of the Recovery-- the "Bankruptcy and Recovery" were renamed "Recovery." And we had the legal people. Now it's the legal side of it, [and then] they downsized again... (Patricia, black woman, 33).

The team's formal leader, Dianne, also had previously held a branch manager position; as a team leader, she was responsible for the productivity and the long term development of the group. She was assisted by a "team coach," Richard, who acted as an informal leader, trained team members in selling loans, and approved larger loans for team members who had a lower lending limit.

In addition to the team leader and the coach, the Employee Credit team had an internal hierarchy with several layers of status with respect to both individual and team tasks. Not counting the leader and the coach whose positions were considered supervisory, the team consisted of ten front-

line customer service employees, called “lenders” or “loan officers.” While all lenders appeared equal to an outsider, and were treated as such in most team-oriented matters, the experience that they had with lending and the lending limits that marked their history in the job created a hierarchy of positions--albeit informal--that was acknowledged by all team members. In practice, the lending limit placed a dollar cap on how large a loan an individual lender had authority to approve. The highest lending limits (from \$75,000 up to \$150,000) signified the number of years spent on the job and belonged to the most experienced lenders. The newcomers began without any lending authority or a modest limit of one thousand dollars. As an example of progression, one team member, Sandra, had started with no authority and had worked her way up to the higher limits of \$75,000; similarly, Pete, who had started his ‘lending career’ when joining the team, was already up to \$25,000.

The meaning of the lending limit was obvious: those with higher limits were considered by team members as having greater knowledge and influence not only in matters of individual loans but also in general questions concerning loan application and credit approval. When team members were asked if they felt that some members had more power than others, they most often interpreted “power” to mean, concretely, a lending limit. “Power,” therefore, was signified in the amount of money team members were able to lend out to the customers and was intimately associated with other characteristics, such as knowledge of the company and experience in the job. The comments of Brenda, Michelle, and Chuck illustrate this point:

**DO YOU THINK THAT SOME MEMBERS OF YOUR TEAM HAVE MORE POWER THAN OTHERS?**

I think the ones that have been with the company longer, that are more seasoned in what they’re doing. Yeah, in a sense I think they have more power. ...[B]eing knowledgeable sometimes just means that you have more power (Brenda, black woman, 42).

As far as loan limits, what they can do and can’t do, yes, but as far as, if it is available to everybody, I don’t see where one has more power than the other (Michelle, white woman, 46).

No. I think it used to be that way, like when we were beginning, there were like certain people that had a lot more power and pretty much you had to play their game. It’s not like that any more, you know. Now everything is pretty much even; of course you have the senior people. When you get like Jane-Ann or Shelley, you can tell their experience by the amount of their lending limit (Chuck, white man, 25).

The ten lenders were divided further into full lenders (the eight members with the aforementioned lending limits) and support specialists (two members with either no lending authority or a low limit of a few hundred dollars) whose job included taking credit card applications and helping with the lenders’ paperwork.

The experience and lending limit of the Employee Credit team members were acquired through time on the job. Accordingly, it was mostly the women who had held these jobs for years, which

gave them a higher lending authority than the two men who also worked in customer service and who were younger and less experienced in the job. Focusing only on the team composition at the time of the study, one might be tempted to conclude that it was the women who wielded power in the Employee Credit team. Nevertheless, it became apparent that for the older and more experienced women (between the ages of 33 and 52), this job was a terminal position, while the younger men treated their jobs as a way to learn the trade on the way to other positions in the field. Furthermore, there were no older men working in the phone service. Incidentally, Richard, a former branch manager in his 50s, had started in the team as a phone consultant and a lender in customer service, but because of his management experience, he eventually was promoted to a coach position and was given some supervisory responsibilities.

Table 3.2.

Eastern Alliance Employee Credit Team Composition

Brenda, lender	Black woman, 42/ 3 yrs in the Bank
Chuck, lender	White man, 25
Dianne, team leader	White woman, 40s
Elizabeth, lender	White woman, 52/ 28 yrs in the Bank
Jane-Ann, lender	White woman, 51/ 16 yrs in the Bank
Maryanne, support specialist	White woman, 37/ 5 yrs in the Bank
Michelle, lender	White woman, 46/ 12 yrs in the Bank
Patricia, support specialist	Black woman, 33/ 5 yrs in the Bank
Pete, lender	White man, 25/ 4,5 yrs in the Bank
Richard, team coach/lender	White man, 52/ 24 yrs in the Bank
Sandra, lender	White woman, 42/ 20 yrs in the Bank
Shelley, lender	White woman, 44/ 10 yrs in the Bank

In sum, the clerical and phone service tasks of the Employee Credit team differed from the technically-oriented work of the Special Project team. In the case of Employee Credit, it was perhaps the lower skilled and feminized service work (despite the considerable lending authority) that limited the autonomy of workers and justified the two layers of supervision and control. It also may have contributed to the interesting and slightly contradictory organizational position of the team, to which I will now turn.

3.2.4. Team Tasks and Organizational Position

Compared to the Special Projects team, the Employee Credit team occupied a lower position in the organizational hierarchy of Eastern Alliance. First of all, the Employee Credit team was not a team of former managers and supervisors like the Special Projects team, but instead, consisted of



front-line customer service personnel, whose tasks were routinized and controlled. To illustrate one specific way in which the lenders' jobs were controlled, I use the phone service as an example. (Other types of control will be discussed in connection with gender divisions in Chapter 4.)

The daily work of Employee Credit members involved answering the phone, taking credit card applications, and approving loans for the bank's employees. The loan consultants (or lenders) processed loan applications, and sold credit protection and other bank products, while the two support specialists processed phone, mail, and fax loan requests and provided back-up assistance to the lenders. The team members began each day at 8 am and stayed at the phones for most of the day, with a few breaks for catching up with paperwork. They were seated in groups of four, close to each other, with their desks facing the portable office walls. Each member wore headphones and was available for phone calls at any time (if he or she were not on a break). Being constantly prepared to answer an incoming call made interaction with coworkers (and the interviewer) erratic, as a phone call could come in the middle of a sentence. In fact, it was assumed that any conversation among the team members could be interrupted by a phone call, and that it would require the full attention of the lender. The priority of providing customer service, however, sometimes interfered with the flow of information within the team and, in the worst case, excluded an individual lender from receiving important team updates. Getting incomplete (and interrupted) information was often frustrating, as one loan officer, Brenda, explains:

[S]ometimes you're in a middle of a conversation [with a customer], and if someone walks by when you're talking to a customer on the phone, I try to acknowledge that they're there and I'm talking to a customer. I have to tune them out totally, so if they come by and say: "In the future, do this," I'm probably not gonna hear it because I'm trying to tune them out (Brenda, black woman, 42).

Hence, the incoming phone calls imposed a structure of time consumption (and attention) over which the lenders had very little control. To counter the lack of control, many of them used a self-determined method of how they used their time on and off the phones. For example, one loan officer had developed a strategy that allowed her to finish each loan application before taking another call. In this way, she was able to exert control over her time and independently organize her work.

Although the phone service imposed controls on the time and work flow of individual team members, their job had another facet that, paradoxically, allowed them autonomy. It was specifically the independence over lending decisions that had won Employee Credit its informal status as a self-managing team. While performing seemingly routinized work, structured by the incoming calls, these loan officers held considerable power over the loan approvals. Although each loan application went through a preliminary approval by the central computer that was programmed to reject risky loans, the lenders had full authority to override the standardized (computer's) decision and approve the loan. This autonomy was somewhat mitigated by the fact that each loan officer was required to fill a monthly quota of loans, calculated by the amount of the outgoing credit (or the quota may have pushed them toward loan approval rather than rejection). Moreover, the quotas were tied to a newly established incentive system, which rewarded individual lenders for the total of their approved loan amounts and thus created an atmosphere of within-team competition. Predictably, competition among team members did not enhance teamwork, as I will demonstrate later.

The freedom to decide about potentially large sums of money gave these lenders an influential position in respect to their customers. Bearing in mind that the Employee Credit team's customers were the bank's own employees, the team also held a special position in the operations center as well as in other parts of the Eastern Alliance organization. Many team members explained that as part of Employee Credit, they were known throughout the entire Eastern Alliance corporation. In addition to being known in the corporation, the members' ability to access classified information on the financial situation of their customers (i.e. the bank's employees, including the CEOs), contributed to the informal clout of the Employee Credit team. Although this influence did not directly translate into an explicit power position in the organization, it did help define the team as a "special" unit that possessed a great deal of important information. As such, the team was singled out as a distinct unit in the organization, an image of which the team was fond and supported.

However the team benefitted in many ways from its informal status of a 'special group' with access to restricted information, this view of Employee Credit as a separate unit had a downside. According to the team coach, the group at times had been excluded from the information loop that included the bank's other teams and therefore had not received important team-oriented information. Informal separation from the rest of the consumer credit operations brought the Employee Credit team both advantages and disadvantages.

### 3.2.5. Self-Management in Eastern Alliance Teams

Although the Employee Credit and the Special Projects teams were both called "self-managing," the designation was informal. Eastern Alliance bank had not officially appointed these teams as self-directed or self-managing, although they were casually described as such by both team members and leaders. Responding to my request to study self-managed or self-directed teams, the unit leader identified the two teams as informally aspiring to the goal of self-direction. According to the unit leader, the organization had toyed with the idea of self-management, and while there were no plans to upgrade any team to a formal self-managing status, he personally encouraged self-management as a goal for teams that worked within the consumer credit operations.

The informal nature of self-management does not necessarily exclude the Employee Credit and Special Projects teams from this study. On the contrary, each team represents a specific stage in the evolution of teams from more traditional forms of leadership toward greater self-management-whether or not they eventually get there. The experience of these teams also underscores the fact that self-management should not be treated as a dichotomy but instead a continuum from more traditional management methods toward greater self-determination. The teams in this study represent different locations on this continuum.

Employee Credit and Special Projects teams existed in the same organization, but their approaches to self-management were rather different. The Employee Credit team members had a great deal of autonomy over individual lending decisions but lacked a clear sense of being a team. This was, however, more a structural than an individual problem. While team members assured me that they 'felt' like a team, a variety of organizational policies stood in direct opposition to some basic tenets of team building. For example, developing an environment that would be more conducive to teamwork was undermined by the individual-based incentive system that created competition among the members. Furthermore, the team members' individual authority over their work flow

and loan approvals did not directly translate into a voice equal to that of the team leaders, whose blessing was required for decisions that affected the whole team. Therefore, while the Employee Credit team may have been experimenting with self-management at the individual level, as a team, it continued to be traditionally managed.

By combining individual autonomy and traditional supervision, the Special Project team also straddled two different methods of management. The technical expertise of the members as well as the project-oriented work flow ensured that they had full autonomy over their tasks. However, the team as a whole was still supervised by a team leader, even though his role was not to be a traditional manager but a team facilitator. On the one hand, many team members pointed out that they lacked a common operative goal shared by all members that would foster their team spirit and enhance their a sense of being a team--an important factor in team development (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). On the other hand, some members were able to derive a common sense of purpose from the more general goals of the team, such as the objectives of staying under budget, meeting deadlines, and being supportive of other team members. Also, some members reported that as they learned cross-functional tasks and got to know more about the specific work their team colleagues were doing, they began to developed a “we-feeling” reflective of being a team.

On the continuum from traditional supervision toward a greater degree of self-management, the Special Projects team was more advanced than the Employee Credit team. Based on these cases, it may be that much of the maturity of a self-managing team is contingent upon the types of tasks and the organizational level at which it operates. The stereotypically feminine, routine clerical tasks performed by the Employee Credit team ranked lower in the organizational job hierarchy than the technological skills of the Special Projects team. Studies have shown that adopting new office technology, and especially computerization, can cause jobs to be either deskilled or upgraded (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 166). In Eastern Alliance, the specific computer skills involved in the Special Projects team’s business automation services marked the fine line between professional and clerical service work. For example, the computerized loan approval system used by the Employee Credit team could point to a possible deskilling of decision making in the future or, in the worst case, worker displacement (see, for example, Hacker, 1979). It shows that at least one important part in the process of deciding whether a loan should be approved had been automated, even though at this point the team members still were able to override the computer’s recommendations. This point also adds an interesting paradox to the self-management of the Employee Credit team: the very component of the loan approval that bore the clearest signs of possible deskilling was interpreted by managers as the key element that signified the members’ decision-making autonomy and thus separated Employee Credit from the rest of the teams performing similar tasks.

The two teams also differed in terms of their supervision. While phone service and the leaders’ supervision imposed controls on the predominantly female members of the Employee Credit team, the Special Projects team members had full autonomy over their projects and only instructional assistance from their leader-facilitator, who was supposed to be more of a visionary and future planner than a close supervisor of the members’ work projects (even though he formally had a more powerful position than a regular team member).

### 3.2.6. Gender, Organizational Position, and Teamwork

The two teams at Eastern Alliance reflect the prevailing perplexity of what exactly it means to be a self-managing team. Despite the absence of a formal organizational policy, the Special Projects and Employee Credit teams were considered to be self-managing as they were informally experimenting with employee autonomy. Another insight that emerged from my examination of the experiences of the teams at Eastern Alliance was that the development toward self-management varies according to the organizational level of the team. Teams at higher organizational levels and with greater status are likely to consist of skilled employees or educated professionals with well-paid jobs, greater access to organizational resources, and a low degree of supervision, as with the Special Projects team. Higher level employees possess many characteristics necessary for a successful self-managing team (such as access to resources and loose supervision) and therefore, may be predisposed to a fast track toward becoming a mature team.

The maturity of self-management is not only a function of a team's organizational level, but also reveals a gendered organizational structure already in place. The characteristics of the aforementioned higher level employees suggest pre-existing gendered organizational structures and masculine career tracks; women traditionally have held positions at the lower levels of organizations and pay scales (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Self-managing teams as organizational units may therefore be "pre-gendered" in that organizations may prefer implementing self-managing teams among the relatively autonomous professionals (who most likely are white men or consist of a mixture of white men and white women) rather than the more controlled workers at the lower organizational levels. Therefore, the adoption of teams among less-skilled workers--often women and racial-ethnic minorities--at lower organizational levels will not advance their organizational power and status to the same extent as it does the higher-organizational-level, skilled employees. Self-directed teams may be introduced into female-dominated clerical services, such as the Employee Credit team, but the pre-existing gendered nature of the job, for example, its relatively low status, deskilling, and the technologically imposed control of phone service are likely to shape the way the teams form and develop. Furthermore, because most jobs are gendered even before those who hold them are organized into self-managing teams, teams that are established also develop as gendered structures.

In sum, gender is intricately interwoven into the organizational level of teams. As the Eastern Alliance teams illustrate, self-management can take place at different organizational levels and, consequently, develop very differently. The organizational status of individual teams is largely based on what they do--their jobs, which are gendered. One can argue that there are gendering processes in all types of teams and work. However, the particular ways in which the two Eastern Alliance teams were gendered were, to some extent, predetermined by their organizational position.

The following examination of the other case study teams--the City County team at Omni Insurance and the Customer Support Network at Motorcol--will reveal that gender is present in all of them, but shapes their work in rather different ways.

### 3.3. Health Insurance: A Self-Managing Team at Omni Insurance

The second site organization in this study was “Omni Insurance,” a private, not-for-profit health insurance provider in the southern United States. The self-managing team I studied at Omni Insurance was called “the City County Account Management Team” (or for short, the “City County team”) named after its client, the City County. The City County is a large municipality that had contracted Omni to insure its employees. The City County team was responsible for managing the account, handling claims and billing, and maintaining contact with the client.

At the time of the study, Omni was undergoing an organizational restructuring which involved decentralizing its operations into geographical business units that were to oversee the growth and profitability of the company in different locations and to strengthen its local presence. The field study of the City County team was conducted partly in a large regional office, where most team members worked, and partly at a recreational resort where the team held its monthly meeting.

#### 3.3.1. City County Account Management Team: History and Composition

The City County team was created and developed by a handful of Omni managers who recognized that they needed an alternative method of managing their newly acquired large account. Much like the Eastern Alliance Bank, Omni Insurance had not officially designated the City County Account Management Team as self-managing; instead, the drive for greater autonomy emerged from among these managers whose main concerns were to successfully manage the account of their highly visible public client. This presented a challenge to Omni and required a team that would be able to quickly respond to City County’s different needs and maintain close contact with its representatives. Building a self-managing team around the City County account was, as Bob, one of the founding members, describes, a conscious effort to restructure the way the organization was managing its large accounts:

We [had] been a highly structured silo-type infrastructure; the silos built according to traditional functional lines within the corporation. . . Which required then, for decision-making and proper resolution, a process flow up the silo, to a higher level, across, and back down the silo. . . . It was obvious that some of the criteria for successful solutions, such as urgency, priority, and multidiscipline thought processes, were not served by that traditional structure (Bob, white man, 50s).

The original team consisted of six Omni employees who, prior to acquiring the City County account, had worked together in sales, marketing, and account management. The team quickly grew as the core members recruited representatives from other functional areas, such as medical management (i.e., representative of doctors and other health care providers), business analysis, and product development. At the time of the study, the team was comprised of eight members, three women and five men. The racial-ethnic make up of the City County team closely resembled the demographics of its racially and ethnically diverse location. Although the majority of team members were white (altogether five members, including all three women and two of the men), the presence of one black man and two Hispanic men gave it the most racial-ethnically diverse membership among the four case study teams.

Table 3.3.

Omni Insurance City County Account Management Team Composition

Angelo, marketing director	Hispanic man, 38/ 9 yrs in the organization
Anthony, account manager	Black man, 38/ 6 mo. in the organization
Bob, vice-president of marketing	White man, 50s/ 11 yrs in the organization
Brad, sales manager (team leader)	White man, 36/ 6 yrs in the organization
Cynthia, manager	White woman, 48/ 10 yrs in the organization
Margaret, manager of community and government relations	White woman, 54/ 11 yrs in the organization
Martha, product manager	White woman, 36/ 10 yrs in the organization
Roberto, senior health data analyst	Hispanic man, 32/ 10 mo. in the organization

After determining which functional areas of the company had to be involved in order to create an efficient self-managing team, the team’s originators set out to recruit members, a task that turned out quite challenging. One of the team’s founders, Brad, describes the process as a struggle for winning the commitment of potential team members:

It had to obviously be an individual who is open, who is committed, who can give us time. And that was the struggle. And it is struggle to this day because none of our evaluations, reviews, recognize our participation in the team from a time perspective [or] from an incentive perspective in terms of rewards. And you are expected to do your job and commit to this team. So choosing those individuals who were willing to sacrifice that, I think it was difficult. I think we looked for individuals who wanted to be a part of something ground-breaking for Omni; who were proud of the work that was done, [that was] necessary to achieve this account. . . . [I]t’s a prestigious and a very large account. And folks like to associate themselves with a successful, highly visible proposition. However, when it hits the fan, a lot of times people like to go and hide under rocks. So, you know, you look for the kind of individual that you knew would persevere (Brad, white man, 36).

In fact, commitment--or lack thereof--was an issue the core members dealt with constantly, as the team expanded and evolved. The lack of commitment which concerned some team members was both a structural and an individual problem. Although the team enjoyed the support of Omni’s top management, it did not have a formal structural position in the organization. Because of its vague status as a sub-structure that existed between functional departments and involved employees from different disciplines, the majority of the team members could not, or would not, consider the City County team their first priority. Many felt that they were accountable primarily to their functional departments and jobs and only secondarily to the team.

The lack of incentives for participating in the City County team was a serious impediment for attracting team members. Soliciting commitment from people whose primary duties and loyalties were supposed to be in their functional areas was difficult, especially if their job reviews were at risk of suffering from taking part in the team. Indeed, the minutes of an early team meeting in November 1995 state that, “in the past, performance review scores were reduced when team members participated too much in support of marketing efforts.”<sup>24</sup>

The original core team of six had remained intact since the beginning; representatives of various functional areas were pulled in for consulting on specific issues and sometimes afterwards joined the team permanently. In fact, compared to the Eastern Alliance teams, the membership boundaries of the City County team were a great deal more fluid as members came and left or opted for an “ad-hoc” membership. For example, the team meeting I observed was attended by all the core members as well as two additional representatives, whose membership in the team was somewhat ambiguous. One of these “fringe members” was a woman from the Omni headquarters’ public relations department who was attending her first team meeting. It was apparent that she was not viewed as a full member by the core group but more as a consultant. Whether she or any other auxiliary member would, in the future, become a “full-fledged” part of the team was contingent on his or her commitment to be present in future team meetings (and, of course, on the team’s need for a PR expert).

One’s continuing presence in the time-consuming team meetings, which often lasted two to three days, was interpreted by the members as commitment to the team. Those who were committed came to the meetings in spite of their other obligations. Because the members could not officially be required to be present in a meeting, the team could only exert friendly pressure to ensure attendance. Therefore, the perceived commitment of an individual member (i.e., their meeting attendance) was the main distinction between the core group and those who saw themselves (or were seen by others) as auxiliary or ad-hoc members. The distinction between the committed and the ad-hoc members also was significant for this study: those members who agreed to be interviewed were the very same individuals who were recognized by their colleagues as full and committed members of the team.

### 3.3.2. Team Tasks and Organizational Position

The work of the City County team revolved around the client’s needs that crossed over various functional areas, such as medical management, network (HMO) management, management of quality, marketing, sales, and membership as well as billing, claims, and customer service. The team goals were to provide satisfactory service to the City County government and its individual employees, employee unions, health care providers, and public officials, to ensure the greatest quality of health care at the lowest cost, and to be publicly accountable.

The management of the City County account differed from the management of a typical large

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<sup>24</sup> The marketing department, as I will describe shortly, is the departmental base of the City County team. For example, the marketing department absorbed the expenses of operating the team, and therefore, the team was often viewed by others in the organization as a marketing team, even though it involved members from various departments.

corporate account at Omni. The City County was a public client and its representatives were elected officers of the City County government. The fact that the team was, in the last instance, accountable to the representatives of the public and, therefore, also had to take into account the political dimension of their business shaped the division of the team's tasks.

The team's most crucial tasks were divided among the eight team members according to their expertise. The political nature of the account employed one team member, who monitored Omni's political relations with the City County municipality. Margaret, a manager of community and government relations, spent a great deal of her time lobbying in the interest of the company in relation to the state and different local governments. The management of customer service and billing was the sole responsibility of another team member, Cynthia, who headed a department of 40 people working for the account. In order to better accommodate so large an account, Omni had relocated customer service and billing from the company headquarters, more than three hundred miles away, to the regional office, bringing the account's daily operations closer to the customers. Both Margaret and Cynthia worked in the regional office, while the third female member, Martha, worked as a product manager in the corporate headquarters located in another city. All three women had been employed in the company for over ten years and had participated in the creation of the team.

In the City County team, it was the men who handled the business side of account management. This division of labor was mostly based on the job titles that the members held before the team was born and had persisted throughout its evolution. The men who had been involved from the start included Brad, a sales manager, Angelo, a marketing director, and Bob, a vice president of marketing. Two additional men, Anthony and Roberto, had joined the team later-- Roberto as a health data analyst and Anthony as a sales manager and a new team leader. Later, I will describe in more detail the tasks and positions of these team members and discuss how the members' tasks helped maintain an internal hierarchy among the members.

With regard to the City County team's organizational position, setting up a self-managing team "from within" in an organizational environment that was not culturally ripe for such an innovation proved troublesome for the team. For example, the team had to continuously justify its need for resources. On the one hand, corporate top management recognized the importance of the team and readily blessed its efforts. On the other hand, many department managers held tightly onto their views of the traditional, functional silos and were reluctant to relinquish their resources. In a sense, the City County management team was seen by "corporate" as a pioneer group that was allowed to exist but not provided with appropriate legitimation or a formal structural position.

The conflict between the organization, on the one hand, encouraging the creation of teams and, on the other hand, maintaining a resource base that was based on functional departments manifested itself especially in the financial position of the City County team. Some members expressed strongly that in order to have greater autonomy, the team needed a budget of its own. Indeed, the lack of budgetary independence presented problems for teamwork. For example, the team was pressured by others in the organization to change the location of its two-day meetings from an out-of-town resort to the workplace to cut costs. The team, however, argued that meeting at work would endanger its efficiency as members were constantly distracted by other demands (more on this point later). As it turned out, most of the team's expenses were absorbed by the sales and marketing department at the regional office, the same department that had acquired the City County



Account.

The team's lack of financial independence may have been a symptom of its ambivalent organizational position, but it also kept the team from being able to implement its decisions. To the members' dismay, their team-based decisions were considered by the functional departments merely as recommendations. In other words, the team was not able to execute its decisions in the jurisdiction of another department. While some members saw this as an impediment to self-management, others saw it as less so as the team had gained a high organizational status because of the large size of the City County account. In fact, it had quite a bit of influence in maneuvering this large account. Angelo, a sales manager and one of the founders, explained that the team's power was rooted in the close relationship with its client, and that being in daily contact with the customers gave legitimacy to the team's recommendations. He felt that first-hand knowledge of the client's needs lent authority to the team, although the team's overall position was still quite vulnerable:

Knowledge is power, power to do good or to do bad. But that knowledge gives us the strength to make recommendations. We will flourish as those recommendations are implemented and are successful. And we will be chastised if those recommendations are bad (Angelo, Hispanic man, 38).

Angelo's remarks reveal how unpredictable the team's position was. For example, the team's perfectly good recommendations could be implemented unsuccessfully by another department, leaving the team accountable to the client. In short, the team had accountability without formal power to control the implementation of its recommendations. Hoping to strengthen its position, the team constantly monitored and evaluated its performance and kept track of how its recommendations were implemented by the functional areas.

### 3.3.3. Self-Management with Titles: A Persistent Internal Hierarchy

In this section I will discuss the internal hierarchy of team members, which was based on their job titles and persisted despite their efforts to overcome status differences. While I will consider gender as a basis for many power differences in the team, the following description will also show how organizational status mediates power and influence.

The division of power in the City County team was rooted in the rationale that, despite the existence of the team, those members who had managed to acquire the City County account were personally responsible for its success. Therefore, they also were entitled to a leadership position. This principle was most apparent in the case of Brad, whose influence in the team was based on the fact that he had sold the City County account. This account, by its size and "street value" of \$400 million, exceeded most accounts in the company. Although selling the account had involved several people, Brad was seen by the members as the team's founding father and its driving force, and they appointed him as a team leader and facilitator.

The team members' organizational positions constituted a ladder of titles, reaching vertically through several layers of the Omni organization. At the top was a vice-president and at the bottom, a data analyst; however, most members were middle managers. Even among the many layers of managers, those members who represented corporate headquarters had an aura of power attached

to them. Many team members understood the importance of consensual decision-making and, therefore, were concerned about the obvious difference in their organizational status and how it shaped the interaction in team meetings.

Examined against the company's functional matrix (i.e., departmental divisions), the marketing department was well represented in the City County team. Four of the five men in the City County team came from different levels of the department. The member with the highest title was Bob, vice-president of marketing. The team leader, Brad, worked as a sales manager in marketing and was supervised by his boss Angelo, a director of marketing. In sum, the City County team combined directors and their subordinates, which undoubtedly made team meetings contested terrains. In order for those members at the lower organizational levels to speak out, they had to overcome the hurdle of confronting their superiors. And although some members agreed that it was frightening to challenge their direct supervisors, all members believed it was quite appropriate and that in the team, titles did not--and should not--count. They also took pride in having conquered the interpersonal frictions that had interfered with their decision-making in the beginning. Team meetings that only a year earlier had ended in aggressive outbursts and walk-outs now ran smoothly and productively.

Despite their status differences, the original team members--Margaret (manager of community relations), Cynthia (manager of customer service), Martha (product manager), Brad (sales manager), Bob (marketing VP), and Angelo (marketing director)--had grown accustomed to each other through working together. However, the new members of the team, whose roles were still very much in formation, were extremely aware of the status hierarchy. Take, for example, the case of Anthony, the latest addition to the team, who was also a new Omni employee. Anthony was hired to fill Brad's position as an account manager after the latter had been promoted to the sales manager position (a promotion undoubtedly based on Brad's contribution in acquiring the large client). Brad unilaterally appointed Anthony to take his former position of a team leader and, by doing so, caused strife among the rest of the team who felt that the team's leadership should have been decided upon consensually. This was a difficult situation for the newcomer. Not only was Anthony expected to lead the team while being disapproved by some team members, he also had to lead his superiors as the position of the account manager was at the very bottom of the City County team's marketing hierarchy. Also, Anthony was still learning about the team and the company, which added to his confusion during the meetings.

Predictably, on many occasions, including during my observation of the meeting, Anthony found himself to be a bystander in the team's already established interpersonal relations. He was an outsider who had been placed by Brad into the leader position. Anthony described his experience as based on his lack of a sense of the team's history:

Everything is not written...I don't know all the details of all the history. So, you know, coming in in a leadership position, I have a handicap [that] makes it difficult. ... [N]ext year this time, I will be a lot more comfortable, I will be a lot more confident ... I'm learning more about Omni [and] the account and I think that's going to empower me to be a more confident leader of the team (Anthony, black man, 38).

The idea that an influential membership in the City County team required a thorough knowledge of

the team's past dealings was also echoed by another new member, Roberto. Joining the team as a health data analyst, Roberto's job was to work on monitoring and evaluation. Coming to the team had been challenging for the newcomer, although the team had readily taken him in and helped him to become "one of them." As a junior member, a "non-manager," and at 32, the youngest of them, Roberto found himself in awe of the team members' expertise and knowledge of the company, which made him feel intimidated:

[It is] intimidating not only because of the status, but intimidating because of the knowledge base. As bright as you think you may be, you just don't know what the organization does. So it was extremely intimidating, but I will say this, that the team members never used it as an intimidating factor. It's more you mentally go through it and you think, well, 'here I'm dealing with this guy; this guy's gotta know everything,. . . [but] he doesn't know everything, because if he knew everything, he wouldn't need us around here (Roberto, Hispanic man, 32).

Having influence in the City County team was contingent upon the knowledge of the company, client, and the team history. Also, the fact that both of these men were from a racial-ethnic minority groups points to a possible process of racialization. Therefore, I will discuss this situation in more detail within the context of racial-ethnic relations in self-managing teams (in Ch. 5). At this point, however, I conclude that while the team actively--and I think, genuinely--attempted to eliminate titles and their hierarchical influence, the impact of titles on team interaction was difficult to break.

#### 3.3.4. Self-Management in the City County Team

In order to examine various gendering processes of the City County team in comparison to the other case teams, it is necessary to describe the type and degree of self-management practiced by the team. I argue that the organizational status of the team plays an especially significant role. In many ways, it is evident that organizational status is one factor that shapes self-management and, therefore, also influences the ways in which teams are gendered.

Among the case teams, the City County Account Management Team functioned at the highest level of the organization. The City County's organizational position was reflected not only in the titles of its members, but also in the fact that it was able to establish itself at a time when the concept of self-managing or self-directed teams had not been fully institutionalized among Omni's top management. Without a specific organizational model of what comprised self-managing teams, what they did, and how they behaved, the core team members borrowed their self-management models from team literature. One definition of a team that is often used in management literature and that was adopted by the City County team, is to distinguish between a 'team' and a 'workgroup' (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993b). Borrowing from Katzenbach and Smith's (1993b) article *Harvard Business Review*, the City County team wrote up a detailed comparison of what it means to be a 'team' rather than a 'workgroup': A team shares its leadership, while workgroups have a designated leader; teams have mutual accountability and collective work-products, while workgroups have individual accountability as well as individual work products; teams have a specific purpose that may differ from a broader organizational mission, while workgroups' goals always are the same as the organizational mission; and teams engage in active and open-ended problem-solving, while workgroups are more concerned about

running efficient meetings. A team, according to the background statement, “discusses, decides, and does real work together,” and thus differs from a workgroup that only “discusses, decides, and delegates” (Team Background Statement, 1995).

To what extent the City County team was, in reality, functioning as a team instead of a workgroup is less important than the fact that its members actively aspired to the team model. It became obvious that all members knew the meaning of these distinctions and often articulated the differences in their interviews with me. Compared to the Eastern Alliance teams, City County members had a clearer idea of exactly what they were aspiring to by practicing team self-management. This was not surprising, given that the initiative for self-management had come from the members themselves and not from the supervisors, as was the case of Eastern Alliance. These characteristics of the team members indicate that the City County team was indeed more mature--that is, further along the road toward self-management--than either of the teams at Eastern Alliance.

The progress of City County also points to an important aspect of self-management practice: teams at higher organizational levels already possess a certain amount of power, which enables them to develop greater degrees of self-management faster than those lower on the hierarchy. While they may not differ, in the long run, as to the kinds of teams that eventually become fully self-managed, the evidence from this study points to an apparent advantage for higher-level teams. While there are many reasons for the advantaged position of higher-level teams, my interest in this study is how organizational status influences how teams are gendered; that is, how the gendering of teams varies in relation to their organizational status. Keeping the organizational status of the team in mind, I will now turn to the Motorcol organization, the fourth case study team.

### **3.4. Services in Manufacturing: Motorcol and the Customer Support Network**

The fourth self-managing team in this study functioned in “Motorcol,” a company that manufactures industrial and commercial machine tools. The Motorcol organization was a part of “Motorcol Industries” that operates across the United States as well as internationally. The site organization is located in a small town in the southern United States.

#### 3.4.1. The Customer Support Network: History and Composition

The Motorcol team, “Customer Support Network” or “CSN,” as the members called it, provided Motorcol’s customers technical support, customized engine design, took product orders, and monitored product delivery schedules. The team had been established in 1995 to improve the speed and quality of the company’s response to customer needs. Much like the Omni’s City County team, the initiative for the CSN team came from a group of employees. The idea behind forming a customer service team was that converging three different stages of the company’s interaction with customers into one team would improve their performance and enhance the company’s competitiveness. The three functions that were brought into the team included processing orders of Motorcol products, designing products to meet customer’s specific needs, and servicing the delivered goods. Each function was assigned to a specific group that were the Information Group, the Engineering Group, and the Field Service Group. These three groups were designed to respond to customer needs from ordering and design to after-sales services. The Customer Support Network was comprised of 13 members. The order in which a typical

customer would interact with Motorcol would begin with the team’s Information Group that consisted of four members, all of whom were white women. In addition to taking orders, the Information Group served as a link between the customers and the production department in issues concerning orders, deliveries, and other stages of the production. The second group that a customer would encounter in CSN was called the “Engineering Group” that designed industrial drives and engines based on what exact features the customer needed. The Engineering Group was comprised of five members, all white men. The third group, the “Field Service Group,” took care of installing and servicing Motorcol’s engines after they have been delivered to the customer. This group consisted of four men, three of whom were white and one of whom was black. The members of Field Service spent a great deal of their work time out of the office at customer sites all over the world.

Table 3.4.

Motorcol Customer Support Network Team Composition

Bryan, field service technician	White man, 38/ 19 yrs in the organization
Ellen, information associate	White woman, 29/ 2 yrs in the organization
Frank, field service engineer	White man, 35/ 1,5 yrs in the organization
Jean, information associate	White woman, 24/ 2 yrs in the organization
Johnny, field service engineer	Black man, 31/ 10 yrs in the organization
Karen, team coordinator	White woman, 40/ 16 yrs in the organization
Keith, engineering associate	White man, 30/ 2 yrs + 4 mo. in the organization
Lee, engineering coordinator	White man, 44/ 16 yrs in the organization
Neil, field service manager/coordinator	White man, 47/ 4 yrs in the organization
Paul, design drafter	White man, 37/ 6 yrs in the organization
Trina, information associate	White woman, 20/ 16 mo. in the organization
Vernon, engineering associate	White man, 50/ 30 years in the organization

The Customer Support Network began with only six members who were involved in the company’s sales and customer service. The idea of a team was born from the many problems these employees faced as they worked in separate units. One example of such problems was the need to minimize the time it took for the Motorcol organization to learn about what kind of products their potential customers desired. This information had earlier been conveyed to Motorcol through field agents and had taken a considerably long time, all of which undermined the company’s competitiveness. Another concern of the group was the dispersed nature of the different stages involved in ordering, producing, and delivering the goods. Streamlining all aspects of customer service was one way to make the whole production process more efficient.

The formation of the CSN team resembled the way in which the City County team at Omni had come together. The group started with a handful of members and added new ones as a need emerged. Similar to the position Brad had in the City County team--a sort of founding father of the team--CSN also had a creator or a founding mother. The team's creator, Karen, was responsible for bringing the team together and also held the position of a team coordinator and leader/facilitator. Currently a middle manager and a team leader, Karen had been working for Motorcol since the early 1980s and had held various positions in customer service. Along with Paul, a design drafter and a CSN member, Karen had worked as a link between the sales and the production departments after the company had transferred all sales and customer services to regional offices. Because of the new structure, the sales personnel in regional offices lacked a formal way of contacting the factory. Paul describes how the CSN emerged from the need for contact between the regional offices and the factory:

So Karen and I, at the time, were both involved in independent efforts to try to encourage some form of formal contact for them. And we ended up getting together and just creating a little 2-person team that [would take] the calls from these people calling in, wanting something special or wanting pricing or this or that. . . . And for about six months, Karen and I worked as a group, and then we proposed this team to management and they felt like it was a good idea. So they formalized the formation of that group; and that's how we became a CSN (Paul, white man, 37).

The beginning, however, had problems, as the members were learning to behave like a self-managing team. Paul describes the time after an initial "honeymoon" period, when the newly acquired independence became confusing and, despite their eagerness, working as a team proved challenging:

We assumed that since we were ten fairly wide individuals all put together to accomplish some thing that, it would just happen and, and it didn't just happen like that. For one thing, in the kickoff of the team of course, we were the . . . new thing and we quickly found that even though, after we made our initial presentation and they formed this group, they kind of took it on faith. But then once we were established, of course they were holding us to much higher standards. You know, we need data, we need ... we need you to demonstrate [to] us this and that, what you need and we need to take these responsibilities and ... It was very much a situation where we, as a group were left to our own devices to a large extent. And I don't think even to this day, I don't think we have done a real great job of that. I think we have done fair, but I don't think we have done a great job of making the team become what they expected it to become or what we really needed to become (Paul, white man, 37).

Paul's comments also show how the top management at Motorcol responded to the idea of a self-managing team. Accustomed to self-directed teams in the manufacturing operation, management was sympathetic to the project. And although it readily gave the go-ahead to establish a team, it chose not to interfere with the team's development. As Paul points out, CSN was on its own.

After awhile, the team began recruiting new members to each of the subsections. The Information Group that consisted of Karen and Ellen hired a third member, Jean, after two other women had left the team. The fourth member of the Information Group, Trina, joined them in early 1996. All the subsections of CSN were headed by a coordinator so that, in addition to being the facilitator of the whole team, Karen also was the coordinator for the all-women Information Group.

### 3.4.2. Team Tasks and Organizational Position

*Customer Support Network links the outside world to the inside world. Information Group, Engineering Group, and Field Service Group keep us in touch with our world wide customer base. (Brochure on '13 Points of Interest' in Motorcol's Self-Directed Work Environment)*

Linking the outside world--sales offices and direct customers, both in the United States and Europe--to production at Motorcol was the main task of Customer Support Network. Each subgroup performed a different step toward assuring that the customer received a satisfactory product both at the time of delivery and after the sale. Although a potential customer at some point in time would be in contact with all different subgroups, the first stage of the purchase would involve the Information Group. The members of the Information Group would take orders and provide price quotations and any other information concerning the production. The engine or tool that was ordered would then be designed and customized by the drafters in the Engineering Group.

Working in a team was not new to the engineers; however, working in a team with women was. Engineering had been, and to a large extent still was, a man's job at Motorcol, and getting used to interacting with women was a novel experience for many of them. For Lee, the coordinator of the Engineering Group, working with women presented what he called a "gender situation":

The most difficult part that I have found is that being an engineer, most engineering departments are typically male-oriented and so there was a gender situation we had to overcome, 'cause now we're working every day with a lot of females in an open setting. . . So I think probably the most difficult thing was to get used to working with, not only working with females but to be able--the terminology, the technical terminology--to get it to where they could understand it for the customers because the females that we work with are not technically oriented, they are information oriented (Lee, white man, 44).

According to Lee, the different task orientations of each group also exacerbated the gender differences among the members. It was quite obvious that the functional division of labor in the Customer Support Network fell along the lines of a traditional gender division of labor and did so in CSN perhaps more than in any other case team I studied. The gender division of labor among the subgroup therefore presented a 'gender situation' and also was the root of many gendered processes in CSN, as I will discuss later.

Much like the engineers, the men in the Field Service Group had technical assignments. Any problems with a sold and delivered product would be directed to the field service technicians, who often had to travel to customer sites for training and repairing. The members of the field service were out of the office more often than they were present and, therefore, their daily participation in

office interaction remained minimal. When in the office, the field service technicians wrote manuals for technical service and maintenance of Motorcol products and answered technical questions over the phone. Outwardly, the field service appeared as the least busy part of the team, although a call for help in another part of the world could come at any time. Being on the road and away from the office often made the field service members feel like they were part of the team in name only. Most team interactions took place among the engineers and the information associates, while the field service members were gone. The words of one field service engineer provide an example:

I don't feel like I am as much a part of the CSN team as I was in the other teams. Field service, we're gone a lot, we're out of the plant a lot, we don't really, are aware of what's going on. We'll come back, we're in here for two days and then we're gone for another week. So, I just know the people really in passing, I don't really have lot in common.

SO IT'S THE NATURE OF THE WORK THAT SORT OF KEEPS YOU...?

Yes. Even the people in my own group, other field service engineers, I don't see a lot of them. We have two or three days together (Bryan, white man, 38).

Hence, while serving the same customers, the team members' different job tasks separated them. The team's division of labor influenced the interaction among team members, for example, by isolating the field service from the rest of the team not only in terms of their presence but also in terms of their physical work space. The field service members were seated separately from the other two groups--another barrier to interaction.

Despite the impediments to teamwide interaction, most team members were content with their self-directed status, which had been officially recognized by Motorcol top management. However, the formal position of a self-managing team generated little attention in an organization that had been implementing a self-directed work teams in its manufacturing parts. The Customer Support Network rarely enjoyed the kind of special regard given to Omni's City County team and even to the Eastern Alliance teams. CSN was one self-directed team among many, and if there was something special about the team, it had more to do with its broad cross-functionality than its status of self-direction. It was indeed unique to be a full-fledged service team within a manufacturing plant. The members had to understand the entire production process--vital especially for the Information Group--to maintain personal relations with employees at different stages of production. While the men in field service may have been well-known among clients around the world, it was the information group that was at the center of action inside the plant.

Because of the imperative of maintaining a satisfactory information flow between the clients and the company, the information service women kept in touch with all levels of the organization, including the CEO and vice-president. Their immediate supervisor and a Director of Logistics, Ray, was often found chatting with the women and joining them for lunch. The Information Group also led a daily plant-wide meeting that gathered together about twenty employees from different departments to report on the progress of orders and delivery schedules. It was perhaps the daily cross-departmental meetings that brought people together, along with the small size of the plant and its location in a semi-rural area, that contributed to Motorcol's familial atmosphere and



made it decidedly different from the other two site organizations. Motorcol was family-like also in that it employed many married couples and family members. For example, two members of CSN were related (Lee, the coordinator of Engineering Group was the uncle of Jean, an information associate) and Paul's (Engineering Group) wife worked as a drafter in engineering. Furthermore, Jean also had once dated the brother of her colleague, Trina, and Trina's mother, who also worked for Motorcol, was a long-time friend of Karen, the information coordinator.

In the web of family, relatives, and long-time friends, it was sometimes difficult to draw influence from one's status or titles, albeit that most of those who did have status and power in the organization (i.e., the top management) were new to the area and the company. For example, the two directors who had supported the team idea and now worked closely with CSN (Ray, Director of Logistics, and Marty, Director of Operations) had joined the company only in 1993. Motorcol had at that time gone through a restructuring process that replaced top management personnel with younger--and as one team member said, more team-oriented--directors.

Despite its diverse functions, CSN was able to maintain a well-defined image of a unit that worked together based on the principles of self-management. Team unity was enhanced by the close proximity of all team members, even though the respective tasks of each sub-group pulled them in different directions. It was evident that the top management's recognition of CSN lent it the necessary legitimacy to coordinate its work with the rest of the plant. This was especially important for the team because it functioned as the mediating body between the customers and production. Nevertheless, compared to the other self-managing teams I studied, the Customer Support Network differed in one significant way: it worked within a male-dominated manufacturing plant. In the next section, I will describe how this context influenced the gendering of teamwork in CSN.

#### 3.4.3. CSN: Women and the "Masculinized Organization"

To sum up the factors that describe team work--and the ways it was gendered--in the Customer Support Network, one must look into the organizational context in which the team functioned. In many ways the organizational history of the CSN resembles the other teams in this study: much like Eastern Alliance and Omni, Motorcol had reorganized and, perhaps as a consequence, began implementing team-based management. This change of managerial ideology also paved way for the Customer Support Network, which was officially recognized as a self-managing team, although only one of many such teams in the plant. However, CSN differed from the other teams in an important way: it worked in a male-dominated manufacturing plant, while the other teams worked in service organizations with a more female-dominated personnel. Working in a manufacturing plant dominated by men in technical professions had a great impact on the division of labor within CSN. Women of the team occupied the traditionally feminine jobs of information and clerical service and men the masculinized technical positions (see, e.g., Ranney [1992] about some gender considerations for bringing teams from manufacturing to offices).

Because of this gender division, teamwork in CSN is an interesting case study of gendering processes. On the one hand, because the team had an official status as self-directed, it did not need to constantly justify its existence to the top management, as was the case, for instance, with Omni's City County team. Motorcol was already supportive of self-managing teams which, some

team members contended, benefitted both men and women in CSN.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the team worked in a technically-oriented environment that was based on and maintained a rigid gender division of work. Therefore, the new opportunities and roles created by the self-directed work environment had, at least for women, often a paradoxical meaning because of the masculinized context of the technical occupation. Compared to the female-dominated banking services, for example, as a manufacturing plant, Motorcol presented a structurally and culturally different, highly masculinized work environment (e.g., Britton, 1997) for the team.

Before concluding this chapter, I present comparative summaries of the significant features of the four teams. These tables help the reader to assess the differences and similarities among them at a glance. To maintain uniformity, the teams are presented in the order that they are discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Karen strongly argued that a team-based management allowed women a greater opportunity to advance: "... It just seems like since we've moved into this direction that I have been able to accomplish so much more, because I don't have any ceilings" (Karen, white woman, 40). I will return to this point in the later chapters.

Table 3.5.

Comparative Summary: Team History and Composition

<b>DIMENSION</b>	<b>SPECIAL PROJECTS</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE CREDIT</b>	<b>CITY COUNTY</b>	<b>CSN</b>
<b>Age at time of study</b>	1.5 yrs	1.5 yrs	1.5 yrs	1.5 yrs
<b>Initiative to form a team</b>	From management	From management	From members	From members
<b>Initiative to self-manage</b>	From management	From management	From members	From members
<b>Team size (incl. leader/s if any)</b>	7	12	8	12
<b>Sex composition</b>	4 men 3 women	3 men 9 women	5 men 3 women	8 men 4 women
<b>Racial-Ethnic composition</b>	6 white 1 black	10 white 2 black	5 white 1 black 2 Hispanic origin	11 white 1 black
<b>Sex/age composition (age range)</b>	Women: 43-48 yrs Men: 32-50s	Women: 33-52 yrs Men: 25-52	Women: 36-54 yrs Men: 32-50s	Women: 20-40 yrs Men: 31-50
<b>Authority structure</b>	Team leader	Team leader and "coach"	Team leader-founder with actual power, the 'new', de jure team leader without real influence	3 coordinators
<b>Leadership race-ethnicity and sex</b>	White man	White woman leader, white man coach	White man leader-founder, black man newly appointed leader	2 white men coordinators, 1 white woman coordinator

Table 3.6.

Comparative Summary: Tasks, Goals, Cross-Functionality,  
Self-Management, and Organizational Position

<b>DIMENSION</b>	<b>SPECIAL PROJECTS</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE CREDIT</b>	<b>CITY COUNTY</b>	<b>CSN</b>
<b>Task</b>	Support Bank's internal automated systems	Approve loans for Bank employees	Manage health insurance needs of a large municipal employer	Provide full customer service from engine order, design, and manufacture to service
<b>Presence of common goal</b>	Low	Medium	High	Medium
<b>Degree of mutual accountability</b>	Low	Medium	High	Medium
<b>Presence of cross-functional skills</b>	Medium	Low	High	High
<b>Technical and non-technical employees</b>	Technical	Non-technical	Non-technical	Both technical and non-technical
<b>Degree of cross-functional task-sharing</b>	Low	Low	Low	Low
<b>Systematic cross-training</b>	Some	None	None	Some
<b>Training for self-managed teamwork</b>	None	None	Some	None
<b>Use of self-mgmt literature</b>	None	None	Some	None
<b>Degree of self-management</b>	Low	Low	High	High
<b>Team meetings</b>	Based on need	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Based on need
<b>Organizational position</b>	Middle-level	Low-level	Upper-middle level	Middle-level

### **3.5. Conclusion**

Before turning to the analysis of gendering processes in self-managing teams, it is necessary to point out that although this study assumes that all the case study teams are in fact on the way to greater self-direction, this development can also be halted or reversed at any moment. It is already evident that economic changes contributed to the establishment of all the studied teams, as downsizing and reorganization programs emphasized teamwork and self-management. Many companies are experimenting with self-managed teams in order to increase their leverage in the market and, therefore, the future life-span of self-managing units--including the four case study teams--can hang by the thin thread of market fluctuation. Even the most successful and mature self-managing teams can be terminated by downsizing and corporate mergers, and whatever benefits they may have brought to employees are thus likely disappear. It remains to be seen to what extent these kinds of changes will affect gendering processes, including any progress made toward gender equality. Having introduced all four teams and described their organizational contexts, I now turn to further analysis of gendering processes in self-managing teams.