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"Workers want a say: we have something to say" : workers' perspectives of management at BHP Refractories

Cecily Miriam Boas
University of Wollongong

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“Workers Want a Say. We Have Something to Say”: Workers’ Perspectives of Management at BHP Refractories

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Cecily Miriam Boas

Jointly with
Department of Management
Faculty of Commerce
and
Faculty of Education
2001
This thesis is dedicated to all those who have experienced being silenced at work.
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Abstract

"No One Up There is Listening to Me"

This dissertation addresses the importance and value of attending to the voices of workers in an industrial setting.

The multi-dimensional self-perceptions of workers at a Refractories plant—who are not usually heard in practice or in the literature—provide insights into their world that are not commonly available to those outside the business. The workers’ perceptions of modes of managing, including what they saw as contributing to the silencing of their voices, provide an interpretation and awareness of their working environment beyond their immediate tasks. The intention of this study is to present their perspectives, not merely as an explanation of their working lives, but as a way of having their insights, perceptions and feelings recognised and valued as part of knowing how to manage. Through having these insights attended to and acknowledged as worthwhile, the workers are given credit as contributors to the understanding of what happens in organisations.

The diverse accounts they share create a postmodern mosaic of life at the Refractories. The stories emerge from fieldwork that took place over a two-and-a-half year time span, almost one year of which involved the sale of the plant. Throughout this span of time, even with the rapid changes that were taking place because of the sale, and the pressures on the workers because of the downturn in the steel market—and hence refractory needs—their views on appropriate ways of managing did not alter substantially. Their considerations were largely based around relationships, identity, their sense of what it meant to communicate with workers, and the emotional aspects of managing.

The dissertation is presented as a trialogue of three separate voices: the workers’, mine, as the author, and the literature. The challenge in structuring this dissertation has been how to prioritise the normally silenced voices of workers within the traditional academic rigours of thesis writing, while constantly referring to their position to lead the discussion.

The issues they raised have been investigated through a series of processes. These included: observations; interviews and return of transcripts; participant feedback sessions; textual analysis of interviews; facilitation of workshops; casual conversations; and my participation in a variety of events at the plant. The multiple-method approach to the study allowed concepts and theories to emerge in a constructivist, grounded-theory fashion. A multidisciplinary approach has also been taken, spanning the literature on organisational management; sociology; and across a broader range of scholarly disciplines, including: feminist research; social psychology; philosophical thought; research methodology; anthropology; narrative studies; education, learning and communication studies.
DECLARATION

I, Cecily Miriam Boas, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Management, Faculty of Commerce and Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Cecily Miriam Boas
1 June 2001
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This acknowledgment section could be a chapter in itself. Unlike many other research students of whom I have read or heard about, my path along the dissertation route has not been a lonely one. In fact, I could say in some ways that it has been quite the reverse. There are many people who contributed to this state. This was not a project that I started alone, worked through in isolation or completed by myself. Without the wholehearted involvement of so many others, this work would not have evolved as it did. Never did I feel lonely or isolated in the process.

The very nature of the study put me in a social situation, as I engaged in exchanges with the people who worked at BHP Refractories. The extreme good will of the workers, who make up the backbone of this thesis, was invaluable. They openly shared their insights with me—this strange, female academic who appeared in their workplace, and placed them in some new and unusual situations. The plant manager was particularly encouraging of my work, spending much time talking with me about the plant and my project. Thanks also are due to the manufacturing manager from Newcastle who gave permission for my study to go ahead.

My partner, Russell Gluck—friend, mentor, unofficial supervisor, chief cook and bottle washer, had a faith in me that was catching. His outstanding acumen and understanding of the direction of my work kept me going through the most challenging times. Through the process of this study, unlike the couple doing their PhD's in John Williamson's play The Professionals, we grew closer through our common interests in our work around people not being heard, their identity and the importance of listening to and telling their stories. Many hours were spent at home talking through these issues in relation to our own and each other's work. What a gift that was.

My supervisors, Dr. Will Rifkin, Dr. Christine Fox and Associate Professor Richard Badham and I had many a session debating the wisdom or otherwise of many of the directions this work took. Their deep insights into, and interest in, my thesis was invaluable, especially their respective abilities in seeing what I did not see, and the many hours they put in to read my work and make suggestions.

Mention of the ‘NRG’—a brilliant group of women who were also going through the same research process—played a vital part in my overall development as a doctoral candidate. Our weekly meetings and workshops, along with the group’s constructive criticism of presentations and writing were immeasurably valuable and inspiring, and at time quite challenging, as well as being lots of fun. Because we all had one particular thing in common, a thesis to write, there was much understanding within the group that was not easy to find elsewhere.

My friends, family and colleagues, all supported me in my journey along this long path with their ongoing encouragement and interest in my work, especially my younger son, Pete, who was determined to have a doctor in the family, and my older son, Andy, with
whom I talked theory and practice of management as he worked through his MBA at the same time.

The spiritual support and encouragement I received from far across the seas from Swami Yogavidyananda and Mataji has been inspirational and has carried me through many difficult moments as I grew through this study.

Kim Draisma’s amazing ability as a discerning friend who lovingly and willingly read through my first draft with me, helped me with her wonderfully positive and encouraging approach. Mary Day, too, used her vision and wisdom to help me to see beyond the ordinary. Clair Gerson’s careful eye helped me to scan the dissertation for its ‘imperfections’.

So, the journey of my PhD has not been a lonely one. Rather I have gained and grown with many friends on my path of immense personal and social growth.
PREFACE

"The Blokes on the Floor Know What’s Happening and How Things Should Be Done"

If the workers are going to have some input with the decisions around change, they have to have a way to have their voice put forward. (Oli)

The blokes on the floor know what’s happening and how things should be done but they don’t get asked. They just get told. (Ray)

This dissertation employs the stories of the workers at BHP Refractories, Port Kembla in southern New South Wales, to portray their perceptions of their lives as industrial workers and how they believed their managers saw them. A picture of life at the plant in a time of extensive change is presented from the workers’ perspectives—perspectives that are not usually sanctioned as substantive or authoritative either in academia or by management. The portrayal of feelings about working at the Refractories makes visible that which is normally not recounted.

The inclusion of employees’ voices has supposedly been on the agenda of organisational theory and practice for some time now, although in practice it is ‘rather rare’, according to several organisational theorists. The overriding feeling of the workers at BHP Refractories

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1 Referred to as ‘workers’ from here on. The men who worked on the shop floor referred to themselves as ‘workers’ and usually those above them as ‘management’. I often came into debate over this term when talking to academics because, as they said, all people in organisations work. This seems to me to be what Rose (pers. comm., March, 2000) referred to as “euphemisms for workers which leads to the denial of ‘worker’ ”.

2 The Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited.

3 Referred to as ‘the Refractory’ or ‘the Refractories’ from here on. The company was called ‘BHP Refractories’, because there were plants in three locations. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to the Port Kembla Refractory plant as a singular entity, because this is how it was referred to by the people who worked there, even though it was included as part of the whole and talked about in the plural.

4 The words ‘manager’ and/or ‘management’ are used in this dissertation to refer to all those ranks above the workers, from supervisors to line managers, floor managers to the plant manager and beyond. Including: Ackroff & Thompson (1999); Cheney (1995); Harshman & Harshman (1999); Heller (1998).
was that their voices were repeatedly disregarded. They present their perspectives in a way Nietzsche (1896: 165) says must be done to “avoid unuttered truths becoming poisonous”. Their stories present an overall picture of operating in an atmosphere of adversity. They express strong feelings of despondency at being ignored and devalued for their potential input into the company, revealing a sense of alienation in the turbulent times in which the company has been embroiled during this study. The general tenor of their talk, or their ‘common truth’ (Foucault, 1991: 96), about their work and the functioning of the company was negative.

The general sense of their impressions of working for this company did not substantially alter over the time of the study. This dissertation presents, as P. P. Cranny (2000: iv) notes in his work on BHP Newcastle, “a freeze-frame, a snapshot in the words and images of the people who work there”.

While I make extensive use of the notion of ‘story’ in this dissertation, I am using that term in the broad definition of ‘story’, one that means adopting someone’s perceptions of what is going on. It could be viewed as a postmodern story, one that is made up of many fragments, which I have gathered together to create an image of life at the Refractories as the men described it to me, and as I saw and analysed this workplace. I am not telling a single story in terms of having a start followed by a body and a conclusion. The ‘stories’ in this dissertation refer to the overall descriptive narrative around central topics raised by the men. The illustrative anecdotes and descriptions of workers’ thoughts and feelings create a story that is integrated as part of a mosaic picture built about working life at the Refractories. None of the fragments, taken from the larger story, make the picture on their own; together they make a picture-story. The ‘stories’ are in a sense what Goffman (1972)

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6 I talk about the ‘men’ at the Refractories throughout this dissertation, because there were no women working on the shop floor. A few women worked as administrative assistants and there were two female engineers. The issue of gender in relation to my role as a researcher will be discussed further in Chapter Six.
refers to as ‘frames’ that make sense of a situation from an insider’s perspective. These frames combine to give a composite view of the Refractories at a particular moment in time, weaving together pieces of the fabric of the men’s working life.

What is presented is a selective version of a sub-culture, providing an image of how the workers perceived their working environment. The focus is placed upon the visions and ideas that are particular and specific to these workers through topics that came up again and again in the time I spent with the men. The images are temporal and exist as part of a narrative that only a participant can experience within the spirit of that slice of time, in a period that spans about two and a half years. To affirm that what I have written is acceptable to the workers, they have been included as part of an intensively iterative process throughout the study, in the development of topics and analysis of events. In this way they have taken an active part in creating and authoring the dissertation.

The Stories of the Workers Guided My Reflections of Life at the Refractories

The views of workers are presented through their self-perceptions. This is a point I want to emphasise, even though this stress may seem excessive to the reader. Along with the feminist researcher, Krieger (1983: 196), I am concerned that social science generally repeats the same stories without considering these self-perceptions. While it may seem obvious that workers’ perspectives are important, they are not generally included in the development of organisational management theory. Watson (1980) expressed this same concern some twenty years ago through his important work on the sociology of work and industry. He notes that while the plight of manual workers has been discussed in much of

This concept of ‘sub-cultures’ is explored in more detail in Chapter Three in particular. I interpret the word ‘culture’ as inclusive of language, behaviour, written forms, buildings, paintings, rituals, and beliefs, as outlined by Stewart (1997: 9).

The process of how the workers were involved in this study is described in detail in Chapter Six.

This aspect of the methodology is considered in Chapter Six.
the academic literature on aspects of organisational management from an etic position, workers’ personal expressions of need, concern or inspiration have rarely been presented. Research insights offered are generally anchored in the academic world, a world in which workers from industrial settings do not usually play a part. Academic text most often talks about workers but does not employ their voices and convey their insights, a view supported by Deetz (1992: 308). In the main, it is the dominant groups—in this case, academia and management—who maintain and give voice to particular points of view that are accepted and legitimised by society. Research narratives are mostly those of individuals who hold privileged positions. There is an emphasis in “all of the literature” on organisational management of management perspectives of managing (organisational psychologist, James Ludema, pers. comm., Feb., 2000). Workers’ voices are rarely heard, Ludema commented, and “if they are, it is so often an attempt to try to make them conform to the dominant story in some way, to make them fit, instead of just valuing them for themselves, and as they are”.

Unfortunately, it is more likely that the inclusion of workers’ voices in the literature or dialogue on the theory of organisational management will be increasingly isolated because there is now a “convergence between social classes and literary theory that is leading to a kind of consummate trendiness on the part of academics in ideas and what to look at; and that excludes real people”, the anthropologist, Dan Rose, commented when he was talking with me about my study (pers. comm., March, 2000). The emphasis is increasingly moving to high-tech industry, Ludema commented.

And yet, “far from being marginal, society’s outcasts [sic] hold the key to understanding the mainstream” (Windshuttle, 1994: 121). They are the ones who know what is going

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11 Stewart (1997: 5) noted this in his paper on privileges in learning in organisations.
on, at a level that may not be available to managers, consultants or academics. By taking workers' perspectives into account, we as a society can gain a vital perspective of social development and history. The knowledge the workers have could be used to provide a wider picture and increase understanding of workplaces. The overall functioning of an organisation, therefore, depends on valuing this diversity of voices by attending to alternative perspectives.

The Direction of the Dissertation

In addressing the disregard the workers felt from their managers, this dissertation explores the men's constructions on ways of managing, including what they saw as contributing to the silencing of their voices. I then expand on possible approaches that may allow for consideration of the inclusion of their perspectives in discussions on organisational management theory. My intent is to give voice to these people who, as a group, are not usually heard either in the literature on organisational management or, as the men say, by those who manage them. The workers' ideas on how the business could be managed differently are expounded.

It is not my intention to provide a model to address the organisational complexities of BHP Refractories. The world of corporate management literature abounds with theories for creating models for utopian organisations, in which, ideally, the organisational environment stimulates people to be motivated, creative and entrepreneurial.

My association with the workers began when I was contracted in 1995 to work on team-building with a work crew of thirteen men. I worked with these men over approximately a

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13 Such as Argyris (1993); Bartlet & Ghosal (1995); Koffman & Senge (1993); Mitroff & Kilmann (1978); Morgan (1993); Semler (1993); Senge (1989).
year, interviewing them, conducting feedback meetings and workshops with them and ‘hanging around’ the shop-floor. During this time I became familiar with the surroundings, daily routines, meeting agendas, relationships and reactions of the men. I was also able to develop easy-going relationships with many of them. My depth of understanding of what it was like for the men to work at the Refractories and the extent of the men’s knowledge about the business grew through my study over the eighteen months after my consultancy work finished, from January 1997 to August 1998, when I spent more concentrated time at the plant. The workers talked freely to me about their work, how they felt about what was happening to them at work and how they experienced the management of the business.

The Multivocality of Workers’ Voices

What is presented here is an aggregation of many stories, providing “a map [that] is not the territory” (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996: 365). The specificity of the individual voices is blended into a collective viewpoint of the workers’ multivocality. The men were not one homogeneous group, speaking from a single perspective in an orderly flow of topics. Nor did they sustain exactly the same perspectives over the course of the study. As circumstances changed, so sometimes did their opinions. Their behaviour and language, although culturally and socially constructed, and therefore shared to some extent, varied from one individual and group to another. Nevertheless, I observed what appeared to be dominant patterns of individual behaviour and language at the plant.

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14 This process is described more fully in Chapter Six.
15 Although my involvement at the plant was primarily with the workers, I also spent much time with the managers. The reason I am not presenting their viewpoints in this dissertation is to redress the imbalance of the abundant space managers’ perspectives already occupy in management literature. To include them would again take away space from the workers.
16 Narayan (1989: 95) mentions this phenomenon within her ethnographic studies in Hindu communities, noting that merely because people have shared backgrounds does not mean that they will necessarily express the same views.
17 These are described in detail in Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five and Six.
Much of my analysis is based around the text of the twenty-eight workers whom I interviewed or with whom I had casual conversations. The words of the workers form a collage of images, upon which I comment in the light of my experiences at the plant through interviews, observations, documentation, ‘hanging around’, attending meetings and social events, and running workshops and focus groups.\(^\text{18}\)

**Why Bother to Tell These Stories?**

I was encouraged in these efforts by noting the comments of many eminent people asking for the voices of those who are not heard to be included in consideration of accounts of organisations and society as a whole. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when asked about the benefits of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation for the people of South Africa, simply said that it gave “People who have been marginalised ... the opportunity to tell their story”. “People merit a voice for their own sake” Gergen (1991a: x) notes, “not merely to satisfy a scholarly need to dissect and debate perspectives to enrich academic debate”; and yet I feel people’s voices *can* of their own merit add to academic debate. *It is the duty of* social scientists to accept and value personal accounts of organisations as part of their theoretical discussion, an approach Czarniawska (1994) states is missing in conventional forms of social science. Further emphasis is given to the importance of taking note of workers by Gerard Sutton, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, when he animatedly stated at a launch of a book about BHP Refractories\(^\text{19}\): “So; it is the perspective of the workers that we must, we *must* access more than we have in the past” (his emphasis) (October, 1997).\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\) These processes are detailed in Chapters Six and Seven.

\(^{19}\) See details in Chapter Five.

\(^{20}\) His statement can be seen and heard in context in the video attached to this dissertation.
Rodney Hall, a well-known Australian fiction writer, at a seminar at my University in August 1999, spoke of the 'genteel censorship' that is placed on certain stories, ones that are not told for various reasons—usually political. This censorship can be "to our own peril", he said, "as we steer a path that does not take into account the picture from many sides". The feminist writer, Carol Gilligan (1977: 19) notes that "Unvoiced subjects act like a slow burn", becoming catalysts for conflict.

I feel the inclusion of the workers' voices is so important that I want to provide a space where their contributions can be accepted in their own right, for their intrinsic value. I am not attempting to prove or disprove whether the men were 'right' or 'wrong', valid or credible. I consider that in hearing these usually unheard voices, I, and perhaps others can benefit by considering alternative perspectives. I am seeking to include the voices of those "who are excluded, marginalized, devalued, or pathologized—who become 'Others'—in Western systems of unjustified domination-subordination relationships" (Warren, 2000: xiv). Throughout this study I was searching, perhaps, in the Greek tradition, as Deetz (1992: 77) puts it, to find "that which shines forth and compels understanding".

I am not seeking to have the knowledge I share through this research accepted as 'true', but rather I seek to have the opportunity to explain my understanding of the workers' perspectives of management, to create a space for transformative dialogue to take place. Nor am I intending to intimate that merely by listening that organisational behaviour will necessarily change. Yet telling and acknowledging the workers' stories may help to allay the myth that all wisdom about management lies with the managers or their representatives, who are seen as the only ones worth noting. This is not how I understand them. Through the intense process of analysis I came to see the significance of what the men said about the

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21 An approach noted in the work of feminist writers Gilligan (1977), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) on the inclusion of women's voices.
principles of managing, and how much they could contribute if only they were heard. So, for me, the point of the research has been to provide the workers with an opportunity to be heard—literally by me, and secondarily by academic readers.

To this end, the dissertation is presented as a trialogue of three separate voices: the workers’, my own and the literature surrounding various aspects of organisational management. I am cast as the ‘second-order voice’, a term used by Gergen (2000) to denote the notion of an author presenting someone else’s narrative. A paradox was created for me between making the workers’ opinions and observations prominent, and the demands of writing a dissertation. While purporting to express the perspectives of the workers, this dissertation could very easily have been yet another vehicle for constraining those very voices.

The act of thesis writing necessitates a very formal genre, which has the potential to overwhelm the very informal voices of the workers. My position of power in writing this dissertation\(^\text{22}\) is itself an anomaly. Where does my right to tell other people’s stories reside? This is a question raised for all qualitative researchers by the organisational ethnographers, Eisenberg and Goodall (1997: 14, 137). The workers’ voices are expounded through my voice, with all the implications that has for the telling. I must use my voice as a conduit so the workers can be heard. Hence, the thesis has become 'double-voiced', involving me in some deep contemplation in what Morris (1994), in her introduction to Bakhtin’s work, refers to as “a consciousness of a consciousness”. Perhaps this difficulty is the reason why such stories are not told more often. It may be easy to tell a personal story, but it is less easy to tell another’s story. Finding a way to tell the workers’ stories was as much a goal for me as conveying the content of those stories. It is not easy to find a way to speak (or write) that does not silence others, Gilligan (1977: 20) noted many years

\(^{22}\) The power positions in research are dealt with more fully in Chapter Seven.
ago in her work on feminist ways of having a voice. Agee (1969: xv), in his work on the lives of people from poor farming families in America’s south in the late nineteenth century, notes that his work is only placed in book form in fixed and linear format by necessity. Today this is still an issue for me as I write this dissertation.

Although my involvement at the plant focussed primarily on workers, I also spent much time with managers. The reason I am not presenting their viewpoints throughout this dissertation is to redress the imbalance of the abundant space managers’ perspectives already occupy in the management literature. To include them would yet again be to take space away from workers.

The Format of the Dissertation

Following experimentation with several forms of presentation (see Appendix 1 for some examples), the words of the workers are placed as quotations at the start of each chapter and section in order to give emphasis to their voices. These quotations provide the basis for the discussions that follow. “Deep traces left by ... words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker” (Bakhtin, 1963: 108). This format appeals to my sense that the workers have a right to be heard; I have an obligation to do just that.

Emphasis is given to the workers’ self-perceptions and self-analyses through the division of Chapters Two, Three and Four into sub-elements of emergent topics. These topics are: not being heard; the formation and retention of identity through division; and the emotional aspects of managing. All of these topics are major issues or tensions in contemporary industrial working life. It was of concern to me that in making sense of the fragments of the men’s lives into clearly delineated areas for consideration, for the purpose of writing a
dissertation, it may appear that their lives could be arranged into neatly separated segments, which was not the case. The sub-elements interconnect and interweave in a rich fabric that for me represents life at BHP Refractories. I have tried to depict this fabric by joining the men's accounts and the way they are juxtaposed and connected to present different viewpoints of BHP Refractory workers.23 Over the two and a half years when I was working with the men, the essence of these stories maintained a similar flavour.

I have chosen a broad-brush approach to the literature. Ideas, topics and categories emphasised by the workers are linked to the literature on relevant aspects of organisational sense-making. They are also located within a broader range of scholarly disciplines, including: organisational studies; feminist research; sociology; social psychology; philosophical thought; research methodology; anthropology; narrative studies; education, learning; and communication studies.

The diverse literatures in the dissertation have been woven into the analysis—rather than being placed in a separate literature review—to give emphasis to the comparison of the workers' perspectives with those of the literature. To maintain an emphasis on this juxtaposition—and to keep the workers' voices as close to the front of this dissertation as possible—I have presented the methodology sections following the workers' stories, and my analysis of them.

Table P.1 provides explanations of the various methods of presenting the voices of the workers as the prime stimulus for discussion of topics.

Table P.1 Techniques used in presenting the dissertation

23 As Susan Krieger did with the people whom she interviewed in her study of a feminist community (1983)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotations taken from the workers</td>
<td>The quotations from the workers (single spaced) are placed before the discussion about what they are saying to give the workers’ voices prominence ahead of the text. The quotations are sometimes taken from larger pieces of dialogue. These selections appeared to be particularly relevant to an emergent topic or sub-topic that arose during the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footnotes</td>
<td>By including certain comments and references as footnotes, rather than in the main text, it is intended that the narrative of life at the Refractories is given prominence. Certain authors are cited in the text, when the citation does not seem to interrupt the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxed statements</td>
<td>The stories that appear in boxes are separated to give them emphasis as narrative examples of particular topics in the surrounding text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>The text, particularly in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five, is designed to elucidate the perceptions of the workers, supported by my observations and analysis and by the literature. Workers’ comments are also used within the text to highlight particular points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter headings and sub-headings</td>
<td>All the chapter headings are taken from the actual words of the men. The sub-headings in Chapters Two, Three and Four are also taken from the men’s words. In the Preface and Chapters One, Six and Seven the headings are not all quotations from the men because they contain more of my story of my explanations of how I came to gather and analyse the material for this dissertation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Workshop inputs

The tables that appear in Chapter Four are taken from workshops which I ran with the men. Some of these workshops were part of a broader change management program conducted both at Port Kembla and Newcastle Refractory plants.

Photos

The photos\(^{24}\) and the book that I have included within this dissertation are a further attempt to broaden the picture within which the workers' stories can be placed. The photos are intended to be 'collaborative' with the text, as Malinowski (1960) suggests, rather than illustrative, even though the text takes up more physical space.

\(^{24}\) The photos were taken by Don, one of the workers included in this study. He took them especially for me to include in this dissertation.
The use of personal communication references throughout this thesis reflects the importance I place on networking and using the voices of those, in this case, academics, who have particularly relevant insights into certain situations. I have used these quotations as a source of support for my arguments.

I have not relied on the insights or quotations for my analysis of the material. I have employed them, instead, as nascent insights into the academic world to substantiate my observations and experiences in the field. (Appendix 25 lists the contact addresses for all those referred to in this manner).

Connections About Not Being Heard That I Felt With the Workers

"Explanations express just as much about ourselves as about that which we seek to explain." Chia (1996: 74) While this thesis is based on the working life of the workers at the Refractories, their struggle to be heard resonates with my own—a process on which I reflect at certain stages of my life. As an example, I recall in my early years as a Preschool Director that the innovative ideas I was trying to introduce were not accepted as usual practice. I remember saying that once I had grey hair those who seemed unable to hear what I was saying would listen to me. Now I have grey hair!

Another struggle I had to be heard was with the writing of this dissertation. As the workers had trouble in being heard in their workplace, so too did I in mine. The structure of the dissertation was critically commented upon by many academics. They were sceptical of the possibility of presenting a dissertation in this way. Most suggested that it would be wise to present it in conventional form, rather than challenge the system with a 'radical' presentation, while in the status of being a doctoral student, still earning my 'research
license’. Part of my battle to present in an uncommon format involved overcoming these hierarchical voices of what have been called the ‘academic village elders’ (Pers. comm., Goodall, Sept., 1998)—some of whom could be my examiners. Though Peter Case, a Senior Lecturer from Oxford University (pers. comm., 1998), for example, was at first dubious about the possibility of successfully putting this method of writing a thesis into practice, he eventually considered that it could be done.

A Search for Meaning, Rather Than ‘Truth’

I hope I have avoided what Foucault cautioned against, that is using the ‘truth’ as merely a “mask of dogmatism” (in Merquoir (1985: 149). It is not a matter of finding the ‘truth’ of the meaning for which I was searching, or what Deetz (1992: 7) refers to as “the modern concept of fact”. After all, as Bertrand Russell (1972: 238) once observed, how we see things—our individual ‘truths’—are derived from memory, and each memory is influenced by many factors to give it distinct significance for particular individuals, which can be interpreted as the ‘truth’.

While I acknowledge that this study presents a point of view that is less than positive, it may show how to move from that position to one where there is an opportunity to be open to new possibilities for challenging the status quo and consciously working toward an alternative social construction. In this sense the study could be included as part of ‘appreciative inquiry’\(^\text{25}\) in which people in organisations are asked what works in their organisation. Whereas appreciative inquiry is a way to have workers appreciate themselves, this thesis also intends to have others appreciate the potential contribution of

\(^{25}\) Appreciative Inquiry is a term used to describe research that can be used to move from a positive rather than negative space to enhance human interaction in organisations, an approach taken by such researchers as: Cooperrider (1990); Dutton (pers. comm., Feb., 2000); Gergen (1999; and pers. comm., March, 2000); Ludema (pers. comm., Feb., March, 2000); Shotter (pers. comm., Feb., March, 2000); Thatechenkery (pers. comm., Feb., 2000); Zemke (1999).
the workers. The study puts forward a positive aspect of blue collar workers\textsuperscript{26} that is not often portrayed in the literature on organisational management; that is, their ability to think and contribute to their work beyond their immediate tasks.

To begin this appreciative story of the workers at the Refractories, Chapter One is constructed to firstly introduce the reader to the plant through a visual image of the general environment of the site. I do not analyse the physical nature of the work of the men at BHP Refractories, although in order to give an impression of the nature of the workplace I will outline the conditions in which the men worked. My intention is to create a context in which to place the topics that arise as the dissertation proceeds.

In Chapter One I also outline the basic tenets of the dissertation, including the purpose of the research project and the issues to be raised throughout the thesis. Chapters Two, Three and Four put forward the men’s perspectives on their workplace. These chapters focus on issues of silencing and lack of recognition, which were embedded in feelings the men had of a management conspiracy against them. These perceptions were explained by the men as being shown through secrecy and lack of communication from management. It was from this divisive space that the men formed their identity, separated from management by a very hierarchical structure. The expressions the men gave to their feelings about their conditions and relationships with management are then linked back to feelings of being unheard. Chapter Five describes an unusual circumstance in which the men could be heard, following the death of one of their work mates. Chapters Six and Seven describe the way I went about this study and the reasons for those choices. Chapter Eight draws implications about the importance and value of attending to the stories of the workers.

\textsuperscript{26} This notion of blue collar worker will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.
I would like to end this Preface by briefly introducing you to the workers. Table P.2 sets out the pseudonyms I devised for the workers.\textsuperscript{27} It also includes the number of years they had worked at the Refractories. I have mixed views about showing the positions of the workers. In some senses it may help the reader to consider any differences they may note between those who have a trade and those who, as operators, are presumed not to have any qualifications for the job they do. I was not able to detect any differences in the men's ability to express themselves or understand the business in any more or less depth because of their positions at work. I have not identified them any further for reasons of confidentiality.

\begin{footnote}
These pseudonyms were developed as part of my attempt to maintain the anonymity of the workers. The use of pseudonyms in the dissertation was adopted after some debate with my supervisors over the merits and concerns that it could create, as opposed to keeping the statements totally unidentified.
\end{footnote}
Table P.2 Names of the workers, their years working at the Refractories and position held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years at Refractories</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>team leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tex</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>leading hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vince</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>team leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cain</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ully</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nev</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oli</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urwin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>tradesperson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

“THIS JUNGLE OF INDUSTRIAL PLAYGROUND

The physical environment leads to the attitudes. Everything here is big and noisy and that affects behaviour. When I leave, I'll remember the environment mainly. The big shed and all the metals. And the dust and the amazingness of it all. Not the workers. Not the management. The forklifts and all the big bins, and the conveyor belts. And the atmosphere—how you felt when you were in there—and it had nothing to do with work. It was just how you felt when you were in there, all this jungle of industrial playground. Yeah, the shed definitely. Not the guys. But it will all fade. People fade before the place does. The place has been around a lot longer than the people. None of those people represent the place because the place is over a hundred years old, and the longest person in there has been there for ten/twenty years. So they're not really the place, not as much as the place is the place. I've never worked in a place like it, the security [guards for] getting into it and out of it, the whole thing. It's like another world. It is fully another world. (Ray)

Driving through the entrance to the grounds of the Refractories from within the huge BHP Steel complex, through a half completed car park that was never finished in the three years I was there, was like driving from one reality to another. Like Ray, I felt as though it was cut off from the outside world. Attempts were being made to create some greenery and gardens
in the car park. In a sense, this made the rest of the site even more starkly drab. Ray, too, displayed this gloom in his voice, manner and grimy attire.

BHP is a massive, dominant structure on the Wollongong landscape. BHP Refractories at Port Kembla was housed in a massive ‘tin’ shed, made from BHP steel, painted in part a bright sky-blue with BHP’s own ‘colourbond’ paint. The plant takes up a couple of acres of ground within the massive complex that is BHP Steel at Port Kembla. The blue paint is part of BHP’s stated attempt to create a more environmentally friendly appearance to an otherwise grey and dirty industrial complex. It is hard to believe that this busy, noisy manufacturing plant—with all its dust and machinery and men wearing dark blue work overalls, bright yellow vests, dust masks and white safety helmets—is only a walk away from a small, golden sandy surf beach called MM’s by the locals. The tin shed in which the men worked, surrounded by large, noisy machinery and hot, dusty air, arguably contributed to the lack of congeniality that I observed at the plant.

Walking across the semi-completed paths of dirt and gravel, I could see through the large open doorway into one of the areas where the men worked. There was another open door directly opposite on the other side of the shed. In the winter, the wind whistles through these doors which often have to be kept open for trucks to deliver and pick up stocks. In the summer, the shed doorways act as a breezeway for some air to enter the otherwise stifling hot atmosphere—the heat being held in by its metal construction, a lack of general ventilation, and the ovens that bake the ‘bricks’.

Sometimes, as I arrived, the men from one of the sections of the plant would be on tea breaks, sitting or standing outside the crib (lunch) room on the narrow first floor landing.

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1 The shed is referred to as ‘tin’ giving it a local flavour of the old outside tin dunny [toilet] that was part of Australia’s less sophisticated past.
2 Metal Manufacturers Pty Ltd.
that looks over the shop floor of the plant. They would call out greetings to me as I passed the entrance and climbed the outside stairs to the office, which is upstairs and seemingly hanging suspended inside the plant itself. Often the remarks would be about the content of a workshop I had conducted with them, or what I was doing there this time, or about the football.

“\textbf{It’s Heavy Work, and We’re Part of Heavy Industry}”

We work pretty hard out there like you can see. Doing that for twelve hours it does take its toll ... We put up with all the dust and rubbish and everything ... It is heavy work and we’re part of heavy industry. (Owen)

The men worked on different parts of the process of making the bricks, mostly to be used in the steel-making process. Some worked on mixing the powdered raw material; others combined the dry mix with precise amounts of water to pour into various shaped moulds, \textit{the larger ones being baked in a large steel-sided kiln with the smaller ones left to air-dry}. Some moved moulds around with cranes, others with forklift trucks. Completed bricks were stacked nearby, ready for collection by trucking contractors. In another part of the plant, more intricate forms were moulded to be used in the steelworks. The work was often physically tough, as the men lifted heavy weights, working in extreme temperatures in dust-filled air. Sometimes they had to wear heavy, hot and uncomfortable protective clothing about which they complained bitterly.

The men worked long hours, including overtime, an issue that often brought them to near blows with each other and the managers. Mostly working overtime was seen as a bonus because of the extra money they could earn at time-and-a-half or double-time. On occasion some of the men worked not only double, but triple shifts—up to twenty-four hours at a
stretch when particular jobs had to be completed and there were no other specialist workers on hand to do the job.

**Long Hours of Working**

I was in the crib room with two of the workers who were on "doublers", working from 11 pm one day to 3 pm the next. I was there at 12.30 pm. One of the workers was so tired he could hardly keep awake, and he mostly had his head on the table. I asked how he could work when he felt so tired, and he replied that he woke up while he was working; it was just when he stopped that he noticed that he was tired. The looks on their faces during these stints were of absolute exhaustion.³

This work load took its toll. In one crew, for example, out of the six on the shift, only one was not on "workers' compensation", meaning light duties due to work-related injuries. This left just this one man to do all the heavy work—until he, too, hurt his back while lifting twenty-five kilogram bags of cement, as part of the job.

**"Dirt Money. We Get Money For Working in a Dirty Environment"**

He [a supervisor] said we have to wear masks, but we can't do that all the time. They're so hot and uncomfortable, and even when we're walking from one place to another in the shed, it's full of dust; sometimes it's thick, when a batch has been spilled. (Ned)

The nature of the work was dirty. Sometimes the dust rose thickly in the air from the operations. The dirt was unavoidably brought into the crib rooms as the men came off the shop floor to have their meal breaks. The food they ate was often encrusted with dust. As the men worked, they were covered in black and grey dust that changed the colour of their

skin and was difficult, if not impossible, to remove at the end of the shift. The grime only seemed to come off after the men had a long break away from the works. The dirt meant elaborate procedures for cleaning were in place, which led to some interesting and unexpected events.

**Dirt and Cleaning**

The moulds and mixing vats in Castings needed to be cleaned with a high-powered hose to remove the dust of the cement after the pourings. One day a hose fight broke out amongst two workers. One of them, who was on top of the equipment, and was virtually cut off from escape routes, ended up totally soaked. Fortunately, it was a hot day. He was nevertheless not happy, to say the least—although he laughed and fought back as best he could (‘boys’ games!’).  

**What the Stories of the Workers at BHP Refractories Bring to Light**

The persistent substance of the workers’ descriptions of being silenced is woven through the stories they told me about working at BHP Refractories. They expressed a sweeping sense of disregard and discontent with their working life. They talked of being treated with lack of care or respect by their managers. They then, displayed a reciprocal lack of respect or trust of management.

From this state of what they saw as disregard from management, they formed a strong sense of identity with their peers. They supported each other in an emotional, as well as a physical space that was separate from the managers. In some instances the workers

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4 Personal Journal (10.9.1997). These games are part of the interaction the men had with the materials with which they worked, where “every struggle with material is also a social struggle” (Dan Rose, pers. com., March, 2000). These types of games are common practice as part of the process of belonging and identification that Ackroff and Thompson (1999: 109) explain in their work on misbehaviour in organisations.
themselves were also divided. The divisions they experienced, they talked of as expected behaviour in the company; a state that they said would not change. Many of their comments alluded to the belief that managers would not be willing to share their power, because it would mean losing the ascendancy they held over the workers.

The stories the men told do not align with much of the positive nature of discourse around changes to management styles and inclusion of workers in organisational management. Most of the current literature on management is written from the perspective of academics, managers and business consultants, not from workers, particularly in industrial settings.

The workers talked of issues of inclusion and decision making from many different perspectives. Some would like to have been included in a broader sense in the running of the company; others were happy to leave all tasks other than direct work-related decisions to the managers.

The Operations of BHP

BHP Steelworks began its operations in the Illawarra region in the 1920s. It has been a major player in employment and economic growth in the region and is still a major employer in the area, even though its workforce has been dropped from a peak of 20,000 from 1971-1983, to about 6,000 in 1999. BHP has had a chequered career affected by world wars, depressions, downturns in the market and global economic changes. By 1986, it was Australia’s largest company, declaring Australia’s first billion dollar company

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5 A chronology of BHP is detailed in Appendix 24. This is then combined in Appendix 25 with events that occurred as part of this.


7 Castle (1997).
It is now operational in fifty nine countries, in such diverse places as Canada, Indonesia, Chile, Zimbabwe, India, Brazil and the USA. It has four main business groups: copper, minerals, steel and petroleum. Engineering, information technology, insurance, power and transport are part of its overall operations. In 1996 BHP's sales reached A$18 million with assets of A$30 million. BHP had, at that time, 1.6 billion shares, having been listed on overseas stock markets in 1987.

The company grew substantially for almost one hundred years from its incorporation in 1885, when it began mining silver, lead and zinc in New South Wales. Then, in 1984, it shed a dramatic one-third of its industrial jobs due to changing worldwide steel markets and technological innovation. The most dramatic reduction of its activities was the closing of its entire steel operations in Newcastle, north of Sydney, in 1998, having a massive impact on that city and repercussions for other related operations across Australia, including the Refractories at Port Kembla.

This cutback followed a dramatic sixty percent reduction in profits in 1996/97 from a previous peak in 1992. During the time of this study, BHP "experienced considerable instability and serious financial strain" (Garrety, 1999).

Graph 1.1 showing employment levels at BHP Port Kembla 1945-1996

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8 1996 BHP Pocket Book, Corporate Communications, Melbourne.
The refractory company was incorporated in 1908 as Newbold General Refractories until 1974 when it became Australian Industrial Refractories and then BHP Refractories in 1991. The Port Kembla refractory plant was opened in 1931, followed two years later by another plant nearby. The Refractories organisation has been a subsidiary of BHP Steel since 1935. At that time 500 workers were employed by the Refractories. The Refractories have had a series of profit-and-loss scenarios throughout their ninety or so years of operation. As part of BHP, they experienced the ups and downs of the steel industry and the various restructuring programs introduced to the parent company. In 1992, the "Refractories embarked on programs aimed at reducing overheads and improving efficiency" as reported in *Refractories, 90 Years*, a book produced by the company's public relations department when the company was sold in 1998 to a Japanese-British consortium. By this time the Refractory workforce had been reduced to around 130 workers. Other subsidiary parts of BHP were also being sold off.

At the time of the field study (1997-1999), the Refractories were going through extensive and accelerated change. A great deal of uncertainty surrounded the industry. There was a downturn in activity, closures (and proposed closures) of sections of BHP, and most significantly as far as this study is concerned, the sale of the Refractories. The change of ownership represented a major change. The company had, prior to this time, been Australian-owned for its hundred-year history and the workers expressed fears of the new foreign ownership, not knowing what to expect from a different cultural base.

The knowledge I gained through this study emerged through an interpretive process, within a social constructivist approach to collaborative ethnography, through my frequent

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9 *Gergen (1995), Rosen (1991) and Goodall (1994) consider interpretive ethnography to be a challenge to epistemological premises, as it interprets the "flow of social discourse" (Geertz, 1973: 20), although Goodall (1994: 150) describes it as "fancy language for something as uncomplicated as hanging out*
interactions with the men. The approach was intended to highlight the complex nature of human perceptions, interactions and relationships in the industrial setting at the Refractories.

Without my being aware of it at the time, consultancy work I had been doing on teambuilding with one of the crews at the Refractories acted as a 'pilot' study, between 1995 and 1997. The research began in January, 1997, and detailed observations were completed in July, 1998. I spent up to three days a week for several hours a day at the plant. During this time I gathered some wonderfully rich anecdotes about every day experiences, as well as profound insights through detailed observations, interviews and reading documentation of BHP Refractories.

Research Questions—for the Workers, for the Literature and for Me

The three focus topics presented in this dissertation emerged from an analysis of the workers' concerns about the way they were treated by many of the staff. I began to question what was behind their assertions, and what impact this had on their working lives. Key questions emerged out of the open ended discussions I had with the men.

What did the workers perceive to be the particular organisational structures and practices that inhibited their being heard and valued, or given recognition for their potential contribution to the business? How did this impact on their perceptions of themselves? How did they see their silencing impacting on the functioning of the company?

From within these central questions came a string of related and overlapping questions that helped me to expand on my understanding of the workers' experiences and beliefs. These

with people, taking notes on what they do and say, noticing aspects of their environments, and writing it down the best you can". 28
sub-questions, conceived as my field work progressed, helped refine my perception of the
three central themes:

• How were these expressed forces of silencing and exclusion experienced and felt by the
  workers?
• What mechanisms did they see could be used to give them the opportunity to express
  their voices and feel they would be heard?
• What did they see could happen if they were heard?
• What did they see as the consequences of not being heard—for themselves and the
  business?
• Was there a common desire for involvement?
• What forms of contribution did they consider they could make to the business?

Along with these questions about the workers and their workplace arose a further series of
vital questions for my research process: Is it possible, or even necessary in this type of
research to come up with answers? Whose answers would they be? How could I represent
their voices? What could happen to these voices? What value would this study have for the
men? And of particular concern to me: What could the consequences be for the workers in
participating in the project? For example, could the findings ‘play into the hands’ of the
managers? So, in the process of asking questions of the workplace, more questions were
raised in regard to the research process itself.

Gathering Information and Selecting What to Present

Many distinctive characteristics of working in an industrial setting provided substantial
challenges that impacted on the research, as detailed in Chapters Six and Seven. Some of
these factors were generated by the nature of the business enterprise and the physical space
in which the workers operated. Others were created around relationships and critical
incidents. The nature of the men’s work meant that gaining access to them was, to say the
least, disorderly. In relation to myself and the fieldwork, my initial relationship with many of the workers was as a relative stranger. Others I had worked with as a consultant, and I knew two of the men, Ray and Ned, as near neighbours. I was a female in an all-male environment. This I was an academic and was associated with management, and hence held in some suspicion.

Within the many pre-determined as well as the unexpected events I experienced at the plant, I made a determined effort to form working relationships with the men at the Refractories. This involved spending a great deal of time on the shop floor, 'hanging around', so that I could build rapport with the workers that revolved around everyday workplace activities. It meant regularly joining in casual conversations with the men and showing my sincere interest in what was happening to them. It was through this extended contact that I was able to gather such a wealth of valuable material for this dissertation.

However, not all of the material gathered during the fieldwork stage is reported in this dissertation. Much of what I learned is of a personal nature and could be damaging to individuals involved with the study if it were presented here. To lessen the possibility of identifying individuals, they have been given pseudonyms. There are other reasons some material gathered has been omitted. The sheer volume of the material is far too great to include all of it. Insights from managers are not included, as explained in the Preface of this dissertation. Issues outside the major topics raised here are not included, and other material collected is not relevant to this dissertation.

Gaps in the Literature and Practice of Management

10 This position of female in a male environment is explored more fully in Chapter Six.
11 'Fieldwork' is used here in the sense that the social researcher Briggs (1986: 7) uses it, that is, a variety of procedures, not just interviews.
12 As set out at the end of the Preface.
Within the literary contributions in various discipline areas, particularly the organisational management literature (both academic and popular), contribution from workers is limited, if not altogether absent, in terms of management theories. Perspectives on managing are seen to be the prerogative of those in the higher echelons of organisations, or of strategic management scholars or consultants. Theory making is seen in the literature to be the exclusive property of academics. It does not allow for serious consideration of the expert reflections of workers on management skills.

There is ample literary discourse about creating better work forces through changed management styles to increase the profitability and smooth running of the company, according to the organisational management theorist, Griffin (1998). But there is a dearth of shop floor intelligence in the literature, as Suzaki (1993: 111) comments in his work on his international experience of industrial shop floor management. We rarely gain a close and personal look at what goes on at the shop floor level that influences how businesses are conducted. Workers are not seen to be theorists, even though it is individuals who create theories through their interpretations of their own lives. Yet, "the shop floor is where the theories and reality collide" Suzaki notes. In this dissertation I reflect on workers' theories of management practices.

When the literature and managers take the approach that workers' voices count for little in theory making, workers' knowledge goes untapped and unacknowledged as a valuable source of understanding. Because of this disregard the workers miss out on being able to contribute in a broad sense to their working lives, and the business misses out on a useful perspective to its operations. The omission then spreads to the wider society. We do not

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13 Referred to in the Preface.
gain the benefit of their knowledge through the development of better products and perhaps a less disruptive industrial relations environment in our region. This notion of others missing out on the contribution that minority groups can make to organisations of which they are part was demonstrated through the research of Gluck and Vialle (1998) in which they demonstrated that Aboriginal students—as a minority group—can, if listened to, add value to the way mainstream subjects are taught at university.

Representations of structural approaches to managing that speak for workers' perspectives do exist in various management and sociological texts. There have been some significant sociological contributions in this area. For example, Terkel's extensive reporting through his interviews with workers over the past seventy years, Donaldson's (1997) contributions on aspects of working class lives in Australia, and Kriegler's (1980) dissertation and subsequent book on the working conditions of the men at BHP Shipyards present perspectives of the lives of industrial workers. Each of these works is an expose of workers' lives. They use quotations from the workers to describe their working conditions. Yet they do not use the words of the workers as constitutional of management theories.

What I am presenting here is an extension of these approaches to include a closer look at the self-perceptions of workers' views about management. Their opinions provide a serious theoretical contribution to the academic literature on managing.

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15 For example, Emery (1976); Fox & Lake (1993); Held (1982); Roberts (1973).
The Pervasiveness of Lack of Acceptance of Workers as General Contributors

An example of how the omission of workers' contribution is perpetuated through academia was observed by me when I sat in on a post-graduate management lecture at my University. The lecturer, when commenting on his presentation about management perspectives, said: "We are learning about management's perspective because we are, after all, in a Management Department."  

This dismissal of workers seems to me to be indicative of management theorists' and practitioners' approaches to workers; that is, 'we' are different from 'them'; workers are not taken into account in terms of managing; they are not to be brought in as a vital part of managing. Barriers are reinforced in this environment, where managers are trained to think they know more than workers and can manage people better.

Conclusion: "The Place is the Place"

In describing the environment of the plant and the basic tenets of the thesis, this chapter has been designed to lead to consideration of the major topics presented in the following three chapters. These chapters are structured so that the workers' voices lead the discussion. The chapters will cover the self-perceptions of the workers in relation to the issues of not being heard, the formation of identity through divisions at BHP Refractories, and the workers' feelings about the link between managers' lack of care for or relationships with the workers. The workers' perceptions are linked to their sense of the ineffectiveness of management. These concepts are supported by my interpretation of their stories, and addressed further through the relevant literature.

16 Personal journal (4.4.1998).
I will not be proposing a model for resolving the many contentious issues that are raised. I have no intention of falling into the trap that the anthropologist, Rose (1989: 3) identifies, namely, "social science knowledge [is] being used to control the ways in which [people] interact." Rather, I will describe life at the Refractories from the points of view of those workers with whom I interacted and present their theories on effective management through their words.

In the following chapter, I concentrate on the issues of not being heard and lack of recognition which were strongly emphasised by most of the men with whom I talked. I address how the workers viewed their position in the company and how they believed they were blocked from contributing by a conspiracy of secrecy by management. The workers' view of possibilities for communication are also outlined.

What we think about doesn't seem to really matter. (Ned)
CHAPTER TWO

"NO ONE UP THERE IS LISTENING TO ME"

Sometimes they listen. Sometimes they don’t. (Stan)

We used to have meetings that were supposed to be working on how the plant's working and what could be done better. It only met for about three times. (Frank)

We know they're not fair dinkum. They go through all of this bullshit. (Ully)

No one up there is listening to me. (Tex)

The workers at BHP Refractories often expressed their perceptions of not being heard by their managers. Their views of thus feeling silenced and the consequences of speaking out at work will be explored in this chapter in terms of how being disregarded affected their ability to be involved in decision making. Silencing is a subtle way of stopping people from being heard. Because the men considered that they were not heard, they were then put in a position of feeling it was a waste of time saying what they thought. They could sense that the structure in which they worked systematically prevented the managers from listening.

They talked of having limited opportunities to express their concerns, and how even when occasions arise where they can voice their opinions; they do not see any impact from their contributions. Contrasting positions will also be considered as some of the men said there were opportunities to have a certain amount of input into the business through formal meetings or conversations with their managers, although not to a large degree and not as often as they had in the past. The men felt that both the workers and the company would benefit if the workers were included in broader decision making in the company.
In light of the men’s recurring reference to the deception they observed from their managers, issues of secrecy and trust from the workers’ point of view will be considered. The workers said the deceit added to the spread of rumours across the shop floor that they saw as a way of dealing with a perceived lack of information.

The intricacies of communication that the workers talked about will also be reflected upon in light of what they perceived as management’s inability to listen to the workers. These factors combine to provide a picture of people working in an environment where they were not given credit or acknowledgment for the contribution they believed they could make to the improvement of the business.

Silencing as a form of social control appeared to the workers to be pervasive at the Refractories, as it is said to be in other organisations. What you will see in this chapter is that omission of the workers’ input, together with secrecy and withholding information, were seen by the workers to be powerful devices for domination and social control.

“They Just Don’t Listen to Us”

It’s the old suggestion box: the workers won’t be putting suggestions in because they never get a response, even to say why the suggestion wasn’t taken up. (Vince)

I believe some of the decisions made here are just not right, they’re incorrect. But, we’re not paid to make those decisions I suppose. There’s some decisions that go on here that could be dealt with in a different manner, involving the workers more. (Chad)

What chance have you got of [the plant manager] listening to a worker off the floor? They’d be run off the floor. I think everything here’s wrong, but I’m only one person. They wouldn’t listen to me. I’ve been here for six years now. I’ve been to meetings where we’ve put in our input and when it comes to designing or fixing the plant it’s totally different. They just don’t listen to us. (Ned)
Having a say was a high priority for most of the workers at the Refractories. Yet just having a say was not enough. Many of the men also said they wanted to have their points of view acknowledged and to see tangible evidence that their input had been accepted. They perceived that their suggestions were discounted or ignored by the managers, openly and/or covertly, even when it was management's stated intention to incorporate their ideas. They talked of a lack of dialogue with the managers, who, they said, talked at them and ordered them to do things, rather than consulted with them or included them in decision making or operational input. This behaviour is often mentioned in organisational management literature as typical in organisations.

... Management often wax enthusiastically about the principles of employee participation, [yet] fall well short of suggesting that the best way to encourage this participation would be to afford each worker a right of expression.


The workers felt that management paid 'lip-service' to their stated intention to listen to what the workers had to say. This practice of seemingly listening is referred to as 'mock listening' by the Australian social researcher, Hugh McKay (1994: 143), which he calls a 'cruel deception' because it sets up a false expectation that the speaker will be heard. They did not get a sense of "the conventional wisdom [of the] well-established aspect of ... participative approach to the management of change" of which Buchanan and Body (1992: 14) write in their work on change management in organisations.

The workers at Refractories seem to be part of a growing number of workers who feel anger at this disregard.\(^3\) They were aware that the same practices of silencing that they

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1 As Markey, Murray, Mylett, Pomfret and Zanko (1998: 35) found to be the case for the workers in their Labour Market Survey in the Illawarra region of workers' perceptions of managing.
2 Associate professor of law at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, Massachusetts.
3 A finding also of Hays (1999: 38) in his study of silencing at work in American companies.
experienced at the Refractories were occurring in other companies with which they were familiar. They talked of themselves as being at a distinct disadvantage in the workplace because they were not listened to. And yet they saw themselves as having a level of knowledge of the business far beyond that for which management gave them credit. Often people at these levels are "the ones who know the situation and have profound insights into them ... They are building theory on every conceivable level", as Gwaltney (1975: xv) points out through his work with disadvantaged black people in the United States. The workers did speculate and theorise about the business and its management. "Every person is a philosopher" (Foley, 1995: 207).

The importance of listening to workers is mentioned in much of the popular and academic organisational management literature. Listening, though, is a word that means different things to different people. What the workers were referring to when they spoke about listening relates to what Sheila McNamee (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) refers as: "attentiveness to the process of relating." This inclusive phrase gives the concept a broad notion of actively being involved with the speaker. The investigative journalists Caudron (1999) and McKay (1994) assert that the key skills of attending are rarely used by management, who appear to be unwilling to put in the time and energy required to hear and then act on what their workers have to say. Some management consultants purport to be able to redress this imbalance through extensive training for managers. Most of these approaches do not consider the cultural and structural barriers to people being able to listen or others being able to feel that they can tell their stories to those in power positions. The workers at the Refractories did not believe that the managers would ever listen, no matter

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4 This concept of disadvantage is further dealt with in Chapters Three and Four.
5 Such as Argyris (1993); Gilligan (1997); Harshman & Harshman (1999); Kaye (1996); Morris (1994); Windshuttle & Elliott (1999).
6 Referred to in some detail in Chapter Six in relation to my approach to 'active listening'.
7 As outlined in many of the popular management journals, such as: HR Magazine, Manage, The Journal of Business Communication, Training and Development and Workforce, by such writers as Boyle (1999); Caudron (1999); Gilsdorf (1998); Salopek (1999); and Vander Houwen (1997).
how much training they had, even if it were long-term as suggested by Blumenthal and Haspeslagh (1994) in their work on corporate transformation.

“The Employees Can Fulfil the Whole Role”

This takes us back to 1992 when all this started. We had TBI (Total Business Improvement). They cut 40% of the workforce. Nothing worked. They’d be better off spending their money on machinery. (Tex)

People on the floor stay here, and supervisors come and go every couple of years. (Harry)

The system doesn’t change. Ideas change with the different managers. (Tex)

When he [supervisor] [first] came here and we were having problems, he took four of us over to the plant where he came from and got the bosses over there to talk to us about how they work. What he was trying to do was get contractors more, instead of us doing the job. We’ve given him figures showing we can do the job cheaper than contractors. (Jerry)

The employees can fulfil the whole role, including ordering and doing the job. (Rohan)

The workers who had been around for many years felt that they had more knowledge than some of the managers about how the plant functioned in some specific areas. For example, they had numerous ideas for improving processes to save time, effort and money or to manufacture a superior product. They expressed a sense of frustration that these ideas were not taken into account by management.

Several of the workers who were part of this study had been at the Refractories for ten years or more, with the average being eight and a half years. The managers were rotated, through company policy, every three to five years.

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8 Management training is discussed further in Chapter Three.
9 See Appendix 1 for details of the amount of time the workers had spent at the Refractories.
Innovations Designed by a Worker

Vince showed me the new designs for moulds that he had devised from foam, rather than the previous timber frame. The new moulds lasted longer than the timber ones and were easier to place in the metal outer frame. They also took up less water from the mixture and so set more readily. 10

The workers' ideas were often interesting and perceptive, many going beyond their immediate tasks. They were not the 'oxen' talked of by Frederick Taylor. 11 They could reflect on their situation. They considered they were a valuable source of intelligence in the organisation, having something to contribute; yet that was denied them. Through experience they could understand what was wrong with materials in a practical sense, and deduce how those errors could be corrected.

Workers' Knowledge About the Operations of the Plant

As Chad and Roscoe stood next to some bricks that had been poured and were not setting, they explained to me why this had happened and how it could be fixed. They said the non-setting was caused by an incorrect mixture in the raw material sent to them from 'Mono'. It had too much aluminium powder in it they said. They thought this had happened partly because of the way the crew in 'Mono' were pushed to produce a certain amount of tonnes each shift, rather than focussing on maintaining quality. They also suggested that because of the relationships some of the workers had with a particular supervisor, that they went out of their way to be less careful with mixing the formulas. Chad and Roscoe did not consider that management were aware of these dynamics and so necessary changes to produce higher quality products were not made. 12

10 Personal journal (4.11.1997).
11 In Lennie (1998); Maguire (1999); and Thompson & McHugh (1990).
12 Personal journal (4.11.1997).
Workers' knowledge was not only related to technical matters. It also extended to personnel management. 13 “It is quite conceivable that some of the workers could be at later stages of [managerial skill] development than managers, although they are put in a position at work where the structure is not challenging [these workers] to move to later stages” the organisational management theorist, Bill Torbert commented (pers. comm., Feb., 2000). We went on to discuss how the men at the Refractories were probably capable of using these skills, but were not given the opportunity to do so.

The workers also had inside information about the latest organisational changes in BHP Steel through their extensive networks of mates in other parts of the company. In some instances, the information they gathered about the company was more up-to-date than that held by some of the Refractory managers, even though some of the information may have been based on hearsay.

The workers were aware, too, of other aspects of running the business. They talked of such diverse areas as work practices and opportunities, training, interpersonal relationships, environmental practices, structural factors, product development and implementation, and working conditions. And they appeared to be well aware of the amount of knowledge they had in these areas. Their interests in these broader issues, they said, arose because of the direct impact various areas of running the business had on their lives. 14

One of the complaints the workers made was related to the sales and marketing staff, whom they saw as jeopardising the business through ineffective tendering and lack of product promotion, resulting, they said, in a reduction in production. This drop in production

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13 This topic of workers' ideas on managing is dealt with also in Chapter Four.

14 This interest of industrial workers in broad issues was demonstrated in interviews with steel workers from BHP Newcastle on the day of its closure, in a television broadcast Steel City. The Big Picture (26.10.2000). One worker said: “Prosperous workers mean a prosperous nation”.

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levels directly impacted on availability of overtime, which translated into dollars for the workers. ¹⁵

The flow-on impacts of sales and marketing decisions such as this led them to have an extensive interest in profit making. It also influenced their interest in and knowledge of the costing of materials, storage needs, possible markets, and the supply and delivery of finished products. Some workers made astute comments about the state of the business and its future, with many of their predictions materialising over time.

Workers' Business Predictions

Chad predicted the level of redundancies that would be offered by the company before the sale, and also correctly named many of the managers who were eventually moved out of the company; Don anticipated the downturn in the steel market; Cain talked about the approaching reduction in orders for particular Refractory products because of the change in the market; before there was any formal indication that the company had been sold to a Japanese/English consortium, Ully interpreted the secrecy surrounding the General Manager's reason for his visit to Japan in October 1997, as an obvious sign that the company was being sold to a Japanese firm, even when this was denied by management. ¹⁶

The prediction of the sale came to fruition in March, 1998. As mentioned earlier, a Japanese/British consortium bought the plant.

¹⁵ Personal journal (20.6.1997).
¹⁶ Personal journal (20.6.1997) and the workers' meeting (22.5.1997).
Not All the Predictions Came to Pass

Tex quite authoritatively told me that no one was going to buy the company because it was in such a parlous financial state, and that it would probably be shut down by January, 1998. He also thought that his crew would go first and be outsourced. None of these scenarios eventuated. The company was bought by another consortium and remained open, and his crew were not even offered the redundancies that others were.\(^{17}\)

The workers were also interested in the needs of the customers and others involved in the distribution and supply of materials. One of the sources of the workers' awareness came through their knowledge of the workplace in an important relational sense as they had information from suppliers and customers through their contact with their employees, information to which the managers may not have been privy.

Workers' Sources of Information

The trucks and vans from suppliers and customers drove into the entrance to the shop floor near the three sections of the plant. When they arrived, it was often some time before the raw materials were unloaded or the finished products loaded. During this time the workers often talked to the drivers. The men told me that they learnt a good deal about other businesses from these drivers as they talked about their company's needs and requirements. This contact was not available to the managers in this immediate sense.\(^{18}\)

As an example of the workers' broad perspectives on the conduct of the business, at an information session with the new owners of the company, the workers asked the following broad range of questions:

\(^{17}\) Personal journal (27.5.1997).

\(^{18}\) Personal journal (2.7.1997).
1. Can we expect to see shop floor representation in the development of products?
2. What sort of sales team have you got?
3. Will there be greater sales for Port Kembla in the short term?¹⁹
4. Will there be an employee share plan and have shares of this company gone up?
5. Will products from other plants be transferred to Port Kembla?
6. How far into the future are you looking to change?
7. Are you looking at using overseas products coming through STC?
8. Will there be a head office at Port Kembla for day-to-day decisions?
9. Can I come to see you [General Manager] if I have a problem?
10. Are you talking about moving workers between other plants in other locations?
11. Will there be any changes to shift structure?
12. Contractors are expected to be finished up. What sort of future do we have?
13. Do you have any visions for training people on the floor?

Through these questions, the workers showed that they were aware of impacts of the broader issues of running a business on their own lives. Further examples of the workers' broader interest and understanding of the company practice and policy was demonstrated when the General Manager of the Refractories held meetings to inform the workers about the progress of the sale of the plant.

¹⁹ The new company had other refractory plants in this and other regions across Australia.
Further Examples of Awareness and Interest by the Workers in Regard to Broad Organisational Issues

All the workers on each shift attended these meetings. They asked several carefully thought out questions about the viability of the company. They wanted to know about the financial implications of the take-over and what products the new company would be making. They were also interested in the composition of organising committees for the hand over. The managers often did not answer all these questions directly because they said they did not know the answers. They said they would send the questions to the head office and pass the replies on to the workers. The workers said they thought that the managers did know some of the answers but had been told by the head office not to give responses in case they were not absolutely accurate.

The workers put what was happening at the plant at this time (in the ten months from May, 1997 to March, 1998) into the wider context of the industry as a whole and the general uncertainty in the Australian economy, including BHP, whose shares had slumped quite dramatically at the time. Many of their questions were related to this wider outlook for the industry and its effects on the Refractory business, and hence on themselves.

When meetings were held in which the workers did have the opportunity to ask questions, these were of little value because direct responses were not given.

"We Just Want Some Recognition"

They’re [management] ignoring what people say or think. In the end nothing gets done. Management takes no notice of workers, or if they do, they don’t acknowledge it. (Stan)

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20 From around $20.00 at their peak, to under $13.00 at this time, June 1997.
We gave a list of outstanding work on the plant to supervisors and that was the last we ever heard of it. ... It's often the case that someone suggests something needs to be done and it will be ignored and somewhere down the track it will be done when it's told to them by someone else. They [managers] don't believe their own work force. It seems as if they can't accept that people who work here have the answers, but that outside people do. (Cain)

You can have an opinion here and relate it to your supervisor and that's as far as it goes. You should be entitled to a reply whether it's good or bad. You could save the company money. (Stan)

We get asked to put up suggestions and then nothing happens; or twelve months down the track it happens; but it's been their suggestions. We used to sit around this table with the engineers but we were just a piece of shit—it was just a token gesture. (Harry)

Very rarely, one of the managers will go over to one of the guys on the floor and say: 'I read your sheets yesterday; you did really well, you know'. (Nat)

There's no gratitude or congratulations [from senior managers]—that's all you want. You get nothing. You don't even get anything for ten years. I've only got one thank you in ten years. There's no appreciation there at all. It's my job to get things going but it wouldn't hurt to say 'thanks' sometimes. It's always the negative things that come out, not the positive things. If you do something wrong you know quickly, not when you do something right. (Frank)

We were insulted once by [the supervisor]. We were all given $10 for housekeeping. He couldn't even give us a barbecue. He gives us $10. We looked at this $10 and it was pathetic. Pathetic. It wasn't the point of the cash. It was to say thanks; putting out all that extra effort to keep the place clean and safer. A barbecue is what they want for that. That's what all the guys want. That way, it's a reward while you're at work and you get to sit down and talk to everyone else. And you feel good. You're eating a hamburger saying: 'This is a gift from the company to me for putting in a bit of effort'. Even though it seems silly and simple, it means a lot. To give us $10 and walk away with $10 in our pocket's stupid, absolutely stupid. He would have been better off giving us a little typed out page saying: 'Ray performed excellently in housekeeping, ra, ra, ra'. Just a little sheet rather than $10. At least you'd then have this sheet to put in your portfolio to show you were a hard worker and they did recognise that. None of that. We got $10. (Ray)

Some thank you sometimes, but it is pretty shallow. (Deon)

We just want some recognition that we've done a reasonable job—not cash reward, but just a pat on the back. You don't expect it from the plant manager—just one above you. (Harry)
Contrary to notions that there is a growing recognition of the wisdom of the workers that is said by Micklethwaite and Wooldridge (1997: 9) to be evident in modern organisations, the workers at the Refractories felt that their abilities in understanding the business went unrecognised. They saw that through the disregard for the value of their input their legitimacy as people to be taken seriously was missing.

The workers at the Refractories indicated that the discounting and lack of recognition they experienced led them to feel devalued. There was much talk of a strong sense of injustice and despondency that ensued from the lack of consideration or validation for their input. Frank quite graphically described his response to this lack of recognition and how that developed into his sense of disillusionment with management.

Frank’s Story

I was employed as an apprentice nine years ago. I went to Tech. four nights a week. I had to pass to get paid. I worked at Thirroul [plant] and worked around the clock. I was doing call outs at nights. I thought they were testing me out. It was good getting all these challenges. Then I was at Slide Gate where I was a third year apprentice and I faced a lot of challenges and passed them. I was learning how the machines worked. I was quite happy. At Unanderra I was doing contractors’ work on my own. Then I went to Mono. I was working as a tradesman and I was on my own (as a third year apprentice). I was studying my fourth year diploma. The company was encouraging me to go to Tech. I hadn’t taken any sickies and was a model employee and then I went to Slide Gate. That was a scary experience because I didn’t know whether I had a job yet. This is where I started to resent management. They did give me time off and good work and heaps of challenges which I must have done well in because I was the only one kept on. I had only two months left of my apprenticeship, and didn’t know whether I had a job. I was classified down to a C8 because I didn’t have enough experience, but I was one of the most highly qualified through TAFE and I was doing tradesman’s work. I gave them everything I could and they rewarded me like that. My job was made redundant. I had no problem with that. They offered me retrenchment. I was awarded apprentice of the year. TBI came through and I was shipped out to Thirroul. The very next week, they had a contractor here and that made my shoulder-chip deeper. At Thirroul I was frequently twiddling my thumbs. They had two permanent contractors out there for two years. I was quite hurt. I did the right thing for all those years and what have I got out of it? I’ve had a gripe with them ever since.22

22 Interview (29.7.1997).
As Frank recalled his story his voice was quite impassioned. He expressed a strong sense of frustration at his perceived disenfranchisement and loss of personal power. Several of the workers mentioned that they also wanted their insights into aspects of the manufacture of the products, about which management knew comparatively little, to be recognised.

Whether it related to product development, innovations to machinery or ideas for improving workplace practices, the workers talked of the simple ways they could be recognised for their contributions. They said that it was these simple gestures, such as a barbecue or even just the proverbial ‘pat-on-the-back’, that would make them feel more enthused about their work.

“I Don’t Have the Levels to Tell Anyone Anything”

The blokes on the floor know what’s happening and how things should be done, but they don’t get asked. They just get told. (Ned)

If the blokes on the floor were asked what improvements were needed they could tell management. They’d be happy to see improvements. (Ray)

He [the manager] knows about the products and processes and materials, but he knows nothing about how it runs day to day; he’s never down there. (Ray)

What we want is a bit of brain stimulation. (Vince)

A lot of the guys have some excellent ideas that’d save time and money for the company—like on safety and efficiency. They’re the ones that should know because they’re the ones on the machines. Management wouldn’t have a clue what’d save time and money because they’re never down there. (Ned)

I don’t have the levels to tell anyone anything. No one will listen. I’m only a Level Two. (Ray)

Even though they had extensive knowledge of the business, the workers felt they were not given the recognition because they were at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder (and it
certainly was a very hierarchical structure at Refractories—see Appendix 2)\textsuperscript{23}. They considered that their views, attitudes and lived experiences of managing counted for very little. Workers said that they were largely ignored by their managers who, they felt, wanted to be in control. Workers said they were seen to know nothing more than aspects related to their immediate tasks. The frustration they expressed at this inability to contribute in any substantial way to the functioning of the business was palpable. This frustration, which sometimes led to extreme displays of anger about things management had said or done, was evident whenever I talked with the men. Every time I talked with them, they expressed anger about something that management had, or had not done, which they considered the workers could have addressed. They were frustrated that managers did not spend enough time on the shop floor, and so missed out on much of what was really going on that could benefit the business. Bartlett and Ghosal's (1995) work on process reengineering recognises the way in which top management can cut itself off from day-to-day operations and so remain unaware of the state of the business.

The Refractories' workers could see that managing is not the exclusive property of those at the top of the hierarchical ladder. Managing is something everyone does every day of their lives; yet it is somehow reified to one group of people, those who are given that title in their job description—manager, a point made by Lennie (1997) in his thesis Managing Without Management. It was from within this hierarchical position that the men at the Refractories expressed their perception that the managers considered they had power over the workers.

\textsuperscript{23} The hierarchical structure will be commented on further in Chapter Three.
“There’s Power Amongst the Workers to Stop Production. That’s About All”

If someone treats you like shit, you go out of your way to go against them. What goes around comes around. (Deon)

The workers have a bit of power because they’re in a position where they can affect production. If decisions are made or if management are coming down on some guy’s crib break and he just wants to slow right down, then that’s the way he’ll play it. But that’s as far as they can take it. They can’t really make any firm decisions; they can’t affect things greatly. There’s power amongst the workers to stop production, that’s about all. (Ned)

The workers overall saw themselves as having to fit into a predetermined system over which they had little control. They did not see themselves as having the leverage to influence business direction or decisions. Although they said their opportunities for input into the running of the company were limited, several of the workers told me that they did not see themselves as completely devoid of some form of power. The power they described to me, however, was often restricted to direct revenge, or disruption, rather than contribution to the business. They were involved in ‘soldiering’ (restricting output) and withholding from management knowledge they had of the production processes. This kind of behaviour, which the workers said arose from what they perceived as unfair treatment, could be related to Costigan et al.’s (1998: 316) notion of “the little people ... getting even” for perceived unfair treatment, often in covert and undetectable ways. Their relatively unfavourable attitudes towards the company could have arisen out their perception that they were treated as machines rather than people.

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24 A term used by organisational theorists Ackroff & Thompson (1999) and Fulop & Linstead (1999).
25 Likert (1961: 79) aligns this type of approach by managers, where workers’ feelings are not considered, with less successful management and lower production.
Means of Revenge

Ray related to me a story of a fellow worker who had a strong grudge against the company, so, in one shift he threw ingots of the finished products, worth thousands of dollars, into the waste bin.  

This artful form of revenge is supposedly common in organisations. Revenge can emanate not just from being controlled. It can also arise from personal and psychological factors, or conflicts of interest, such as the contested terrain of profit maximisation, Pruzan (1998: 1389) notes in his work on value-based management. A number of factors led to the practice of revenge against the company. Dissatisfaction was one of the major ones.

Perhaps it was the men’s general sense of dissatisfaction with the company as an entity, as well as with individual managers not listening to them or the feeling they were being misled, that led them to be involved in the numerous strikes that occurred during the time I was at the Refractories. The actions were triggered by situations, such as demarcation or individual disciplinary disputes. Sometimes the workers talked to me or their peers about getting back at their bosses through industrial action.

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26 Personal journal (6.3.1997).
27 According to such organisational theorists as: Ackroff & Thompson (1999); Emery & Emery (1976); Friedman (1977); Fineman & Sturdy (1999); Laabs et al. (1999); Morrison & Robinson (1997); Tripp & Beis (in press).
28 The voluminous industrial relations literature around strike action, while clearly bearing on this issue of strikes at the plant, is not included here. Within this study I want to keep the emphasis primarily on being heard as the reason for the strikes, as described by the men.
Industrial Action

Stan and Cain angrily talked about the disdain with which they were treated by their supervisor. They were irate that he showed no interested in them at all. They laughed derisively as they said they could arrange a strike around any issue they could think of, just to get at him. One such idea was to take action because there were no paper cups at the water dispenser (a health and safety requirement at the plant) or no sugar in the tea room. These strikes did not eventuate.29

Deon and Cain talked about striking over the disciplinary action taken with Deon who was ‘counseled’30 for leaving fifteen minutes earlier than he was supposed to on a shift. The incident was raised at the crews’ morning meeting. Other crew members recalled that Deon had worked that lunch time. Cain commented that it is common practice for the men to work through their lunch time and then leave early, and it had not been a problem until now. They felt that Deon was being victimised and used as an example. They suggested to Deon that he check his records to see if he had a yellow card over the incident. As part of their enterprise bargain agreement, it was agreed that if a person receives three yellow cards they could be asked to leave the company. (The incident was ‘resolved’ following this meeting when the supervisor intervened on Deon’s behalf. No further action was taken by either management or the workers.)31

Perhaps these actions were ‘a bit of fun’.32 This view of striking for fun was vehemently refuted by other workers at the Refractories when I mentioned it to them. They declared that they only went on strike over significant matters, and then reluctantly. Mismanagement and a sense of the intractability of managers was the basis of the stop

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30 ‘Counselling’ is really another word used for disciplining.
31 Personal journal (9.7.1997).
32 As Donaldson (1997: 10) describes this type of resistance in his work on the lives of manufacturing employees in Australia.
work meetings and strikes, the workers indicated. Sometimes the strikes were over major issues of conditions and pay, while others were over less significant issues, such as minor demarcation disputes. Some of the workers explained that they used these strikes as an attempt to be heard, to have their points of view noticed. When I mentioned to Vince that other workers in another crew had said they were deliberately setting out to destabilise management, he was aghast. He seemed to be saying that he wanted to leave behind the myth of workers as mindless trouble-makers. He felt rather that they should contribute to the smoother running of the business.

A Workers' View of Revenge Versus Cooperation

Vince: Deliberately set out to jeopardise the work of management? Why? Why would you do that?!

C (author/interviewer): Because they don't like management.

Vince: But you're out to help management. You're not out there to jeopardise management. Jees, that's only going to make a bigger wall. That's just like war. They're making war on management. Ooh! No! I don't like that one! I'm not out to do that. I'm out to improve my work, to make it quicker and get more productivity out if I can, to help the company. In these days you need that. It might be different for some people.

C: Do you think that would be the same for all of your crew, if they heard that statement, that they would say the same thing?

Vince: Yeah, I think so (interview, 3.8.1998).

Most of the resistance I observed was based on serious concerns, although it was often triggered by seemingly minor incidents. The underlying causes of the strike action seemed to build to crisis stage following a gradual building of discomfort with the overall situation, leading to incidents that upset the workers. From there the problems became entrenched in misunderstandings, creating a great deal of tension that finally erupted into action.
Some of the Impetus for Strike Action

One strike was called about a new manager, whom they had complained to me about on several occasions, used a computer terminal normally used only by the workers on the shop floor, rather than using the one in his office upstairs. The workers downed tools and called in the union organiser to show their anger at the actions of the supervisor. The tenor of this strike, with the men displaying extreme anger at the supervisor, led me to think that there was much more to the discontent than this individual incident. Perhaps it related to the dissatisfaction they talked about with this particular supervisor; or perhaps it was, as the plant manager suggested, about the denial of their pay claim to bring them up to the levels of the workers at another BHP Refractories plant, an event that was occurring at the time. Other strike action was taken over the unfinished state of the car park, which they said damaged their cars, and another over uniform allocation.33

The reasons for the strikes differed. Security of employment, working conditions, or the bringing in of contractors to do the work of permanent employees prompted industrial action. The strikes were only called after the external union organisers were brought in to assess the situation and to meet with the workers. If they deemed that the situation was serious enough, the action went ahead. The organisers then acted as lobbyists for the workers, debating with management over the issues raised by the workers. When the men talked to me about the strike action they were taking or considering, there was a sense of the men feeling that they had some power as they worked together against management. They said that striking was one of the few ways they could get heard. When the plant was shut down, the managers would have to listen, they said. Striking was one way the workers felt they could get heard. But there were other ways.

33 Personal journal (30.1.1997).
"We Make Some Decisions but They’re Usually Minor"

When called upon we’ve [team leaders] got to make the harsh decisions and call the shots when there’s no one here to give technical support. (Nat)

We [workers] get paid to do our job and we do, and that’s about it. In the end it’s up to them [managers] to make the decisions. That’s what they’re paid for. (Mitch)

We [workers] make some decisions but usually they’re more minor. (Harry)

Decision making at the Refractories, particularly on the middle and macro levels, was seen by the workers to be the prerogative of the managers. Some of the workers at the Refractories thought that only those higher up in the organisational hierarchy should be part of the strategic planning. They were seen as the only ones who could “meaningfully contribute to the outcome”, which Giuliano and Carillo (1998: 109), in their discussion on change management, suggest is how most organisational structures operate. This approach suggests those lower down the ladder, like the workers at the Refractories, have neither the know-how nor the interest in broader processes to be able to participate effectively. Yet, as noted in the section above, this was not my assessment of the workers. Nor is it the view of Cooper and Markus (1995: 46) who write about inclusion of shopfloor workers. They attribute the willing adoption of change at the Shoyu Soy company to the inclusion of workers in the decision making process. At the Refractories there were mixed feelings expressed by the workers about how much they wanted to be involved at this level.

Within the literature on workplace management, debate around how involved workers should be has continued for decades. Many alternatives to worker involvement have been proposed and tried, from the Scientific Management of Taylorism in the late nineteenth century, to Fordism in the early part of the twentieth century and the Human Relations

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35 As noted by such authors as: Bussell (1999), Denis (1997) and Fairris (1997).
approach of Mayo in the 1950s\textsuperscript{36} that grew from the Hawthorne Studies.\textsuperscript{37} While much of the organisational management literature extols the virtues of involving workers in decision making,\textsuperscript{38} there seems to be little evidence that they have used the voices or perceptions of workers to formulate these theories. Managerial groups have a clear privilege in this area.\textsuperscript{39}

Perhaps the stated desire of some of the workers to remain in a position where they were not part of decision making related to past experiences of hostility and blame, which they noticed went with increased involvement. This is a notion that Field (1997: 151) supports in his work on power in organisations. The workers said that when they were ostensibly given extra responsibilities, they experienced manipulation from the power positions of management.

**Manipulation of Workers**

Team leaders were selected and given the role of maintaining order, while not having any authority to follow through with discipline, except in the form of passing information on to senior managers and then relaying information back to the workers. This, they said, put them in a difficult position with their teams as well as with management because they were not seen to belong substantially in either group.\textsuperscript{40}

These team leaders were in an invidious position of feeling like “the meat in the sandwich”, as Nat put it to me. While these men were expected to carry out management-type duties, they were not included in the processes that led to the creation of those decisions.

\textsuperscript{36} Fulop, Frith & Hayward (1992); Lennie (1997).
\textsuperscript{37} Borg (1989); Carey (1993); Morgeson and Hofmann (1999); and Thompson & McHugh (1990).
\textsuperscript{38} For example: Beare & Slaughter (1993); Bussell (1999); Czarniawska (1994); Daft & Lewin (1993); Davidow & Malone (1992); Denis (1997); Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Laabs (1999); Lawler (1992); Spreitzer & Mishra (1996).
\textsuperscript{39} Deetz (1992: 55).
\textsuperscript{40} Interviews with team leaders: Nat (6.5.1998) and Owen (14.5.1998).
Decisions, in both times of rapid change as well as the more moderate times, were made by those at the top of the hierarchical ladder of the Refractories and passed down through a chain of command to be enforced by team leaders. Efforts were made within the company to change the approaches the managers had toward the workers. These changed ways of interacting with workers were decided upon by the managers, not in conjunction with the workers. When the men were presented with the 'Vision and Principles' statement (see Appendix 3), developed by the managers and supervisors in a workshop conducted by a management consultant, they were far from convinced of its applicability to their work site. They derided its declaration to:

- Treat people with respect and fairness;
- Be open and honest with communication;
- Develop effective relationships at all levels; and
- Provide a safe and healthy workplace with a shared responsibility for its achievement; recognise individual differences and the benefits that can be gained from them.

(taken from the 'Vision and Principles' statement)

They did not see the sentiments expressed in the statement put into practice at the plant. They indicated instead that they had scant opportunity to be treated in the fair-handed, comprehensive way that the document indicated. They referred to various indicators of what they saw as unfair privileges for the managers that reinforced the differences between them.41

They spend so much money. They get engineers from Newcastle, paying them big dollars like $50 or $60 an hour and credit cards. They're doing stuff that we could do, and we could show them better ways of doing things. Because they're engineers, they get them in to do it, where they could be getting us to do it. We're the ones on the floor and could be doing it, and we would have a lot better ideas and we could do it much cheaper. That's what 'Total Quality Management' is about—good in theory but it never works; the inverted triangle. They [consultants] just come in, make a lot of money and leave and don't change things. (Deon)

41 This notion of difference and preferential treatment is dealt with more fully in Chapter Three.
The practice of Total Quality Management (TQM—introduced into the Refractories some years prior to this research), as Deon pointed out above, is intended to involve the workers in decision making in the frame of what he called an ‘inverted triangle’ of power. However, the attempts at being inclusive according to TQM principles were described by the workers to be a waste of time because work practices did not change in relation to their involvement in decision making in the business. One of the conundrums of promoting the practice of inclusion in workplace decision making is that decisions are not “items that drop out of the ether” as Fulop, Frith and Hayward (1992: 298) explain. They form over time from a myriad of minor facets that build up to create a solid idea.

The workers knew a great deal about the way the plant operated but because of their status they were denied the opportunity to put their ideas into practice. Their place at the bottom of the hierarchy seemed to encourage them to use what they knew in sometimes destructive ways, or in other cases to keep what they knew to themselves.

"Now We Seem to Have a Bit of an Input"

If we’ve got any problems, we can talk about them to some of the supervisors. Whether it gets back to management, or whether it just stays in [their] head—[they] don’t write it down—who knows. (Ned)

I think management give the guys a chance to voice their opinion, but how seriously the advice is taken I’m not sure; I’m not up in those meetings. (Nat)

42 The notion of power is also dealt with in Chapter Three in relation to the divisions it supported or created, and in Chapter Four in relation to dealing with people’s feelings overall perceptions of management style.

43 The management cartoonist/satirist, Adams, in Dilbert (1996: 7) would support Deon in his assessment. Adams refers to TQM as “part of the evolutionary process: First there were some amoebas. Deviant amoebas adapted better to the environment, thus becoming monkeys. Then came TQM. I’m leaving out some details, but the theory itself also has a few holes that are best left unquestioned.” Adams represents front-line workers through his cartoons and sardonic comments reflecting his assessment of management practices and theories.
Some areas we've had a lot of input into things. Especially since Paul [the new supervisor] came here, we've had a lot of say into the designing of moulds. He even took us out to the manufacturers to check it. But now we seem to have a bit of input into [the products] and they've been 100% perfect because the operators have been involved in it; like designing the moulds. We've been working with the engineers designing the structure of the moulds and that, and they've been getting record heats out of them. They come up and ask us 'do you reckon that could work?' and we say 'yes' and they go away and put it on paper and come back show us the plans and then we set out from there. When they wanted them poured, we had a meeting with the staff and ourselves and we discussed it all, you know, the best way to lift it, because they're four ton poured, and we had to get a forklift (which they didn't get) but we're going to get the other forklift now apparently. And it was good, you know, because we got input into the design of the mould. And when they came back they were all wrong and [the quality controller] checked them, sent them away and got them modified. That's different entirely to what we used to have, you know.

(Chad)

Chad was enthusiastic about the recognition that he received from his new supervisor who arrived in mid-1998. This was a very different scenario from his interactions with the previous supervisor he had when I first began to work at the Refractories in 1996, when Chad often vehemently swore at him.

There were other workers who were not always hostile towards management, although the more congenial aspect of interaction was rarely talked about. There were instances talked about where some of the men did consider that they could talk with their managers. These opportunities for interaction were limited, they said, to their immediate supervisors, rather than with those higher up the ladder. Yet, even when they were able to talk about some of their issues with their direct supervisors, the men still felt unsure that these issues were passed up the line. They were indicating the complexities of communication that involve issues of trust, attitudes, relationships, social structure and power.

45 This is detailed further in this Chapter in the section on communication.
Some of the workers commented on their shared desire with managers for the company to be financially viable, although they often differed on how this could be achieved. While these understandings were not exactly the same because of the conglomerate of experiences of each individual (and group of individuals), there was some common ground that was used as the basis for theorising and taking action, the workers said.

Opportunities for Involvement

Chad received a great deal of encouragement from his supervisor Paul, one of the newer managers. This manager recognised Chad’s potential and encouraged him to take on more responsibility for the outcome of the work he was doing. He also arranged for Chad to undertake English and maths classes so that he would be in a better position to be considered for future employment if the new company underwent any form of selection processes. I had observed Chad showing much anger at and about individual managers and the company generally on many occasions. With Paul he was quite different. Chad went on to become a team leader after I finished my fieldwork.

Yeh, but I love it here. It's a very flexible job. I don't particularly like putting this shit on [pointing to his worn and dirty looking T-shirt]. But overall I love working here. (Nat, team leader)

Nat’s feelings, he went on to explain, arose from the relationship he and other workers had with their new supervisor, who related well to the workers. He listened, they said, and took action based on their input. This recognition for and interaction with the workers, Nat noted, was a rare exception to the normal practice of supervisors at the plant.

47 Interview (14.5.1998).
These examples of positive personal relationships developing between managers and workers were unusual. It was through the personal interests of individual managers that Chad and Nat found a way to have some constructive input to improve their situations and positions in the workplace. The examples demonstrate Senge (1992) and Shotter’s (1989) view that it is possible for individuals to form shared meanings of the world with those with whom they do not normally associate, or who are outside of their sphere of understanding. While these understandings were not exactly the same because of the conglomerate of experiences of each individual, there was some common ground that was used as the basis for theorising and taking action. It was these exceptions in the worker/management relationships that proved the rule. These examples of amenable relationships between these workers and their managers were so rare that they highlighted even more clearly the antagonism of the majority of the antagonistic relationships. The workers often spoke of wanting to be on a more equal footing with their managers and sometimes this happened.

“I Like To Do a Good Job and Get it Done and Finished”

I get satisfaction out of it, but not recognition. It’s our job to keep things going. (Harry)

If I know I’ve done a good job I’m happy. I don’t go looking for praise. (Cain)

I know when I’ve done a good job. I take a lot of pride in my work; that’s for sure. When I do a job I might as well make the most of it. It makes the hours go. (Nev)

All they have to do is go up to a hard case every now and then and say: “Jees, I’ve been watching you today, you’ve been right into it. Keep up the good work”. That guy would just turn around. People just love to be praised. Even if it sickens him to do it, if he did it every now and then, you know; just to try to get them on side. Because, the guy will say: “Oh, guess what that dick-head said to me today? He told me I was doing a good job”. And they’ll have a good laugh about it, but inside they’ll go “Jees!” (Nat)

I like to do a good job and get it done and finished. (Ully)
Many of the workers spoke to me about wanting to do a good job, to contribute something to their work in a way that gave it some purpose and meaning, a consideration often written about in the organisational behaviour literature.\textsuperscript{48} "No one wants to do a bad job" is a statement I have heard many times at seminars on organisational behaviour, such as the one conducted by a management consultant at the Refractories in 1997. This also extends to inclusion in the running of the company. Most people want to be part of their organisation, to know its purpose and connect with its direction, as Lewin and Regine (2000: 27) note through their intensive work with organisations in which people's feelings are considered as relevant to 'the bottom line' of business. Not all the men spoke in terms of contribution to the business. For many, their work correlated with alienation and boredom, a perspective mentioned by several organisational management theorists.\textsuperscript{49}

There's people here that are not really interested in anything and it's bloody sad. (Chad)

When managers don't show interest, it's hard to keep up the interest and commitment. (Frank)

Some people here do their eight hours and then go home. Why would you want to hang around any more? I come to work and go home and that's it. I make it quite clear I'm here for eight hours. I have a job to do. I just do my job and go home. (Tex)

Workers just want to get the work done and leave the planning to management. That's what they're paid for. We're not. (Rohan)

These comments reflect the difficulties some of the workers had in relating to doing anything more than what was basically required of them in their immediate tasks. To these men, work was seen only as a means of escape, to finance what they seemed to view as the more meaningful parts of their lives.

\textsuperscript{48} For example: Caudron (1999); Fairris (1997); Hayes (1999); James & James (1989); Lewin & Regine, 2000); Natale, Sora & O'Neill (1955); Naughton (1995); Scott (1998); Vecchio (1980); Wilpert & Whitely (1987).

\textsuperscript{49} For example: Cary & Kane (1987); Davidson & Caddell (1994); Fox & Lake (1993). This notion of the men's feelings about their work is dealt with further in Chapter Four.
Life Outside of the Refractories

Some of the workers had interesting projects under way. One was setting up a flower farm on the far south coast to which he planned to 'retire' when he had made enough money at the Refractories to carry him through the early years of primary producing. Others were interested in leisure activities that were quite expensive, such as skiing or long fishing trips to remote places. Others were investing for their early retirement, and one was saving for treatment for his severely ill child.50

The proclivity some of the workers had of seeing work only as a fringe activity was disconcerting for others, such as Vince or Chad, who wanted to contribute to improvements in the operations of the plant. Yet as Frank noted, it was hard to do this when responses from superiors were not encouraging.

"We’re Cynical of Management. If Management Were a Bit More Honest They’d Get a Better Response"

Management lies to workers. They tell workers something that doesn’t happen and when that keeps happening they just don’t believe anything. It’s like ‘the boy who cried wolf.’ Management say: ‘We’re fixing something in this plant this week’. And it doesn’t get fixed, it never gets fixed. And then they say something else the next week: ‘We’re going to do this; and we’re going to do that’. And it never gets done. I’m sure management’s up there trying but they probably can’t get it through the board or whatever. It just doesn’t get agreed. But it doesn’t matter to the guys. As far as they’re concerned they just get told things and things don’t happen. Constantly. (Ray)

We were told things, and were promised that we would have a say in the design of the plant and we came down here and it was all designed and it was all designed wrong. And we had no say in it. (Chad)

We’ve been led down the garden path before. (Stan)

There’s a lot of things that don’t get said, for different reasons, and every decision in there affects someone. (Ned)

50 Taken from interviews and casual conversations throughout the study.
Our belief is that they are saying they are months off a sale. I find it hard to believe that it’s that far away. We aren’t getting the whole truth; they should, because it’s our lives, too. It’s difficult to get any real inside information. Some feel betrayed. We’ve been told in the past that if we did certain things there wouldn’t be any problems with the business. Quite obviously the decision to sell wasn’t made overnight. There have been decisions going on for quite a while. (Tex)

I’ve been battling for the last eight or nine years. It hardens you up to believe anyone who’s wearing a blue shirt.51 (Frank)

You never know what they’re [managers] thinking. It’s part of managing the company. There are certain things that aren’t wise for them to tell us. We’d like to know, but it’s their business. It’s a management decision. It’s not wise to tell everyone. The attitude of most of the blokes is they would like to know what’s happening and when, but it’s not possible sometimes. I don’t really have all the facts and figures they do. They’re looking at it from a different perspective, so I can’t say too much about those things. They’re the managers. It’s their business. We get paid to do our job and we do, and that’s about it. In the end it’s up to them to make the decisions. That’s what their job is. Many people say management is this and that and don’t know what they’re doing, but I think they do. It just might appear that way because they’re not telling us everything. They’ve told us everything they’re going to tell us [about the sale of the company]. (Norm)

The way the books are being juggled is not a true indication of what’s going on. Even before the closure, we knew something was going to happen. We’re cynical of management. If management were a bit more honest they’d get a better response. (Cain)

One of the reasons the men gave for their distance from management was what they perceived as a sizeable gap between what the managers said they were aiming for and what was actually put into practice. Many of the matters with which the workers were grappling in relation to the changes taking place were around issues of secrecy, misinformation, lack of information, or privileged information. Management’s attempts at communication were interpreted dichotomously as either ‘truth’ or ‘lies’. The lies the workers talked of involved: being misled, partially informed, changes in direction, not following up on suggestions, or unfulfilled promises. Many of the workers indicated that they wanted to know the ‘whole truth’ with no ambiguity. Though some accepted this as

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51 ‘Blue shirts’ was a term used to denote managers. This term will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Three.
normal business practice, that managers held privileged knowledge and led the direction of the company. The notion of Refractory managers lying came to be seen by most of the workers as a truth in itself, with its own power to guide the workers’ interpretations of what management said and did.

This impression of the managers telling lies is not only of concern to the workers at the Refractories. The lead article of a large daily newspaper ‘Bosses Told to Lie’ (Brad Norrington, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April, 2000) was aghast at the content of a government departmental training program in which the managers are instructed how to lie so as to manipulate workers. This example supports Foucault’s (1980: 131) notion that the manipulation of ‘truth’ creates a ‘regime of truth’ which is primarily caused by large political and economic interests, including businesses such as BHP, that “mirror the hegemonic class interests of their culture.” Secrets were seen to be emanating from the top levels of the company. Secrets are “always seen as coming from the next level up in an organisation” (Fred Steier, *pers. comm.*, January, 2000). The workers’ sense of deception was exacerbated around the time of the sale. They were perhaps aware it is common practice in organisations to keep certain information away from workers. This practice is even recommended in these sorts of dealings by some management consultants, such as Giuliano and Carillo (1998: 107. The workers felt that the managers often went against them or deliberately withheld information to embed their own power, at the expense of the workers’ needs, and hence entrenched the workers’ feelings of alienation from management. The feelings the men had about management lying to them did not foster a trusting relationship between them.

“They All Talk About Trust but it Isn’t Given”

[One of our team leaders] is the closest to the guys, but the guys don’t trust him because he hangs with management, and who wants to trust them because of the things they do? (Ray)
You’re very wary of what you tell them. (Troy)

You just can’t trust what the company tells you these days. That’s what gets at people; the company says that’s not going to happen, but two months down the track it just does happen. (Ken)

Who do you trust? It makes it hard, being involved in it and seeing it. You can see people doing what they say they won’t be doing. You see it heaps of times. I can’t see that it will ever change; not how it is now. (Ned)

It’s like when we first moved down here. We were told things and were promised things that we would have a say in the design of the plant and we came down here and it was all designed and it was all designed wrong (and it cost them about $150,000 to redesign it all; and that’s a lot of dollars you know). (Chad)

They change their story all the time and don’t tell you what’s going on. Maybe they don’t know what’s going on. With their track record how can you trust them. You have to earn trust from each other. I have to get your respect to give you my respect. You can’t just trust a person like that. In my nine years’ illustrious employment in this company I have no trust in them—not that you’d find under my fingernail! I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them—the lines they come out with. How do they lie to your face and sleep at night? That’s the kind of people they are, or the way they’re bred; or are they just puppets being told what to say by other people. It’s amazing. I don’t trust anyone from supervisors up, all the way to the top. I trust the blokes on the floor. There are some blokes you are dubious of. It’s a two way thing. Trust and respect walk hand-in-hand. (Frank)

They don’t respect us at our level. We’re supposed to respect them. They always look down on us. And it’s not going to change. (Stan)

They all talk about trust but it isn’t given. (Ray)

Most of the workers were very wary of their managers, whom they said could not be relied upon to follow through with their responsibilities to the workers. The men expressed their grievances about the of lack of integrity of the managers and the incongruity in what they saw as promises made to them by management and the subsequent actions taken. They said they could not rely upon or trust their managers, a common view amongst workers in
the Illawarra. Some of the workers mistrusted management to the extent that they claimed they would never go along with certain management decisions.

The unkept promises and plans they talked of were interpreted as examples of irresponsibility, undependability and incompetence of management. The words ‘trust’ or ‘mistrust’ were common words the men used to express their disappointments and their wariness of their managers. The managers were not seen by the workers as having the qualities of responsibility, dependability and competence that form the basis of trust in the eyes of workers. The notion of trust as used by the workers had many dimensions. They interpreted mistrust of management as arising out of lack of follow-through, incompetence, changing stories, a dearth of mutual respect, reneging, being set-up, hiding a plan and not trusting workers.

To build an atmosphere of mutual regard was beyond the expectation of most of the workers in what they outlined as a low-trust setting. It is hard to imagine, in the atmosphere of power and control which existed at the plant, that the notions of mutual respect and equal standing could be engendered. There was far too much ‘point scoring’ as each group tried to out manoeuvre the other in different ways. The amount of energy that was used in this way prevented the two groups coming together in a constructive working relationship.

One of the broken promises the workers talked of was in regard to becoming a self-managed team when they moved to the new plant, about twelve months before I began to work.

52 Markey et al. (1998: 30).
53 These qualities were found to be the basis of trust by Costigan et al. (1998: 306), in a study of ‘focal employees’ trust of their CEO’s.
54 These attributes are seen by the organisational management theorist Butler (1999), and the social psychologist Gergen (1999b), as basic to cooperative working relationships.
55 See further discussion on the worker/management dichotomy in Chapter Three.
there. They had been looking forward to new work routines and practices, which did not eventuate (apart from making them all equal Level Fours in a scale of seven Levels). They felt annoyed that they were treated as being unable to manage their own work. Expectations that are not met inevitably lead to mistrust.\(^{56}\) The workers said reneging on what they had inferred were unwritten contracts made them cynical about any management promises or plans. They also inferred that it was part of management’s plan to set the workers up to lose, to prove that workers were not capable of making organisational decisions.

**Purportedly Moving Towards Self-Management**

| The first task one crew was given in its planned move towards self-management was to manage overtime. Overtime, as management was well aware, was a contentious issue among the crew members, who were not given the opportunity that the managers had to learn how to reach such decisions through strategic planning around constructive dialogue. Disputes broke out amongst the men and they were not able to make the process functional. Hence the ‘experiment’ was deemed to have failed, and the workers themselves asked management to take back the responsibility for organising overtime. The failure of the crew to take on this responsibility was then taken by management to indicate the inability of the crew to take on overall responsibility of self-management. Hence the self-management concept was sidelined.\(^{57}\) |

The men felt annoyed that they were treated as being unable to manage their own work, when in effect the attempt was piecemeal and tokenistic. The men sensed that they were placed in a position of “pseudoparticipation or inauthenticity” (Heller, 1998: 1434). It seemed to them to be part of management pretence to want the workers’ views and

\(^{56}\) Costigan et al. (1998); Morrison & Robinson (1997).

\(^{57}\) Personal journal (9.11.1997).
involvement, when they actually want to manipulate them rather than use their opinions and suggestions.

The problems of this type of fragmentary and sudden unfamiliar transfer of responsibility are described by Marris (1974: 19) in her work on how people deal with change in organisations. She sees it as a destabilising practice that is fraught with danger of failure. To achieve the outcome of self-management requires a series of interconnecting facets, which operate around open interaction, responsibility and trust and can allow for interdependent action.

The rhetoric of trust in organisations is widespread in both popular and academic organisational management literature, as Harshman and Harshman (1997) found in their extensive studies of organisational behaviour, and is often spoken of in emotive terms: “Trust only flourishes if top management builds fairness into the heart of the firm” (Micklethwaite & Wooldridge, 1997: 9). “The communication of undistorted, truthful, or candid information” is the foundation of trust in organisations, Mishra (1996: 273) claims in his work on trust and relationships at automotive firms in the United States and Canada. Trust is described as “willingness to risk increasing one’s vulnerability to a person whose behaviour is beyond one’s control”, as explained by Zand (1972) in his model of the dynamics of trust in organisations. The notion of trust is often imbued with a universal meaning, to give it a simple explanation for understanding. It is usually seen as a state of having confidence that others will act as expected. Individuals build up perceptions of what they think they can expect from another person, not necessarily what that person can or can be expected to give. When this level of expectation is not met, it is perceived as betrayal. The whole notion of trust is based on an expectation that an individual or a group will remain unchanged in their actions in relation to the beliefs of others—a most difficult
state to achieve. The workers' definitions of trust, while aligning with much of the literature, add further connotations of operative implications.

Because the men felt that they could not 'trust' their managers to deliver, to inform them, to include them, to respect their ability to deliver, they expressed a sense of being left out of organisational management. Through their sense of not being listened to they were unable to contribute fully to the business. Because they did not trust the managers, they did not want to listen to them either. They said they could never believe what management told them. Nor did they trust that management would listen to what workers had to say, or act on what they said.

It has been well documented in communication guides and is commonsense psychology that when people are not listened to their personal sense of worth is damaged. Another impact of not listening to those considered to be at the lower levels of an organisation is that those who do not listen also miss out. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the blockages to the men being heard at the plant. It was because of these obstructions that a cyclical pattern of non-listening and hence lack of learning between the two groups was created.
The process of non-listening was not linear, as the figure suggests, although it did involve all the components that created the disregard that the workers indicated they felt. The first impediment to listening, as indicated in figure 2.1, came with management not taking note of information workers had to offer. The workers did not feel confident in speaking up to management because when they did they felt that they either got no feedback or retributive responses, within or after meetings. This process then blocked the path to further information being passed on to managers about other issues or incidents. In an article in the *Business and Health Journal* (1999: 36), Gemignani, in reporting on his studies of several business organisations in the United States, suggests that present day management is ready to hear ‘honest feedback’ from workers. He states that to facilitate openness anonymous telephone systems could be activated so that workers could say exactly what they feel,
without fear of retribution. Yet if workers are too afraid to speak out openly, it is difficult to see how candid worker feedback to managers can be possible.

“We Don’t Have an Opinion Because We Don’t Know. We’re Kept in the Dark”

We don’t get told. And if it fails, we still don’t get told. No one’s told until it happens, or after it happens and then it’s too bloody late to fix it. (Chad)

We don’t know anything about why they don’t do things. No one tells you. (Ray)

He’s [marketing manager] not going to tell us what’s going on [in relation to the sale of the company]. What he’s going to tell us will fit in a matchbox. He says he’ll only tell us some things. It’s a waste of time going [to meetings about the sale of the business]. ‘I’ve got something to tell you, but I’m not going to tell you’. (Tex)

I heard about the V.E.R [voluntary employment redundancy package] rumour about two weeks ago. I asked [the manufacturing manager] and he said they were considering it. It was floating around about six months before the sale. That’s when you know they know more than they say. I don’t believe that the company decides that it has a plan in the short term; they know what they’re doing more than a week ahead at a time. They should have five-year business plans and should know what’s happening. I find it difficult to believe that we don’t know what’s happening from month-to-month. In a smaller company, they know that. They know what’s going to happen. That doesn’t instil a whole lot of trust in them. I think they know what’s happening. (Ray)

[The company’s] senior management has a reputation for being secretive. They are just doing the party line. (Troy)

Some [workers] want to know everything. Others just coast along. I’d rather not know because it’s creating too much negativity, but if they didn’t tell me [what’s happening with the sale], I’d go off my head, too. Animosity builds up because they don’t tell us all the information. (Rohan)

They [managers] only tell you what they want you to know. They don’t come clean with you. (Jerry)

We don’t have an opinion because we don’t know. I think we’re being kept in the dark. (Stan)

The meaning Stan was expressing in the opening quotation of this section was that because the workers were ‘kept in the dark’ it was not feasible that they could have an opinion on
how the workplace could function. He was implying that workers think that management think that workers know nothing. Many of the workers expressed a sense of disquiet at being deliberately misled over work issues in the usual running of the business. This sense of deception was exacerbated around the sale of the company. The men found it most annoying to be unable to make informed choices about their future when they were precluded from knowing what was going on.

While one young worker accepted what he saw as a lack of information sharing from the managers as inevitable and even necessary, most of the men opposed this managerial privilege. Management's hold on information was seen by the workers as part of a deliberate ploy of misinformation and dominance of management over workers. They talked of the secrecy and deceit they experienced as having been deliberately employed as a means of excluding the workers while bonding the senior staff. Secrecy is commonly used as an affiliation mechanism in social groups.\(^{58}\)

**Information Sessions About the Sale of the Company**

> When the information sessions about the sale of the company were held, it was with the managers' stated intent to keep the workers informed of the progress of the negotiations. The workers were given an opportunity at the end of each session to ask questions of the general manager. Many of these questions, he told the men, he was unable to answer. He said he would send them to the head office in Melbourne to obtain answers. By the time the questions were answered at the next meeting, usually weeks later, the impetus for the questions had subsided and the answers were given out of context of the information given in the previous meeting.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) Saville-Troike (1986: 38, 79).

\(^{59}\) Personal journal (23.6.1997).
The lack of information often led to different interpretations of events by different individuals. Much of the information upon which workers based their readings of the situation came from sources other than management in the form of rumours. Rumours became part of the multiple interpretations workers put on events. The different versions of events the men were hearing led to confusion felt by many of them, which they implied was troubling for them. The creation of the rumours sprang partly from a disregard the workers felt when they were not part of the process of listening and being heard. The workers had stopped listening to what they were told by management or did not believe management when they did tell them something.

Much of the organisational behaviour literature notes that people can interpret the same event in very different ways. The lack of information the workers said they had meant they had no chance to express their opinions on company matters or to get feedback from management on their ideas about the company direction. Being 'kept in the dark' led to the outbreak of many rumours.

Don’t let the news get in the way of a good story. Rumours fly faster than light. Everyone’s rumours are correct. (Nev)

We knew about the sale last year. It leaked out. Someone tells someone a little bit and it grows. All the rumours turn out to be true. (Frank)

There was a lot of information that was not given out [in relation to the sale of the company] at the appropriate time and a lot of things were said. And that caused rumours to start. (Troy)

There is a lot of uncertainty with the changeover [sale]. People are worried about what the conditions are going to be if we’re sold. [The manufacturing manager] said conditions would be similar. We don’t know what that means. ‘Similar’ could mean anything. We’re more worried now about who’s going to keep and lose their job. They say we’ll be all right but we don’t know what’s going on. (Jerry)

For example: Argyris (1990); Chia (1996); Cohen (1993); Czarniawska (1994); Dunford (1992); Egan (1994); Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Gergen (1991); Emery & Emery (1976).
Before we shifted down here, my brother’s father-in-law told us we were shifting, before we knew. He didn’t even work for BHP at the time. Why should I learn from outside what should have been told directly? (Jerry)

You can’t believe how many rumours are floating around. Each one sounds better than the others. (Harry)

The secrecy that the workers felt was occurring through the many upheavals at the plant, particularly around the time of the sale, led to the growth of multiple and competing perceptions of the events. The workers talked of being uncertain about what could and could not be believed either from management or from fellow-workers. The lack of credible information they received led, they indicated, to a spread of rumours, which expanded exponentially. Rose (pers. comm., March, 2000) noted this is usual in times of rapid change. Various ‘facts’ were being promulgated depending on the level of knowledge held by each person and the source of information.

A lot of information comes from people knowing other people (like at the pub) before it comes from the official channels. (Troy)

I get all my news from the pub or from other blokes who work in other parts of BHP. They’re pretty spot on. If I tell the blokes here that I’ve heard it from the pub they take notice. (Tex)

Tex was indicating that he felt more confident about the credibility of the information he got from his informal network outside of the Refractories than he received from the managers of the plant. Many of the men suggested that this form of learning what was going on in the company was indeed a more reliable source of information. Much of the information originated from sources outside the workplace—in the pub or at a football game, or created from ill- or uninformed talk in the crib (lunch) room. Where ‘official’ information is not readily available hearsay will often fill a void.61 Rumours were often created around a ‘worst-case’ scenario, describing possible outcomes that did not eventuate. This

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overstating of a situation is most likely to occur when people are not given all the information they need.\textsuperscript{62}

All of the issues mentioned in this chapter: silencing; lack of recognition; lack of adequate information; secrecy; mistrust; are examples of the workers' perceptions of the overarching issue of mis-communication and distorted communication.

\textit{“Communication—the Tip of the Iceberg”}

Communication; well, I think they try to do it in here. Like they want to have communication meetings and safety meetings and it’s all over the top, but no one ever sits down and ... There’s no real communication. (Nat)

The basic issue is communication between workers and staff. Everyone here likes to avoid communicating. (Tex [leading hand])

There’s no togetherness. There’s no communication. There never has been here, I don’t reckon. (Chad)

Everyone talks a lot in here, but not much gets said. (Ned)

I don’t believe management at Refractories have the ability to communicate with people. (Troy)

We used to have our consultative meetings and OH&S meetings and we don’t have them any more. It’s wrong. Consultative meetings were for talking about things—communicating things. People got the chance to try and solve the problem, you know, before it exploded. And that’s why a lot of people go on strike. Not that they go on strike a lot. But you know, majority rules, because the majority say it’s the only way you can get your point across, that’s true. We went on strike the other week. We lost a day over something that we believed was wrong, you know. But they don’t want to even sit down and talk about it any more, like they used to with these consultative meetings. (Chad)

Communication, that’s a big part of everything—how people feel. It’s more than the fact that there’s a lack of communication. That’s just the tip of the iceberg. (Ray)

\textsuperscript{62} Harshman & Harshman (1997: 10).
The workers put various interpretations on what they meant by ‘communication’. The communication they talked of related mainly to verbal interchange between themselves and their managers. Ray, in his statement about hidden aspects of communication (“the tip of the iceberg”), recognised that communication is far more than what Gubrium and Holstein (2000: 101) note is often discussed as ‘sheer communication’, that is, giving and receiving messages. A great deal of the literature on communication also focuses on the sharing of information as the crux of human interaction. When communication is seen only in this way it misses meanings at a deeper level of incorporating and assessing values and beliefs, and ignores the complexities of human interaction. Then the hidden parts of the iceberg, to which Ray was referring, are neglected. Some argued this disregard for underlying factors of communication, led to the flawed relationships at the plant. Some, in response, cited ‘effective communication’ as the panacea for all their workplace disputes. They saw this lack of reliable interchange as a symptom of what was wrong with the company generally.

To articulate what it means to communicate, in theoretical terms, based on my observations at the plant as described in the preceding sections, is a complicated task. Communication is much broader than techniques of interaction. It also “represents the fundamental values of an organisation”, Slater and Bennis (1964: 305) note in discussing democratisation in organisations. It involves the practice of dialogue within interpersonal spaces. These spaces which exist between speaker and listener are influenced by many factors in a complex ‘causal chain’ (Emery & Emery, 1976: 12). The complexities of interaction and exchange are emphasised by Figure 2.2, which indicates various factors and links that I saw contributing to the interchanges I observed at the plant.

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63 Such as Cooper & Markus (1995); Dunford (1992); Egan (1994); Genette (1988); Harshman & Harshman, 1999); Held (1982); Kolb (1994); Mauws & Phillips (1995); Ross & Wright (1998).

64 Bakhtin (1986: 35).
The complexities of the interactions can be connected through factors of personal, group, organisational or external influences. The men's perception of what they were told was influenced by their levels of understanding and their interpretation of events from the past. Their points of view were linked with their values and beliefs which created their ideologies and assumptions about their relationships with their managers. These beliefs were in turn influenced by the social structure of the group with whom they worked. Certain behaviours had become enculturated within a system that upheld ways of viewing things. The images the men had of themselves and their work within BHP Refractories influenced how they interacted with their managers, and each other. The whole interactive process
was built around a set of myths partly created by the obvious signs and symbols that constantly surrounded them.\textsuperscript{65}

As the men talked about not being listened to, as set out in the beginning of this chapter, they referred to many factors as influencing how they related to those with whom they worked. Chad talked about 'togetherness' (above), recognising the importance of relationships in the processes of interchange. Ray reflected on the relevance of feelings in the way people related. Nat found it difficult to put his feelings about communication into words, other than to say it was not happening. The workers generally voiced the opinion that improved communications would lead to a positive state of affairs.

Because the workers felt that there was a lack of so-called 'communication' between themselves and their managers they responded negatively to the managers. They did not just ignore what they saw as a deliberate attempt to bypass them, they reacted in very negative ways, as shown by various means described throughout this dissertation. One of the ways the workers saw as diminishing levels of interchange was through a lack of meaningful meetings with the managers. The workers saw the lack of meaningful meetings with the managers as one of the causes of diminishing levels of interchange.

"We Used to Have Communication Meetings"

We used to have the ten of us, with [the plant manager] and have a communications meeting, consultative meetings and tool box meetings. And then they seemed to have only four people on the committee because nothing was getting done, and so it went down to four or five on the committee. We used to sit in there and talk about problems on the plant and so on. They’re wiped! They’re all gone. Like I just don’t see ‘em. I’m in the consultative committee and I haven’t had one for eight or nine months. I could probably go back further. Why? I don’t know if they’re having them when I’m off or what, but no one ever talks about OH&S any more. I was only on the consultative committee because you could only pick one, you know what I mean, so I went to one, and now I don’t even see it.

\textsuperscript{65} Outlined more in Chapter Three.
I liked it. I was getting benefit. It was benefiting me and benefiting all me work mates and if we had anything that could help, it would help the company too. It's wrong. (Vince)

We used to have our own consultative meetings in our own work centres. And you know if you had a problem on the floor and it was worked out there, and if it couldn't be worked out there, we all went down on the floor together and tried to work together as a group of men. In the old days we were like a family company. It was a different attitude. (Chad)

The company, once upon a time, would have a group meeting in good and bad times—not just gloom and doom—and advise people. And we were making a good profit. We used to have communication meetings, where you could tell the bosses what you felt. They're gone. (Tex)

The workers raised the issue of how good things used to be, indicating a higher level of informative interchange. They said that in "the old days" things were easier because there was more communication between them and their managers when meetings were held more regularly than was the case now. Hence this avenue of presenting their views to management was eroded. As the men talked about the past, they generally agreed with each other that things had been better. Perhaps this reification of the company's history was part of selective recollection that is said by many organisational theorists\(^\text{66}\) to be necessary in the formation of social identity. These halcyon days were past. There was no turning back the clock.

We have tool box meetings, where you have the chance to seriously talk about workplace issues in a formal group. There's usually only one or two guys who'll speak. If they do have an issue, they'll bring it up there. If someone says that, [the supervisor's] thrilled that someone's said something; because usually there's nothing. Usually in toolbox they might inform you of something: you're dying from like silicosis of the lungs, which is one of the things that you're getting, and then they're not liable.\(^\text{67}\) He [the plant manager] raves about different things, about amounts coming out each month and no one cares. He just shows masses of figures. No one knows what they mean. Not that that happens very often. It's supposed to be a time to make suggestions to management, but [the plant manager] has an answer for every question before the question's asked. (Ray)

\(^{66}\) Such as: Cohen (1993); Deetz (1992); Gergen (1998); Ross (1994); Wenger (1996).

\(^{67}\) When the workers were working with dangerous material they were supposed to wear masks, but the masks were far too hot to wear in the summer months. They were also very uncomfortable and cumbersome, and prevented any spoken interaction with other workers.
We have tool box meetings and [the supervisor] will come in and say things like: 'I don’t want you driving out of the car park that fast any more'. That’s the toolbox meeting! That’s it; full stop! If I was going to have a tool box meeting, I’d have it on cranes and forklifts. But this is just: ‘Don’t drive like that’. Fifteen minutes to have a toolbox meeting on that! (Vince)

We used to have our consultative meetings and OH&S meetings and we don’t have them any more. It’s wrong. Consultative meetings were for talking about things. People got the chance to try and solve the problem before it exploded. And that’s why a lot of people go on strike. Not that they go on strike a lot. But you know, majority rules, because the majority say it’s the only way you can get your point across, that’s true. We went on strike the other week. We lost a day over something that we believed was wrong, you know. But they don’t want to even sit down and talk about it any more, like they used to with these consultative meetings. Communications meetings are held once a month, maybe. Nothing’s communicated at the meetings. (Chad)

When meetings were held the men talked of miscommunication. They did not place much significance on the formal meetings that were held. These meetings included: Occupational Health and Safety; Toolbox, where day-to-day matters were discussed; and Communication meetings, where general issues were supposed to be considered as a channel for communication. When they did make suggestions, they said, they felt as though the listening was a token gesture, as the managers worked at being ‘new-age’ managers. These behaviours they saw as examples of calculated forms of dictatorial power by the managers, and a deliberate effort to keep them confused and ill-informed, rather than included. Meetings that were held, were seen by the workers as superficial forums for discussion, and often counterproductive. Deetz (1992: 320) states that this is not unusual in corporations, where meetings “are usually routines of control, that conceal the control.” In most of the meetings, even the short ones, they said they were presented with an overload of information, in language they often found difficult to comprehend, or which was of little or no interest to them. Some alluded to this use of obscure language as marginalising and alienating, causing them to feel even less able to participate in the business. It seemed to them that this manipulation of language was a deliberate ploy to confuse and even insult them, so they could not contribute in any meaningful way.
The workers' comments on language barriers perhaps relate to Palmer and Dunford's (1996: 695) suggestion that words are systematically used to manipulate meaning. "Language is a powerful tool that expresses and creates our reality" (Maguire, 1999: 112). The managers were seen by the workers to be creating their own reality without regard to the workers' reference points. This use of what McKay (1994: 313) called 'coded language' is seen by some social science researchers to be a tool of class domination, giving workers unmistakable and often destructive messages of control, oppression and social positioning. The use of abstruse language leads to those at the production line level perhaps only understanding twenty percent of the information presented to them by management, Harshman and Harshman (1999: 6) found in extensive employee surveys.

The Refractories may have been an ideal organisation at some stage in terms of communication, but that is not altogether likely. It was ideal from their vision of the perspective of what they sensed they were missing out on, even if they never had it before. Stories about communication in the past may have met a need for visualising the ideal organisation for which to work. Perhaps the stories that were told about a brighter past, were told simply as a way to make storytelling more satisfying and entertaining. Maybe it was to make a stronger argument for how untenable the current situation was, or to justify social relationships.

The workers were convinced that improved communication would fix everything. They saw that opportunities for engaging in fruitful interchange at meetings was a thing of the past. The lack of opportunity to have input at meetings added further to the men's perceptions that they were not given an opportunity to be heard by management.

68 For example: Bernstein (1974); Fiske (1991); Ford & Ford (1994); Kornfield (1994); Lichtenberg (1992); Palmer & Dunford (1996); Saville-Troike (1986); Semin & Gergen (1990); Wenger (1996).
69 A point made by Banaji et al. (1994: 88) in their work on autobiographical reporting.
70 Back (1994) and Ross & Buehler (1994) refer to the influences on recall in their work on autobiographical recollections.
Conclusion: “What Chance Have You Got of [them] Listening?" 

So what chance have you got of him [the plant manager] listening to a worker off the floor. They’d be run off the floor. (Chad)

The poignant statements of the workers, expressed through heartfelt assertions of not being listened to, acknowledged or respected, are palpable. They transmit an image of a ‘dispirited’ group of people.

The men talked of the combination of factors that impacted on their sense of not being heard. These components of silencing are shown in Figure 2.3. I saw this silencing of workers exemplified in areas outside the workplace as well as inside, through the academic literature as well as in the broader media.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.3.pdf}
\caption{Analysis of how workers saw themselves as silenced, and my interpretation of possible sources of this perception}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{71} A telling example is given of media impressions in Chapter Five.
The invisibility the workers felt caused them much frustration. They expressed feelings of being marginalised, a major factor in determining who is heard, as noted by several organisational theorists.\textsuperscript{72} Their perceptions of how they were treated by the managers, and their lack of influence on ways in which the business functioned were common points of frustration plainly expressed as they talked about their work. One of the consequences of the workers' feelings of demoralisation through exclusion and alienation was the involvement by some in hostile work practices, in order to gain some power, they said, over those whom they saw as alienating them. Yet the majority of the workers described, in various ways, how they could contribute constructively to the management of the company if they just had the opportunity.

The workers explained how they did not have that opportunity, as managers were not to be trusted or respected because they told lies and kept secrets. Within the hostile atmosphere that resulted, the workers felt uncertain about their positions at work. Their need for some certainty in their working lives led to the generation of rumours as the men searched for something to believe in, to give them some sense of where the company—and their jobs—might be going.

There can be many painful consequences of people not being heard, Boyle (1999: 7) notes in his work on organisational communication. Relationships are damaged because people feel misunderstood and frustrated. That then leads to feelings of anger and depression. The next part of the chain, Boyle asserts, is lowered motivation and initiative, which leads to lower productivity.

\textsuperscript{72} For example: Deetz (1992); Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Fiske (1991); Gergen (1999b); Koberg, Boss, Senjem & Goodman (1999); Maguire (1999); Pinchot (1998).
From within this environment of non-listening, not being heard, and of non-involvement in decision making, they developed their own meanings of their jobs and their relationships at work, their sense of person and purpose, and place in the company. The silencing they experienced became part of the division that they felt separated them from management.

In moving into the following chapter, the basis of the non-listening environment the men described will be explored from their perceptions of their sense of identity within the company. Their notions of division and how they made meaning of their relationships through their search for meaning at, and with their work, will be examined.

There are two different sides. They see it differently. One sees it as good; one sees it as bad. (Nev)
CHAPTER THREE

"PEOPLE HAVE A SENSE OF IDENTITY WITH WHICHEVER SIDE THEY’RE WITH"

There's a lot of divisions in the place from really little things to really big things. It's between workers and managers. (Ned)

I don’t look at it from the management point of view, because I’m a union delegate. I’ll never look at it from their point of view. (Ully)

[Divisions] That’s not just this workplace. It’s everywhere. But it’s not the same everywhere. That sort of thing’s always been here, ever since I walked through the door. (Chad)

Managers—they’re all bastards, to one extent or the other. I’ve never felt comfortable with any of them. (Don)

I think the management loves the hierarchy. You can see the way they walk; they love being, you know. So, the hierarchy of the whole thing: as far as workers hating management—true. Why? No one ever gets to meet management or work with them at the same level. They’re just aliens that walk down and look at you every now and then as if you’re doing something wrong, and walk off again. Or they just come down to check on you to make sure you’re working which is like—you know you feel like a little kid, like your parents coming down to make sure you cleaned your room sort of thing. That’s what it feels like. So it’s no wonder that it’s all sort of built up. There’s no common ground to the two. If you had maybe workers working with a few more management decisions and managers working with workers more on the floor, one-to-one, working things out together as a team, the whole thing’d become a lot smoother. But as it is workers do hate management. The first day I got here: ‘They’re the enemy’. For weeks I was reminded: ‘They’re the enemy; they’re the enemy’. Then after a while you learn to spot a light blue shirt through a hundred yards of metal construction. ‘Here they come!’ It’s just a dot of light blue; you know it’s them. And then by height and walk you know who it is. If it’s [the supervisor] or if it’s [the plant manager]. ‘Here comes such and such’. If it’s [the plant manager], every one’s ‘boom!’ Because he’s sort of the main person. And because he doesn’t come down much. People tend to work while he’s here. He would never see anything wrong. He wouldn’t see what’s going on. [The supervisor] would a bit more because he catches people out and [the team leader] would see more; but not all of it ...

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1  The colour of the shirts worn by workers and managers will be discussed later in this chapter.

2  In the hierarchical structure at the Refractories supervisors were above team leaders, who were above leading hands.
People do have a sense of identity with whichever side they're with ... Level Five down you're proud to be a worker. (Ray)

The dispirited feelings evident as the men talked about not being heard, as outlined in the previous chapter, seemed to be intensified as a result of the divisions they said were manifest at the plant. This state of affairs flourished with the divisions. These divisions have been talked about in industry for many years.³ The men indicated their acceptance of the separation between themselves and the managers as quite clear and 'normal', accepting the bureaucratic structure as “a necessary part of life” (Martin, Callaghan & Fox, 1997: 1). Ray’s comments about the managers’ position vis-a-vis the workers reflect a common impression I got from the workers of their sense of alienation from the managers who were seen as controllers and manipulators. The workers did not want to be associated with the managers, whom they talked of as being generally disagreeable. They preferred the polarised world of ‘them and us’.

The division was to them an intrinsic part of the way the company functioned. Its existence, they said, was not just within this company, but brought into the company from other similar workplace settings. They saw it as an accepted and fixed position that would be unlikely to change. Statements about pride at being a worker were deeply embedded in the way many of the workers vocalised their sense of belonging and identity. The meaning the workers made of what was happening to and around them was defined from their side of what I came to see as a virtual chasm.

In this chapter I will consider how the chasm at the plant separated off a ‘space’ in which workers’ personal, social and organisational identity formed. I will look at how the men viewed their position vis-a-vis their relationship with management within the circumscribed

hierarchical structure. Their social location at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, which led them to feel marginalised, resonated with their earlier comments about not being heard. Their resultant disdain for their managers and how that sustained the division between the groups will be also be explored. The workers’ experience of this division, their sense of discrimination, and continual power struggles will be considered in light of the image they had of those they derided on the opposite side of the chasm, their managers.

"Us Workers Stick Together and the Managers Have Got Their Own Group"

If you cross over that chasm, you can never come back. There’s no turning back. You change. (Vince)

I’d like to talk to him [the plant manager], but the others [workers] wouldn’t like it—you know what I mean. (Owen)

The managers up in the offices, I don’t see any of them, so I really couldn’t say [what they do], other than the fact that we’re down there getting dirty and they’re up there in the office. But they’ve been there for years. So, it’s really hard to see it from the management point of view. (Ned)

Us workers stick together and the managers have got their own group. (Owen)

The chasm that existed between the workers and the managers had built up over many years, according to the workers. It was now seen as an established mode of operation. The two groups operated from either side of a ‘great divide’, which the men indicated was difficult to cross. Figure 3.1 illustrates how I envisioned the disjunction.4

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4 I will refer to my role working across this chasm in Chapter Six.
The binary sense of disconnection and alienation involved continual conflict. The workers talked about the separation in terms of the strength and sense of safety it gave them as a group in adversity.

Whether the interpretations of belonging and division at the plant came from within the socio-cultural milieu, or from individual positioning, or a combination of both is a moot point. Yet, the division did not seem to be a random factor. Merely by using the terms 'workers' and 'management'—which were the common parlance of the workers and their managers (as is the case in much of the literature on management), an immediate critical distinction is drawn. Certain images are evoked (perhaps intentionally) and these had become part of the usual experience of the plant.

The workers saw the managers as being from another world. They were referred to by Ray as 'aliens' who could not be expected to be able to see the world in the same way the workers did. Vince voiced the often talked about view that even those managers who had reached their positions by being promoted from the shop floor changed with their
promotion, forgetting their roots. The higher up the ladder, the more distant the managers were seen by the men, and the less they were expected to know of the actual working of the plant. Chad complained to me about the general manager, who he said, did not even acknowledge the workers' presence, let alone show interest in their work. He indicated that this felt as though their very existence was denied. Chad, along with many of the other workers, often expressed a wish that the company would operate in a more humane and personal way towards them. They expressed feelings of separation from managers by virtue of status and tasks, which was often then personalised to individuals. The general tenor of their comments was strongly anti-management.

Hatred of Management

| On a day when new workers were being inducted into the company, spending the entire day in an office upstairs learning about the plant and its safety rules, Herb, one of the new employees, commented to Ray that he “hated management”. Herb had only met a few of the managers at that stage. |

Herb's sentiments were not drawn from his knowledge of the Refractories' managers. Ray, who was also newly employed at the Refractories, and also being inducted into the company at the same time, commented to me that he thought Herb made these statements because he saw it as a way to align himself with his new work mates. This sentiment of group cohesion is supported by Schein's (1992) comments that these overt signals are designed to allow smooth transition into a group. Ray did note that he thought this behaviour was rather senseless. At this stage Ray had only good things to say about the managers, an attitude that changed radically in a relatively short time.

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5 Interview (21.11.97).
6 As mentioned earlier, I had known Ray before he worked at the Refractories.
7 As seen later in this Chapter.
Rarely did any of the workers have good things to say about management—to me, to their mates or to managers themselves. In meetings I attended in the days leading up to the start of my study, where one particular supervisor was present, acrimony ran high. “You should see the sparks fly when Chad [worker] and Damien [supervisor] are in the same room!” exclaimed Ken. At one such meeting I attended, Chad shouted at Damien: “The best thing would be if you’d fucking drop dead, mate! You’re so full of fucking bull-shit!”

The workers felt that it was acceptable for them to openly criticise the managers to their work mates and to me. Criticism of their work mates was expressed far more cautiously. Some told me that they did not like their fellow workers either, but did not want to break their sense of solidarity. “It is safe to identify with one side because it provides a rich, deep sense of identity within a collective narrative. It is a sense of home, part of the struggle to reach a meaning of life”, John Van Maanen (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) commented to me as we talked about this concept of separation between workers and managers.

Kafka, in *The Castle* (1974) could have been speaking for the workers at the Refractories when he wrote:

> We are all supposed to belong to the Castle, and there’s supposed to be no gulf between us, and nothing to be bridged over, and that may be true enough on ordinary occasions, but we’ve had grim evidence that it’s not true when anything really important crops up.

Some of the men saw disadvantages in the exclusivity of their group because, like many organisational behaviour researchers, they saw this sort of exclusivity as constricting. Owen, for example, talked of the constraints he felt because he could not talk to the

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8 Such as: Deetz (1992: 256); Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Fiske (1991); Gersick & Hackman (1990); Leach (1996); Morgeson & Hofmann (1999); Schein (1992).
managers, for fear of reprisals from his work mates. He, along with others, who expressed the same apprehension, were caught in a dilemma of not being able to follow their inclinations for fear of intimidation from their work mates. They could be seen to be turning against their own group, they said. The consequences of going against their own group negate the notion of ‘free choice’, which Belenky et al. (1989: 46) refer to of as the options individuals have.

Although, in the exceptions that proved the rule, I sometimes observed connections across the chasm between some of the workers and managers in constructive, communicative ways, people on either side of the chasm generally maintained their ‘designated’ role, only crossing the crevasse rarely and with some caution. At times I could see a bridge being used by members from both groups to cross from one side to the other. However, the workers generally saw it as a one way bridge that was dangerous to cross. When their work mates were promoted to the other side of the chasm, they saw that somehow they irrevocably changed and could not remain part of their former work group. A promotion would lose a worker his expressed sense of identity, which was found in his connection with other workers.

“*We’re [workers] All Just Good Mates. Everyone Helps Each Other Out*”

I only care about me and me work mates. (Frank)

A lot of things have happened over the years. It’s a long time to eat and sleep and drink with people, especially the overtime we used to have. You see more of the people at work than you do of your family. (Ully)

I get on well with the blokes here. They’re all just good mates. Everyone helps each other out. Some are best of mates. Others are always talking to each other. Most of the guys

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9 Part of the ‘rules’ that will be talked about later in this chapter.

10 See further comments on the division created by workers’ movement up the hierarchical ladder later in this chapter.
see a lot of each other after work. There's a social group where you pay into each week towards going out at Christmas ... We're [workers] all just good mates. Everyone helps each other out. (Norm)

The workers referred to many things they had in common with their work mates, materially, physically, socially and emotionally. They shared their knowledge, belongings, activity, speech patterns, common geographical and political boundaries and workplace cultural characteristics. They spent a large part of their lives together, sometimes up to twenty four hours at a stretch when they were on double shifts. They worked in situations that demanded close, physical interaction, sometimes in potentially dangerous circumstances, such as with the movement of overhead cranes, moving large, heavy objects, or pouring dangerous materials into vats. Interpersonal interactions were embedded in these intensely close work experiences. Paul told me of the time when Eddie was injured at work when they were working on night shift together. Paul took Eddie to hospital and then went to Eddie's home to get his wife. The men ate their meals together and attended work meetings as a group.

When the same people show up day after day at the same time and place, their activities are likely to become more mutually defined, more mutually dependent, more mutually predictable, and more subject to common understanding encoded into common language.

Weick (1995: 75)

Their lives often also connected outside of work, through playing soccer as a team, going fishing together, or meeting at the pub after work or on weekends. Some shared living accommodation.

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11 Emotional aspects of the workplace will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Four.
12 The game of soccer was their chosen game. It crossed all nationality bases.
The close connections between the men at the plant produced a collective logic of institutional values, beliefs and practices. The men used the term ‘BHP mentality’, referring to particular ways of behaving embedded in the identity of this large corporation, giving the company what Brown and Starkey (2000: 149) refer to as a ‘meta-identity’. This included the delineation of both formal roles, such as work functions delineated by the company, and informal roles, such as organisation of social functions. These roles were accepted by the men as standard, if not always agreeable practices. These ways of doing things had become part of the system, forming patterns of association in what Thierart and Forgues (1997: 121) describe as a “cyclical patterns in which systems behaviours elicit actions and actions shape systems behaviours.” Thus being part of BHP brought with it certain expected behaviours and certain ways of being created what was BHP. Also being part of the workers’ group brought with it codes of what Basil Bernstein (1974: 43) calls ‘public language’ which plays a strong role in bonding individuals within a social structure. Bernstein notes (ibid.: 47) that the use of this public language brings with it “a powerful sense of allegiance and loyalty to the group”, which he notes is self-perpetuating.

The workers at the Refractories displayed some strong codes of behaviour that had become part of the expected conduct to be adhered to by members of the group, such as maintaining particular work practices, belonging to a union or sitting together at lunch within particular sub-groups. One of the expected ways of behaving at the plant was to be ‘macho’, even if some did not want to act that way. Being macho is a strong example of the pressure the men felt to conform.

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33 Some of these codes of behaviour are described later in this as well as in Chapters Two and Four.

More of this notion of being macho can be found in Chapter Four.
Keeping up with Expectations

Vince was interested in my involvement with yoga and meditation, which I had spoken about in one of our workshops. He came to me quietly one day as I walked in and out of the way part of the plant, and asked me if I could get him some meditation tapes because it was a practice he wanted to learn. We arranged that I would deliver the tapes to him in a recycled office envelope the next day outside the plant. He did not want his workmates to know what he was doing. Meditation and yoga are definitely not part of the macho image in Australian society!15

It is from this pressure of conforming that the notion of self is located.16 In addressing pressure to conform Gergen (1991: 71) uses the term ‘social saturation’ to denote interconnecting influences between individuals as it “creates us as pastiches, imitative assemblages of each other ... becoming increasingly populated with the character of others.” This connection with others is also part of Buddhist and Yogic philosophy. The Buddhist scholar Govinda (1969: 54) noted that “every individual is essentially connected with all that exists.” Yoga master Satyananda (1995: 6) expounds how all our actions affect and are affected by others. He talks of connection whereby individuals are not only externally linked with other individuals, they actually experience the feelings of others. In this sense, the collective thinking of the workers was more than an attempt to belong or conform in order to be accepted. It had become part of their ways of being. This notion of collective conduct fits with Goffman’s (1959: 164) comments on how individuals are moulded to behave in an expected fashion, even when that means division and dissent. Hence workers cohered by separating from management. Lyotard (1984: 15) adds to this view stating:

15 Personal journal (13.2.1998).
A self does not amount to much ... no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before.

Because of this moulding and connection, even to form an identity, much of the literature on identity\textsuperscript{17} suggests that people need 'permission' from the rest of the society of which they are part. Thus the influence of people on each other is inevitable (Geertz, 1973: 35). Deciding exactly where the sphere of the individual ends and the sphere of the collective begins can be difficult (Denzin, 1987; Wenger, 1996).

"The Refractories are Sort of Part of Me"

I've been here since I left school. It's the first real job I've had. It's the place where I got a start in life. Basically, when I left school and was looking for work, we were in some pretty hard times in the family, so it was a good thing when I was able to get a job here (Mitch)

See, the big problem there is management - it's all dehumanised; management don't give a shit about whether you've got problems. It's the only one who's aware that if you have trouble at home you're goin' to bring that trouble to work. No one else really thinks about that. No one else treats it properly. (Ray)

I've been here for twenty-one years. The Refractories are sort of part of me. (Harry)

Harry felt a strong connection with the company after working there for so many years. His work had become 'a part of' him, one of his principal sources of social identity. This connection to the workplace is to be expected.\textsuperscript{18} As members identify more strongly with an organisation and its values, the organisation becomes as much a part of the member as the member is part of the organisation.\textsuperscript{19} Mitch explained that he already felt a connection

\textsuperscript{17} For example: Fiske (1991); Deetz (1992); Erez & Earley (1993); Weick (1995); Wenger (1996).

\textsuperscript{18} As noted by many organisational researchers such as: Deetz (1992); Gergen (1991a); Gersick et al., (forthcoming); Gubrium & Holstein (2000); Hewitt (1997); Morgeson & Hofmann (1999); Weick (1995).

\textsuperscript{19} Eisenberg & Goodall (1997: 202).
with the company even though he had only been there for the relatively short time of two years. This was his first job. It meant a great deal to him because it came at a time when his family was experiencing financial difficulties.

Such feelings of being part of BHP are part of the previously mentioned meta-identity created by company practices and inculcated in organisational memory. These practices included rules and regulations as well as artifacts that were part of the environment, such as the bigness of the place, the noise and the dust described by Ned:

The clothes the men wore and the shifts they worked also separated them from other members of the community outside of BHP. BHP uniforms are clearly discernible when the men move outside the gates of the company. Then there were other symbols of being part of the company, such as the safety notices warning the men how and where to walk around the plant, the distinctive machinery and materials with which they worked, the pictures on the walls and the spaces within which the men operated.

Yet the identity the workers gained from being part of BHP was not isolated from other parts of their lives. As part of a two-way process BHP impacted on their home lives as did their home lives impact on BHP. For example, Ray talked of the men who came to work carrying stresses from home and how that affected their work. Others talked of people knowing they worked for BHP when they wore their uniforms home, or hung their washing on the clothes line. Wollongong is still very much a 'Company Town'. Frank talked to me about the impression those outside the company had of BHP as a whole, and how that impacted on his feelings about his work and hence himself. He told me that he agreed

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20 The issue of clothing will be discussed further in this chapter.
21 More of the effects of the artefacts later in this chapter.
22 This connection is dealt with further in Chapter Four.
23 The feelings the men had about working for the company are further discussed in Chapter Four.
with his friends outside the company that BHP was a 'bad' company to work for. The men's comments on the home-work/work-home connection can be linked to what the anthropologist, Rose, (1989: 65) sees as the "incorporatedness of our lives."

When I held a workshop with a group of twenty-one of the workers, they rated their identification with BHP as the least relevant of twenty-two statements put to them that were derived from analysis of their interviews.24 This seems to deny many of the statements the men made to me at other times about working for the company. Perhaps it reflected their need to disassociate from a company that they openly derided, and whose reputation was not positive amongst the wider community.25 And yet it is not possible to have a secure identity that remains only with one group, Knights (1990: 329) contends in his work on power and identity, because individuals lead multiple lives. The men's statements are evidence of the multiple lives they led. There were aspects of themselves that they identified with as part of BHP. Yet at the same time they needed to deny that connection because of their place in a community a very negative viewpoint of BHP. Chad provides an example of a man who took his identity from both inside and outside of work. He was a man with little formal education, and yet he had insight into the management of the company. He predicted many of the outcomes that eventuated at the plant. He wanted to be in contact with management but this would have meant ostracism from his work mates. He was a family man who often talked to me in a very caring way about his extended family, yet at work he was regarded as a tough guy. He also told me about the welfare work he did in the community with people in trouble. His identity was a multiple one between work, home and the community.

24 This process is dealt with more fully in Chapter Six.
25 The media's reporting on BHP is dealt with more fully in Chapter Four.
The degree to which work is a source of identity is questioned by some organisational researchers, such as Applebaum and Goransson (1997: 117) who show concern that "people confuse their jobs with their identity." The viewpoint that people primarily take their identity from places other than their work, underestimates the impact work has on identity creation. Separated identities between home and work "don't hold up" (John Van Maanen, pers. comm., Feb., 2000).

The boundaries corporations set on their employees help to create and maintain that state.\(^\text{26}\) The connections between the corporate world and other sectors of human existence are inextricably linked in a myriad of subtle ways; through products, media, education, socialisation, the structuring of family and geographical location around work. "Phenomenologically, if not concretely, people over time are submerged in a community of meaning that is to some extent monopolised by management: a total institution of sorts", Kunda (1991: 224) states. The connection is interdependent, involving what Czarniawska (1996: 7) refers to as "macro (organisation) and micro (individual) actors" who interact together to influence each other. A notable example of the interconnection between work and the community in the context of the Refractories is seen in the name\(^\text{27}\) of the local Australian Rugby League football club: 'The Steelers,' denoting its connection to BHP Steel.

\[^{26}\text{Rose (1989: 64).}\]
\[^{27}\text{It held this name until quite recently, when the club was taken over by a Sydney club.}\]
'Bud' Goodall (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) referred to this interdependence between community and work as 'psychomytosis'. He commented that the importance does not lie in the source of identity, as much as the fact that the connection between the two is such an important part of people's lives.

I recall a children's story titled *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* about a bunyip\(^\text{28}\) who lived in a muddy billabong\(^\text{29}\) in the Australian bush. He had never met another creature like himself and so had no idea what he was. He asked all the animals in the bush if they could tell him, but they could not give him an answer. Then one miraculous day a female bunyip rose out of the muddy billabong. He asked her: "What am I?" to which she answered in a very matter-of-fact tone: "You're a bunyip, of course, just like me." He was ecstatically happy with his new-found identity, and went about telling everyone who he was.

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\(^{28}\) A bunyip is an Aboriginal fabulous creature (Oxford Dictionary (1976) or earth spirit (Wrightson (1985). There are many stories written about bunyips in Aboriginal folklore. They are described as monsters that eat strangers who fall into their water holes (Morgan (1994); Orgen (1990) although Wrightson (1985) described them as being most helpful in time of need.

\(^{29}\) A small shaded waterhole, which dries up in times of drought.
The notion of having a distinct identity is a necessary basic concept so as to be able to effectively interact with others, Albert, Ashforth and Dutton (2000: 13) note in their work on identity and identification. Cooley, almost a hundred years ago (1909: 23) referred to this identification process as the 'looking glass self' through which we get our image of ourselves from how others see us. He noted that this close interaction creates a 'natural ... mutual identity'. A lively example of the looking glass view of identity can be seen in Louis Carroll’s (1947) stories of Alice In Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. On her journey into Wonderland Alice encounters many tests to her sense of who she was. This supposed dream state of Alice’s, in an imaginary, bizarre world, may not be too far removed from every day life I observed at the plant. Like the men, Alice’s identity is constantly challenged. She questions whether she is the same person that she was even that morning, unsure who she is from one episode to the next, or where she fits in the strange world in which she finds herself. She able, only through trial and error, to determine what is appropriate or safe to say in the company of others; all of which fit into the image the men were presenting to me of their life at the Refractories. Ray, for example, did not initially regard managers as enemies, and yet in a matter of months his attitude toward them was as antagonistic as his fellow workers.
In the same way as Alice, the men demonstrated how they had learned to behave differently with different people at work, depending on where they stood in relation to their place in and around the chasm or up and down the hierarchical ladder. For example, in the interviews the men were without exception forthcoming, pleasant and helpful. Yet when they were with their work mates on the shop floor, their behaviour towards me was often quite different. Their cordiality and familiarity often turned to aloofness and a sort of embarrassment and awkwardness. The multiple identities they had within the workplace often led to disharmony between individual workers. Even with the connection many of the men felt toward the workplace and their fellow workers, there were inevitably situations in which discord occurred. The written and unwritten rules by which the men operated sometimes brought on conflicts between the workers.

"There’s Obviously Conflict Between Workers, Too"

There are different sub-cultures too (in the plant); some are secretive, some open, relatively speaking. (Troy)

The guys fight amongst each other as it is. Like a classic example is day shift. Like on any back [night] shift I won’t have any altercations, very rarely. The guys won’t want to go out on the grass over an issue. They’ll leave it all. (Nat)

You’re caught between two things; if you do something outside your normal eight hours, you’re an arsehole for doing it; if you don’t do it, you’re an arsehole on the other side of the fence. So you’re in a position where your arms are tied ... I can talk to staff but you get bagged out by the others if you do. You cop a flacking if they see you up there [in the managers’ offices] talking. If you’re interested in doing something and the other people don’t want you to do anything, then you’re an arse hole for doing it, sort of thing. So it’s a ‘catch 22’ sort of thing. (Chad)

There are divisions within the plant even at operator level. All three parts of the plant stay separate from each other, which is stupid. They don’t seem to trust each other across lines. The others in the plant are all afraid of [our section]. They have a different culture there, by the sound of things. They live in a bubble. They never come down to us. I notice when

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A distinction is also referred to later in this chapter.
[the men from another section] and the whole shed would come down to our room and we all have a big meeting the other guys are always a bit laid back because we've got most of the shed. There's heaps more guys in our part. I don't know whether we just get all the tough nuts or whether it's just that we have a lot more guys in there. The others are more laid back and mellow. They don't seem to trust each other across lines. There's going to be a strike because one of the men in the other area stole some gas [for his car]. I don't know whether we'll support them or not. I don't want to and most of the other guys don't want to. We'll have a vote if they ask us. I doubt that they'll get our vote because they haven't supported us in the past. (Oli)

There's obviously conflict between workers, too. Other workers'll just stick a knife in your back; phshh! (Cain)

The differences between the men were openly expressed by several of the workers. They saw that not all the relationships between workers were amicable. They also had their own divisions. The workers were not exclusively part of one homogeneous, bounded group within the company. Merely because individuals belong to a group along one dimension does not imply they will always get along. Nor does identification necessarily imply solidarity, Nichols and Armstrong (1976: 125) found in their extensive studies of industrial organisations. The divisions the men talked amongst themselves may have emerged from what Held (1982: 237) refers to as a forced state of affairs brought about by the 'competition and possession [of] social labour'. The men at the Refractories belonged to changing work crews, separated into three distinct work areas. They belonged to three different unions. Another division was created by the seven Levels of promotion for the workers.

Ray commented that he saw the divisions amongst the workers as sometimes more dangerous than between the workers and the managers, which he found quite puzzling and senseless. He considered some divisions due to Levels as not totally destructive as they

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31 Czarniawska (1996: 60).
32 These areas will be described in more detail shortly.
33 The three different unions represented the workers across the plant—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Federation of Industrial Manufacturing Engineering and Electrical Trades Union.
created a some sort of order out of the chaos he saw around him. He indicated that each person knew their place and hence who they needed to ask for specific directions for their work.

However, internal divisions amongst the workers at similar Levels, caused consternation for some of them. These men declared to me their anger with certain group decisions in relation to work issues, but they were afraid to state their position for fear of hostility or alienation from their work group. Owen noted this impasse when he said:

I’d like to talk to him [the plant manager], but the others [workers] wouldn’t like it—you know what I mean.

Group Pressure

When the workers in one of the areas were asked by management to put their names forward for the position of leading hand, they were discouraged by other workers in their crew because of a ‘black ban’ they were putting on the position. Graeme, who was one of the ‘in-group’ members, said he wanted to apply, but did not for fear of the negative consequences he would experience from his work mates. He told me how angry he was at the intimidation he had experienced which was intended to stop him applying for the job.34

 Tex quietly took me aside one day as I was leaving an internal office/shed on the shop floor to tell me he disliked the way group decisions were made, feeling excluded and alienated, although he said he did not overtly express these feelings to his peers. He was referring to the twelve hour shifts, which he did not want, but felt pressured, he said, into agreeing with the rest of the work group. He said, with quite some bitterness in his

34 Personal journal (17.6.98).
voice, that he wanted another shift pattern but got no support from his work mates for his request. He commented that they had “left [him] out in the bloody cold”, but felt he had to “roll with the punches” and go along with the group decision.\(^{35}\)

To stand against a strong popular bias is not easy.\(^{36}\) There is always tension between group needs and individual needs for belonging. It is a widely accepted view that peer groups often exert influence on individuals to feel and judge as the group dictates rather than follow their preferred personal inclinations.\(^{37}\) This interconnectedness is challenged by some researchers of the dynamics of individualism and collectivism. It has been said that individuals in Western societies are more independent than they have been in the past and that collectives currently have less power over individuals.\(^{38}\) However the workers I spoke with at , felt strongly influenced by both their connection to their work mates, and being part of BHP Refractories.

There were implicit standards of who could speak when, to whom, in what way, where and with what authority. To go against these informal rules was to invite sanctions from work mates. Some of the workers talked about being caught in a position of wanting to be solidarist while still valuing their individualism. Chad, Graeme and Tex all indicated different situations in which the workers’ voices were silenced by what Hays (1999: 39), in his work on silencing in organisations, describes as “unwittingly complying with their own silencing” through deference to group pressure. One of the established and accepted forms of behaviour included the necessity for the workers to belong to a union. There were also unwritten requirements that the workers would only work within their job descriptions and not exceed general expectations of work Levels; that they would share overtime; support

\(^{35}\) Personal journal (27.6.99).

\(^{36}\) Leadbetter (1968: 211) notes in his theosophical writings.


\(^{38}\) For example: Triandis, McCusker, Betancourt, Iwao, Kwok Leung, Salazar, Setiadi, Sinha, Touzard & Zaleski (1993: 367) co-authors in extensive studies on individualism and collectivism.
their fellow workers against the managers; and join in with social activities arranged by the group. These commonly accepted informal 'group ideologies' (Watson, 1980: 109) amongst the workers appeared to have developed over time as the men faced common problems and pressures. The unwritten, informal group rules were not challenged openly by most group members because, they maintained, they wanted to remain part of the group.  

39 A usual form of group behaviour noted by: Marris (1974); Martin et al. (1997); Saville-Troike (1986).
Ray told me how he had been told by other workers to slow his work rate down when he initially started working at the company. He told me he was a hard worker, naturally, and found it difficult to work to rule when he could see that there were things needing to be done. He said some of his fellow workers had told him that this type of work ethic put too much pressure on the rest of them. They were not paid sufficiently or looked after well enough, they told Ray, to give more than the basic requirement to the company.  

Some of the workers also asserted that if they did not go along with the group, and therefore have their support, they would suffer at the hands of management. Others maintained that they related to their work mates more from necessity than agreement. This type of sweeping allegiance, Kriegler (1983: 124) asserts, tends to occur particularly where people are employed by a large organisation, directed from afar as was the case with BHP Refractories.

To break the rules was seen as treacherous. Some of the workers who had broken the rules were ostracised. One of these breaches was to be aligned with management. The workers had clearly defined what was required to be part of their group, and that excluded any working relationships with management. When the workers did associate with the managers this was seen as compromising their “fidelity to [the group’s] standards”, a point raised by Gwaltney (1975: xxiii) in relation to his studies of racial differences. They were often viewed by their former work mates as traitors to be treated with caution and sometimes derision.

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Interview (24.6.1998).
Ray talked about Nigel as a defector. Nigel was under suspicion because he had been made a team leader. Even though he was still one of the workers, he was no longer welcome at union meetings because he was seen as a deserter who would “run off to [the plant manager’s] office as soon as the union meeting’s finished, to tell him everything”, Ray said.\(^{41}\)

The codes of behaviour arose out of a number of interweaving factors involving the specific historical context and social milieu of the plant.\(^{42}\) They were part of the social expectations of how workers _should_ behave to support their work mates. This aligns with Sewell, Fulop, Linstead and Rifkin’s (1999: 215) notion of group codes of behaviour, which are exerted through the strong influence of group members. It was within this situation of ‘rules’ that conflicts arose amongst the men. It was particularly difficult for those who were promoted and yet who were still regarded within the company structure as workers.

"It’s Hard to Work in a Place and Then Become a Supervisor"

The role of the team leader—and I have fallen into it—I sometimes feel that we’re on different sides—because I have to tell the guys what to do. I’ll go down to smoko and they’ll say: ‘No staff in here! What are you doing down here?’ Just joking; but there’s an element of seriousness about it. And there’s even a division between us. But, yeah, there is an ‘us and them’ thing, definitely. You’re viewed as staff; well, not staff, but in the hierarchy. But I say to them: ‘I’m just like you; I’ve got a job to do’. It’s anyone they see in authority. A lot of them don’t differentiate. They just see you as telling them what to do. The line stops at Level Five. At Level Five you’re still working on the floor. Once you get to Level Six then you’re like the roving leading hand role and you’re sort of telling them what to do, but that person still falls in with them better, because he’s coming to you and going to them and he’s the middle man, and I’m sort of out of that middle man role. I’m sort of like one above that middle man role, but I’m still the middleman. It’s really hard to explain. (Nat)

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\(^{41}\) Interview (24.6.1998).

\(^{42}\) Several organisational theorists refer to the multiplicity of factors that play a part in the development of ‘rules’, including: Czarniawska & Guillet de Monthoux (1994); Geertz (1973); Gergen (1987, 1991a); Kriegler (1983); Lloyd (1997); Schein (1992).
Some seem to get a hell of a boost when they go from wages to staff. In general their personalities change. They get all important, and don’t take extra time to talk at crib time, for example. It’s like a power surge. You roll with the changes but there are still dignified ways in doing the job rather than thinking you’re a better person now, just because you get fifty cents an hour more. (Jerry)

There are a lot of workers in here who are Level Five and could go to Level Six and stuff, and work their way into the office that would not do it, would not sacrifice their relationship with the entire shed, would not go up there to be hammered. A lot of guys are promoted and they quit within two months because they get hassled from management and the guys. (Ray)

A lot of workers have gone to being managers and it doesn’t make them treat others any different. Obviously, however they’ve been treated by their managers, they act the same. So maybe it’s just a game in here. There are some guys who you aren’t really sure where they’re at—if they’re workers or managers. They still wear our shirts, and they hang out in the office and they’re not really ever on the floor. They’re the team leaders. They’re in the middle of the road. As soon as you’re a Level Six or Seven you’re in between and no one trusts you, they don’t trust you at all. From Level Five down you’re proud to be a worker. There’s a hierarchy amongst the workers. It is a positive one. It’s not like people have things over people. Someone has to show direction and someone has to answer the questions down the line and up again to the supervisor. If new guys come in, older guys show them how to do things. That’s just how it is. On each crew there’s a leader. They’re all excellent and whatever they say has to be done in the day will be done in the day. They’re cool. They’re one of the lads and you do what they want. They’re with you. I think the guys [supervisors] on the floor still run the show; they work pretty hard from what I see. They don’t really seem to care if they have to stay another four hours after a twelve-hour shift. It’s just what you have to do to climb the ladder. (Ned)

It’s hard to work in a place and then become a supervisor. When it comes to tough decisions it doesn’t always work out well. They’re driven by their bosses. They’re just channels for management policy. They might not always agree with it. I used to be a foreman at the steel works. People change when they become staff. They mightn’t think that they do, but they do. (Cain)

The dilemmas of moving from worker to management status were quite openly expressed by several of the workers at different Levels. As the workers moved up the promotional line, they faced decisions of working across or even crossing the chasm; a move which, as mentioned earlier, brought with it certain personal risks of alienation and isolation. They did not have a secure place in which they belonged.
Choosing not to be Promoted

Nat, a team leader, talked about the men on his team who could have become team leaders but were content to stay working on the shop floor so they did not have to deal with the responsibilities and difficulties that went with being a team leader.43

The team leaders told me they were placed in a position where they took on the responsibility of organising and disciplining the workers. This, they intimated, relieved management from the need to deal with the workers directly. They sensed themselves as being separate from management both in terms of responsibility and physical location.

Awareness of the Effects of Climbing the Ladder

When Tex asked me what I wanted to talk about with the men in the second round of interviews, I mentioned power and he smiled knowingly. He explained that he could see that there were power plays amongst the men toward him because they could not understand his position as a leading hand who spent most of his time in the office.44

Those who had been promoted talked to me about how difficult it was to straddle both worlds. They considered they were caught in the middle of the chasm, seeing themselves as Nat said: “the meat in the sandwich.” As they climbed the ladder, they found it harder to associate with their old work mates, who were perceived by those ‘left behind’, to see themselves as the bosses’ mates. Their loyalties were divided in what Wenger (1996: 101) in his work on communities of practice terms ‘multimembership’ brought about by ‘marginalisation’, which, in this case applies to processes of the team leaders wanting to do the right thing by the managers which isolated them from the workers, and at the same time feeling a sense of loyalty to the workers, which kept them from apart from management.

43 Personal journal (8.5.1998).
44 Personal journal (9.10.1997).
The workers saw them as arms of management. They were different from the other workers. As mentioned earlier Ray verbalised the difference, saying: "Besides Levels Six and Sevens; Five down you’re proud to be a worker."

This positioning created very difficult situations for leading hands and team leaders as they carried out the directions of the senior managers. They were seen by other workers as part of the management team, because their role was to organise, and yet they did not feel part of the managing group. They did not attend staff or planning meetings, and were not involved in the decision making processes with managers. They merely received second-hand instructions from those who did attend the meetings. Their offices were on a raised level in the centre of the plant, well separated from the managers, and also apart from the workers. They were neither attached to one side of the chasm or the other, hence did not have a secure anchor of identity with either group.

"It’s More Than Just a Physical Space"

Managements’ offices are up high and they see they’re over us. If they got down to our level, they would be able to see it from our point of view. That might be just a physical space, but it’s more than just a physical space. They [workers and managers] have internalised it. (Nev)

The emotional and work-related divisions at the Refractories were reinforced by physical divisions, resulting in an inherently fragmented labour force. The shed was divided into three main function areas: monolithics, castings and slide gate, with maintenance housed in a separate and smaller section. Figure 3.3 shows a vertical cross-section of the physical set-up of the plant. Administration was conducted from the top floor offices, occupied by salaried staff, while the shopfloor was occupied by the workers, including leading hands and team leaders.
The physical surroundings that defined the spaces in which the workers and the managers functioned exacerbated perceptions of unequal power relations that existed in the company. To add emphasis to the spatial separation, the physical condition of the spaces was vastly different. In contrast to the recreation spaces of the workers, which were, with one exception, small, cramped, old and dirty, the main office area was air-conditioned, clean, new and fresh with large window space and vertical blinds to filter the light. Only rarely did workers enter these spaces—for designated meetings arranged by management, to query payments of wages, or to attend short training sessions.

The men in monolithics (‘mono’ as it was commonly named) produced the ceramic mixtures for making bricks; the crew in castings moulded the larger bricks, and Slidegate operators made the more intricately shaped bricks. The maintenance crew was a separate entity from each of the other three areas. Each group referred to their crew as separate from the others and most wanted things to remain that way.
**Division between the Sections of the Plant**

As Vince, Carl and Zak stood talking with me about their separation from one of the other divisions, they pointed to the tin fence that stood between them and wondered if this was a deliberate ploy by management to keep them separated, so that they did not have too much collective power.  

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An extended dispute took place between the workers in Castings and Mono. in relation to the movement of material from one section to the other. Castings would not allow Mono. workers to bring material into its area and a large scale dispute was only diverted at the last minute by the involvement of a union leader who had been asked to intervene by management.  

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In another incident, Castings' forklift truck had broken down. Slidegate had one that was not being used, but the members of that crew would not let Castings use it unless a request went through the plant manager. When Castings were granted the use of the forklift, the Slidegate crew kept a close check on where it was being used and when it would be returned to their side of the fence.

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45 Personal journal (9.10.1997).
46 Personal journal (19.11.97).
47 Personal journal (14.5.1998).
Photo 3.1 Slide Gate section

Photo 3.2 Monolithics section

Photo 3.3 Showing the fence dividing Slide Gate from Castings—left hand side
The three divisions stayed quite separate from each other in work and in most social events. The men told me that they even drank at different pubs on most occasions, and at times when they were in the same pub, fights often broke out between workers from different sections. The soccer team was the exception that proved the rule in this case. There were not enough men who were interested in becoming part of the team to make up a team from any one section, so the soccer team which played in an intra-BHP competition was made up workers from across the plant. None of the managers played in the team. The notion the men had of management deliberately creating division is supported by Deetz's (1992: 336) statement that managers "have carefully constructed the actors and their approved conflicts" in order to maintain their own power. This is further upheld by Fiske (1991: 88) in his sociological considerations of communication. He asserts that controlling classes maintain power through the creation of the dominant and accepted ideology. They are not likely to easily surrender this power. It is within this state of the maintenance of power that Heller (1998: 1434) asserts that pseudoparticipation flourishes because those with power are reluctant to give up their influence.

Power was seen by the workers to be a combination of various factors such as economy, status and reward, described as an expected part of bureaucratic organisations by Weber in Etzioni-Harlevy (1993: 250). Management created the structure that set up these divisions amongst workers. Management held the power to divide the workforce. They dealt with each of the sections separately in matters regarding such working conditions as shift work pattern, and even sick leave. Each section had their own leading hands and team leaders.

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48 Fairris (1997) asserts through his studies of shop floor conditions in mass production firms, as does Fisher (1999), in his research in quite a different setting with scientists at M.I.T. and Rosen's (1991: 16) in his work on organisational ethnography. This notion of maintaining power positions is also dealt with by Argyris (1990); Field (1997) and Kriegler (1980).

49 As mentioned in Chapter Two.

50 The situation with sick leave is dealt with more fully in Chapter Four.
The physical divisions were a representation of the political divisions and also a metaphor for the political divisions.

"You Wouldn’t Get a Job in Management If You Weren’t a Power Tripper"

I know why management employ the people they do. It all starts with the person at the top. The company isn’t going to put a nice guy in management because they think he’s not going to look after the company. Who employs the guys? The arseholes. They go for the nice guys so they have it over them. It starts at the top. (Ray)

The way BHP is being handled at the moment, they are being driven by shareholders. Some of the biggest shareholders are the directors of the company. There’s been a decline in the company over the years. That’s related to the remoteness of management. It’s a BHP trait—faceless people make the decisions and ultimately they don’t have to face the music. In the old days we were like a family company. It was a different attitude. (Cain)

They do it just to have some power over us [use language that was difficult to understand].

(The supervisor) will have this meeting with us. He’ll go: ‘I’m the boss now; you do what I say’. We come in here and cop their shit of time keeping and control and ‘stay in your work centre’ and all that. (Owen)

I don’t think we can force them to tell us anything. That would just be up to management. At the end of the day it’s their company. They’re running the show. (Norm [apprentice])

Problems go all the way up the line and then come all the way back and nothing is ever done. It goes from the men to team leader to supervisor to the floor manager to the plant manager. The plant manager sends the responsibility back to the floor manager and everyone goes back and forth and nothing ever gets done. (Ray)

We have ideas and it might go as far as our boss and that would probably be it ... The further up the ladder it goes the more it gets ignored. (Deon)

(The general manager) isn’t going to employ someone smarter than him because he’d make him look stupid. That goes all the way down the line. They won’t be a threat to him. They employ less bright people all the way down the line. This makes them feel better. They’ve combined the fact that they need to have a little bit less knowledge down the ladder with the power-tripper effect. You wouldn’t get a job in management if you weren’t a power tripper. (Ray)
The men saw a relationship between the bureaucratic structure at the Refractories and the reins of power. The hierarchical arrangement placed the workers at the lowest part of the ladder, a position from which many saw themselves as powerless. Some, such as Norm, accepted the structure as inherent in business. He, along with others, saw it as a given component of working for a large firm, a commonly held belief in organisations. Not that they condoned that behaviour. They complained vehemently about the manipulation they experienced within the bureaucratic structure.

Within their organisational view of power, the workers saw themselves as having little opportunity to impact on the direction of the company, or their own working lives. They felt, as Foucault (1980: 118) described those with inadequate power, as though they were being repressed through managerial control. They had little sense of autonomy. Ray's earlier comment about parental discipline is indicative of the workers' discomfort at being watched and told what to do. Perhaps this dis-ease at being under surveillance is connected to the rebellion the men exercised at work. Cain saw this constriction of the workers' power as a result of shareholder pressure over the managers. He indicated in his statement about BHP being managed by 'faceless people', that it was not possible to influence how the company responded to the workers' needs because the people who made the decisions were too far removed from the workplace, and they were in turn pressured by those who were even more remote, the shareholders. They saw the senior managers also as powerful shareholders in the company. It seemed to him that much of the Refractories' agenda was driven by a larger company agenda. That impression of constricted power aligns with the view of organisational learning analyst, Field (1997: 152), of how external pressures heavily influence political power plays in organisations.

51 As mentioned in Chapter Two.
52 Field (1997: 151).
53 As mentioned in Chapter Two in relation to their exclusion from decision making.
54 Even though many of the workers held company shares, they did not see themselves as able to exert any influence through their shareholding.
The workers spoke of power as being exercised around reward and punishment as well as position, knowledge, relationships. These are usual bases for power over others, according to the work of Cornelius and Faire (1994) on conflict in organisations, and by Ackroff and Thompson (1999) in their work on misbehaviour in organisations. In much of the organisational literature, rewards are linked with fears and hence punishments. Owen and others talked of being ordered to behave in a particular way. If they did not follow these orders they were 'punished' by the supervisors who granted favours to those who obeyed. This included the granting of overtime—equated with money. Ray felt the managers revelled in the hierarchical structure, where they felt justified in wielding their power.

Deon and Ray talked of their frustrations of wanting information from the managers as well as the feeling that their recommendations passed up the line into some sort of void. Within this pyramid style of organisation, Linstead (1999: 101), in his discussion on managing culture, alludes to the scenario where managers assume that by spreading their word it will be followed by those all the way down the ladder. David Napoli, an organisational consultant for the Refractories, drew a diagram—shown in Figure 3.3—at a series of short explanation sessions at the Refractories, to show how he saw the organisation. He described it as a hierarchical pyramid within which the quality of information is lost as it moves up the line so that only some information reaches the top—and much of that distorted. This message resonated with the workers as it did with what I had observed at the Refractories. Orders were sent down the line and any contribution the men wanted to send up the line, they felt was blocked on the way, or if it did get to the top it was distorted. They also felt the managers at the top did not really understand the messages because they were so far removed from the coal face.

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55 Such as by: Carr (1998); Fineman & Sturdy (1999); Flam (1993) and Jackall (1988).
56 Mentioned also in Chapter Four.
Hierarchy = control of the behaviour of the many by the few

less room to move

limiting choices

grain silo feeds in

loss of quality and information = 50%-30% bad decisions

managers

specialisation + regimentation = Predictability

Belief: Control & co-ordination is always at the level above

Belief: Workers work and managers think

Constraining control by making smaller groups and limiting their idea of movement

silo out (no movement sideways) (us and them barriers sideways and up and down)

Figure 3.3 Picture of hierarchical movement of information as explained to the workers at the plant by consultant David Napoli

The men's sense of separation was reinforced through this process, alienating them further because of their perceived place at the base of the information chain. This description of information movement in organisations is supported by Emery and Emery (1976: 166), who see the practice of transferring messages up and down the structure as inhibiting what would be expected to be routine face-to-face conversation about how to get the job done. Ray saw this for himself as he complained of "problems going all the way up the line and then coming all the way back, and nothing ever gets done." Again there is a link between power, creation of divisions and notions of not being heard. The vertical 'silos' between the different sections at the plant created a strong form of division, as did the horizontal
separations. The effect of this divisive environment of power plays was to create what the workers often described as war-like relationships with their managers.

"I Wouldn’t Want to Be a Manager Because You’re the Enemy of the Blokes, And I’m Friends With the Blokes"

It’s like a Gestapo camp in here—with the swipe card, they’ll know how long you’ve been to the toilet. It feels like you’re back in Schindler’s List and they’re whipping you. (Frank)

It wouldn’t matter what they [managers] do, we’d still take the shit out of them ... You just have to soldier on and ride it out. Like ‘D Day’. (Rohan)

With the ‘shirts’ it’s just like policemen. We’re the civilians and they’re the policemen ... It goes both ways with managers and workers, because there’s a lot more workers, so the managers have to be all the time ready to defend themselves against whoever, because there’s always someone who wants something. I can’t see it ever changing. (Ned)

There are safety things too that don’t get done. The guys feel it’s a personal attack on them. It’s a personal war: ‘If I’m not going to be helped by them, I’m not going to help them’. (Ray)

It’s like they [other workers] see that light blue shirt and it’s like a red rag to a bull. (Owen)

I wouldn’t want to be a manager because you’re the enemy of the blokes, and I’m friends with the blokes. (Norm)

The workers used the word ‘friend’ to describe those with whom they worked, and its antonym ‘enemy’ in relation to the managers. The division was not a simple separation of two sides. It was filled with enmity. The men commonly talked of their interactions with management being dominated by alienation and confrontation. The managers were mostly spoken of with antipathy, as people who were playing out the role of punitive police officers. War and alienation were common metaphors the workers used to express how they felt about their relationship with the managers. The workers angrily described power positions of managers in terms that could be characterised as despotic.
**Prison Camp Images**

In a half day change management workshop, the workers, in groups of six, were asked to draw, on large sheets of paper, how they saw the Refractories. The overwhelming image was that of a prison camp with watch towers, barbed wire and bars on windows.\(^{57}\)

The use of language that sounds warlike is not seen by some organisational analysts,\(^ {58}\) to necessarily represent militaristic thinking or intent. However, the intensity of the feelings expressed in the combative terms used by the workers at the Refractories sounded extremely aggressive and tantamount to war, albeit without the physical firepower. Foucault (1981: 180) saw that this vision of the enemy was created from within irreconcilable difference, and necessitated continuing the struggle until victory was gained. At the Refractories the differences had developed throughout the history of BHP and were entrenched into a specification of division between workers and managers.

The regular slighting of the managers was not conducive to cooperative working relationships. There is no room in war for relationships that inspire mutual confidence with the enemy. Each side works at forming a strong sense of rightness in its own campaign in order to deceive the enemy, Barnes (1994: 25) notes through his extensive study on deceit in organisations. In the words of the yoga leader, Naranjananda (1998: 14) “If I recognise you as a friend, my emotion will be that of friendship. If I recognise you as my adversary, the emotion will take the form of animosity.” Hence, the notion of warfare colours all other aspects of the relationship.\(^ {59}\) The men’s expressed feelings of being at war or jailed were accompanied by statements about being discriminated against and expressions of hate toward those who get away with things, and have privileges that the men did not have.

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57 Personal journal (30.6.1997).
58 Such as Deetz, (1992) and Ackroff & Thompson (1999).
“Discrimination is Rife In Here”

A lot of the blue shirts walk around all day and we’re up there in the middle of that black shit, and that’s how the hate happens. They think they’re untouchable. And when you do get them up there, which is once in a blue moon, they’ll touch something which is dirty and it’s like they’ve touched a disease. They’ll sit down and they’ll rub and wash their hands. (Nat)

Anything management gets they deserve. They have more security, they have comfortable air-conditioned offices. There’s more distance between the workers and the management. They eat in different places. They wear different clothes. They’ve built it up and they deserve what they get from the workers. They’re just getting back what they’ve set up. We’re playing different games. (Ray)

When we get retrenched in a couple of week’s time, there will be no farewell for us; I can guarantee that. There was a bloke who was here for twenty years and all he got was a cup of coffee and some muffins, and he had to go back to work after that. All these bits and pieces keep adding up ... Everyone knows what the floor workers are doing, but what are the ‘blue shirts’ doing? ... How often does he [the plant manager] spend having coffee? And we’re measured for how long we spend doing everything. They’re not measured for how long they spend having time off. (Frank)

They’re treated differently [workers and managers]. I mean you look at [the plant manager] and [one of the supervisors] for starters; he could tell him to ‘f’ off. Can you imagine me at a meeting standing up and saying to [the plant manager] ‘Hey! Get off, I’m not sitting here and listening to your shit!’ and walk out? No chance. And he gets away with it. [The plant manager] can’t say nothing [to stop him]. It’s got me. (Vince)

Managers have a lot that the workers don’t know about. It’s very unfair. There’s double standards. There’s plenty of double standards going on. (Ray)

When the staff leave they’re given different treatment to workers. Discrimination is rife in here. (Harry)

The workers noted many ways in which the managers received favoured treatment and privileges. They spoke of ‘double standards’ where, for instance, workers had been ordered to remove ‘girlie’ posters from their crib room, while some supervisors used similar images as screen savers on their computers. These ‘decoupled’ practices were similar to what Meyer (1996: 251) found in his work on the transmission of ideas in organisations. They engendered feelings of a “tremendous credibility gap”, which Harshman and Harshman
(1997: 11) found in their comparisons of classic communication models in large manufacturing organisations.

There was, to the workers at the Refractories, a definite mismatch between the managers’ words (‘espoused theories’) and deeds (‘theories in use’).\(^{60}\) They were not sure that what their managers were telling them was a reflection of what was actually happening,\(^{61}\) which had the consequence, they said, of negatively affecting their work. They saw this as part of the privileges the managers had over the workers—knowing things that the workers did not.

The managers were not seen to ‘walk-their-talk’\(^{62}\) which led the workers to mock them, a phenomena that Collinson (1992) noted is common when workers feel deceived. The workers were “experts at spotting the reality gap” that Sewell and Wilkinson (1992: 284), in their comments on research on shop floor surveillance and discipline, note workers are able to do. Some organisational theorists contend that management hypocrisy is performed unwittingly in most instances.\(^{63}\) The workers at the Refractories were not so generous in their interpretation of mismatched words and deeds, shown for example, through Ray’s comments on the ‘double standards’ he observed.

The differences in treatment led the workers to derive meanings from those actions in what Deetz (1992: 127) refers to as “the politics of every day life.” The differences were in some instances quite obvious. The staff were on salaries while the workers were on wages (see details of differences in working conditions at Appendix 4). Staff received three months notice and were sent to courses to help them to find other jobs when given

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\(^{60}\) These are phrases used by Argyris (1990: 10) to describe a separation from what is said and what is done.

\(^{61}\) As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three.

\(^{62}\) A phrase used by some organisational analysts, for example: Geller (1999); Harshman & Harshman (1999); Wilkins (1989).

\(^{63}\) Such as: Deetz (1992) and Ford (1999).
voluntary redundancies. The workers were not. When the company was sold, staff were given the opportunity to attend financial planning seminars. The workers were not. When staff left the company, the company administrative assistant organised dinners and the company partly financed farewell gifts for them. The workers were left to organise their own forms of farewell, if any.

Signs of Division

At one of the staff farewells to which I was invited, several of the workers as well as staff attended, a somewhat unusual occurrence. There were too many people to fit in the one room at the restaurant, so staff and their guests were seated in the main room. The workers were relegated to the back room and came in to stand around the edges of the room to listen to the farewell speeches.64

Symbols demonstrating division and exclusion were accepted as the norm by the workers, albeit sometimes grudgingly. These symbols were seen by the men as “stored means of power [and] instruments of domination” (Goodall, 1994: 93). It was easy to see how the men could visualise the many differences in treatment as symbols of power.

Some of the artifacts used to build separate identities, which made the workers feel marginalised, were quite visible—the pictures on the walls; clothing; resources available to each group; heating and air conditioning; the cars parked in the car parks, and the state of the car parks themselves; even the amount of window space. Other differences, although not visual, were nevertheless quite obvious. Pay and employment conditions, including sick leave provisions, varied. Training opportunities were far more limited for the workers,65 not unusual in the Illawarra.66

64 Personal journal (14.6.1997).
65 As mentioned in Chapter Two.
Other aspects of difference at the plant were quite noticeable. The workers bought their lunches from a van selling its wares outside the main door to the shop floor, while administrative assistants ordered lunches for the managers, which were delivered from the canteen; the workers were expected to be members of unions; staff were expected not to belong to a union. Staff had access to private use of telephones; the workers had one telephone that was publicly open to anyone who might walk past. The workers were checked for all attendance times—starting and ending the workday, finishing morning tea and lunch breaks—and were disciplined if they did not keep to the exact times stipulated, while no one, it seemed to the workers, watched or commented on staff times.

Ray's reference, at the start of this section, to 'playing different games' fits with Goffman's (1961: 15-56) comments on social reactions in recreational games. The games at the Refractories involved certain rules through which the players were attempting to win over their opponents or 'enemies', in relation to working conditions, pay or control of processes. The game playing was acted out at the union/management meetings where each side showed the 'poker faces' of which Goffman writes, as the two groups sat opposite each other, trying not to give anything away, in order to keep the trump hand. Moves were made to keep the other side guessing. Each side seemed aware this was occurring.

The differences in privileges and treatment were seen by the workers as part of management's efforts to control them, reinforcing the division and animosity between the two groups. The differences seemed reified and taken for granted as though they had always been in existence, and would somehow naturally remain so. These patterns of behaviour had become an expected element of being part of BHP and hence could be seen as part of identity formation for workers. One of the most commonly mentioned differences was the clothes that people wore. There were certain practical reasons for wearing specific
types of clothing, but it was also tied in as a symbol of the overall discrimination about which the men talked.

“It’s Like They’re the White Dots and We’re the Black Dots”

I mean, that’s why we define ‘blue shirts’ as just scum. But take that off them, see them in the street and they’re nothing. Like [a team leader] said to me: ‘They carry a wallet like you; they breathe air like you’. You put them in the blue shirt and people totally hate them. Because it’s the way it’s been built up here. (Owen)

The ‘blue shirts’. It’s like they’re the white dots and we’re the black dots; and it’s like stay away. [The supervisor] is only human. Just because he wears that blue shirt gives him some sort of transformation of power. I’ve been in his shoes. Yeah, ‘blue shirts’; it’s wrong. Since I’ve been here, it’s always been they wear the light blue, we wear the dark blue because that’s how it’s always been. I can remember a couple of years ago, one of the guys ordered himself some light blue stuff and he wore them around, and he got heckled and harassed by the other guys. But he was just that sort of guy, you know. He was a bit different and he liked to go to the club after work in his light blue. But his excuse to the fellas was: ‘Oh, I get cheaper drinks when I wear this shirt’. But I think it was just him trying to be a little bit better. (Nat)

The difference in uniforms was one of the most distinctive signs of position and division and discrimination at the plant. The workers wore dark blue shirts and heavy long dark blue serge trousers that hid the dirt but did not entirely protect them from it. In contrast, the managers wore light blue shirts. The phrase ‘blue shirts’ was used by the workers to refer to the managers in a very specific derogatory way that juxtaposed the workers with the managers in a fixed, stereotyped way that implied expected behaviour. ‘Blue shirts’ were talked of as ‘scum’. They did not get dirty like the workers. Even when they came down to the shop floor—which the workers complained was not often enough—the workers said the managers did not touch material or equipment that would soil their clothes.

67 The term ‘blue shirts’, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. There is strong political symbolism in wearing dark blue shirts, linked with the common term ‘blue-collar workers’ to denote manual labourers. According to Linda Tanenbaum of the Socialist Equality Party (1998): ‘The term ‘blue collar worker’ began to be widely used in the 1950’s referring to factory workers wearing overalls, as distinct from office workers—‘white collar workers’—wearing a ‘collar and tie’. The meaning of these terms has not fundamentally changed since then, [Office workers] ‘wear a white collar, [and] regard themselves as members of the capitalist class’ (Upton Sinclair, 1919).
Although it was company policy that every employee had the right to select light or dark blue shirts, the workers chose to wear dark blue, while staff all chose light blue. The workers said they chose not to wear light blue because it would be seen by their peers as aligning with the managers.

Uniforms' are a good idea I reckon. Not the colour. But for everyone to wear the same uniform. It makes you feel a part of something. I don’t mind wearing it. I sort of like it. I always feel I’m sort of meant to be there. If I was wearing clothes I wore outside of work I’d feel as if I shouldn’t be here. (Ray)

The workers expressed a sense of pride in wearing dark blue shirts. It was a sign of belonging and identifying with their colleagues, against the common enemy. And yet, at the same time, they conveyed a sense of inferiority in relation to wearing these shirts.

The workers also demonstrated an understanding of the impact that symbols have on individuals' perceptions of each other; wear a light blue shirt and you are to be distrusted; take it off and you are like anyone else. Clothing constitutes a paradigm that conveys a meaning about the wearer and the relationships between the wearers. The differentiation in uniform symbolised what Geertz (1973) and Goodall (1994) refer to as a way for management to create order. What people wear has a direct correlation to the status of the position they hold in the societies within which they interact. The sociologist Etzioni-Harlevy (1993: 250) sees that ruling classes maintain their power and privileges through the use of artifacts such as these. Symbols, such as particular coloured shirts can have a profound impact on division and discrimination as well as the formation of identity and class according to several cultural theorists.

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"We Have to Support Each Other"

As far as the guys are concerned, the only reason they [union members] support men who do the wrong things is because one day it could be your turn. So you have to support them. Which is in a way healthy because it creates some sort of comradeship. The guys need something. There's going to be a strike because one of the men in the other area stole some gas [for his car]. I don't know whether we'll support them or not. I don't want to, and most of the other guys don't want to. We'll have a vote if they ask us. I doubt that they'll get our vote because they haven't supported us in the past. (Ray)

[Without the union] it'd be hell, absolute hell. Management wouldn't even tell us what was going on. They'd just say: 'Yeh, this shift's now, it starts from then; and no, it starts from then, oh, but ...'. We wouldn't have a say at all. (Ned)

I'd rather have the union organisers fighting for our conditions than the managers. (Frank)

We have little impact in union meetings. I don't see us getting anywhere there. Generally, you've got to go with the flow. That's how it is. When you get in a union, you don't really have an option. Everyone usually follows what the union does because otherwise you just get paid out, right or wrong. You have to vote 'yeah' with the fucking union. (Nat)

I don't want them to go out on strike over me. They [other workers] all have mortgages and families and things; but when it's a matter of principle, we have to support each other. (Ian)

They said they trusted union delegates more than immediate supervisors, seeing themselves as the best people to represent their own best interests, a feeling supported by Markey et al.'s findings in their regional workplace survey (1998: 30). They said unions would ensure that they were heard on contentious issues, although some mentioned their reservations about the ability of the unions to get individual voices considered by the whole group. While it was generally acknowledged by the men that unions were there to support them, many also felt a sense of frustration at being thwarted in presenting individual views at union meetings, or following their own desired paths of action, such as shift patterns. Despite the constraints the workers spoke of, union membership was expected by the work

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70 Organisers are external representatives of the union and only came to the plant when requested by workers or managers, usually to deal with major contentious issues.
group, who would not tolerate non-unionism amongst their work mates. They felt a strong need for solidarity. The workers comments to me indicated their belief that unity signifies “dignity and solidarity [and] frequently manliness” (Donaldson, 1997: 16). Based on his personal experiences and observations of industrial workplaces, Donaldson points out that if workers were more individually accommodating, they would be seen by their work mates as giving managers a position of superiority.

Union meetings called by the workers were often part of a lead-up to mass meetings with the organisers. Major issues were facilitated by union organisers who did not work at the plant. Though outside organisers represented workers in the industry across the whole of the region, lesser issues were dealt with by the shop floor delegates, who were elected into their positions by their fellow workers. It was usually the organisers who negotiated with management, although on occasion the delegates took on this role.

Another irony is displayed here as the men felt a need to support each other, and yet the sense of solidarity was not felt as a general state of affairs, as illustrated by the following comments:

We’re all working to better our own lives. It’s a ‘look-after-yourself’ mentality. (Harry)

There’s people here that are not really interested in anything but themselves and it’s bloody sad. (Chad)

People right now are just out for themselves. (Ray)

While there was talk and action to support each other through the unions, some of the workers saw their mates as having reverted to self-interest, away from collective interest. There was quite a deal of concern by some that many of their work mates had deserted the group cause as times had become more unstable. While much was said about people caring
for themselves at the expense of their fellow workers, there were also many comments, not only about their own fate, but also showing concern for their work mates and the managers, many of whom were being made redundant around the time of the sale. While they said they felt some concern for the managers as well, they took no action to demonstrate this support.

"There Are Divisions Within the Plant, Even at Operator Level"

There are divisions within the plant, even at operator level. All three parts of the plant stay separate from each other, which is stupid. They don’t seem to trust each other across lines. (Oli)

The workers at the Refractories have provided a comprehensive picture of how they constructed their identity at work through divisions, and the part other people and the organisation played in the formation of their self-image. In making sense of their rapidly changing world they sometimes expressed contrasting perceptions about their own identity within their group. They tended to see things from their place on one side of the chasm. The greatest division at the plant was between workers and managers, while there were also divisions among groups of workers and between individual workers. All three forms of isolation and exclusion had developed over many years, and were well entrenched, setting the scene for the way things were expected to be done at the plant. The identities the workers had constructed for themselves appeared to be based around how they saw themselves in relation to their work, the workplace group and their work mates, in what appeared to me to be in a space that was in direct opposition to the managers.

While the men expressed a need to belong to a supportive group in opposition to the managers, at the same time they were torn by the differences of opinion and belief systems they had amongst themselves as a work group. These feelings have been described by Pratt
and Foreman (2000: 141) as “multiple and competing identities [as part of] the reality of organisational life.” On occasion, some of the workers felt no connection with their fellow workers or their managers. They expressed a sense of isolation, alienation and confusion as beliefs and values of those with whom they desired solidarity and support clashed. They were caught between the benefits of collectivism and following their individual values and desires.

Living and working within a virtual chasm fostered a sense of desertion and betrayal to the common cause when the workers crossed over to the other side. Within this prevalent milieu sprung the common use of metaphors of war to describe relationships with management in an environment that was alienating and confrontational.

The division between the workers and the managers was so highly entrenched in the Refractories that it was difficult for the workers to see the state of affairs could ever change. Indeed, the situation seemed to perpetuate itself through the strongly exclusive identification that each ‘side’ maintained.

There were many disparities in the way the men talked about their sense of belonging to the work group, while at the same time having some serious concerns about how the group acted at times. The division was a double-edged sword. The things that gave them a sense of pride also gave them a sense of alienation and low self-esteem, symbolising the tensions they voiced as being part of an industrial setting.

The following chapter will lead on from the notion of division and identity to describe how the workers expressed and dealt with their feelings and their relationships with management in the alienating environment they described.
My blood pressure’s gone up since the sale and the redundancies because I’m so stressed. It’s like the stress spreads from one person to another. (Vince)
CHAPTER FOUR

"THIS COMPANY ISN'T ABOUT PEOPLE, IT'S ABOUT PRODUCT"

That's the main problem I think; besides whether they're telling the truth or lying, it's how we're treated that's more important than what we're told. I think if we were lied to constantly it wouldn't matter so much as long as we were treated well. It's just the poor treatment ... I was the only one for a long time who thought management was all right; now I just think they suck. BHP isn't about people, it's about product and that's wrong. Small companies look after their people. My change in reaction happened after I'd been here for a while and I got to see what they [managers] do to the men. They've got a lot of thinking to do. The managers are socially retarded; they have no idea about socialising with the workers. I know they're the bosses, but you don't have to sit on your high horse all day. It'd be ok for them to just say 'Hello' as they go through. And when they do talk, which is on a good day, it would be just: 'Hi, how ya goin'?' You don't know the temperature of the water until you jump in. This is what people like [the manager] don't do. He doesn't jump in. He'd know where to start looking, start fixing, if he jumped in. He never jumps in. (Ray)

Ray's statement expresses strong views of the paramount role of the emotional welfare of the workers in business. His statement is supported in many ways throughout this chapter through the statements of his co-workers. These responses arose spontaneously as they spoke of the difficulties they were having at work. They talked earnestly about their work, the management of the company and their relationships with their co-workers and their managers. They quite openly and demonstratively expressed a wide range of emotions to me, and often, although in a different tone, in the presence of some of their work mates.

Interchanges based around sensitive feelings and relationships are not expected from male workers in industrial settings. He states that workers are said to be disinclined to express their feelings—other than pride, anger, or issues of powerlessness—or talk of sentimental things at work. For workers to talk about their feelings is tantamount to setting themselves up for ridicule or worse by their work mates, he states. This disinclination to express

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feelings was not what I observed of the men at the Refractories. Not only did many of them talk to me quite openly about their feelings, they also overtly, in a group, expressed their interest in including “Dealing with Emotions” as a topic for a proposed half-day workshop, which I facilitated while I was a consultant at the Refractories. There were also times when I happened on the workers talking comfortably about emotionally sensitive subjects with their workmates. They talked about such things as how they were handling death in the family, dealing with difficult children at home, or the stress of financial insecurity. The more time I spent with the men, the more comfortably they seemed to become in talking about these issues with me, and often with their fellow workers.

### Sharing ‘Way Out’ Experiences

Vince and Quentin were alone in the crib room finishing their lunch when I walked in to see Vince. He began to talk to me earnestly about a spiritualist he sees who predicts future events for him. I was fascinated that he was talking so openly in front of Quentin (whom I had not met before) about the influence the spiritualist’s predictions had on his life, including dealing with his problems at work. He talked about how she had had life-changing impacts on him and his family. Quentin joined in the conversation with his experiences with this same clairvoyant whom Vince had recommended to him.

The openness around talk of the softer emotional issues did not fit into the so-called ‘sex-role theory’ whereby people act “in accordance with their expectations about their own sex and the genders of other people present”, as Butler (1999: 227) notes in his comments on the gender effects of negotiations. I was surprised to find that the stereotypes of men in blue collar jobs being reluctant to express more gentle feelings, as Bernard (1981); Elshtain

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2 This subject was selected from a range of topics that had arisen as a result of previous workshops and meetings I had with the men. The other options they were given were: ‘Running Meetings’, ‘Coping With Change’, ‘Decision Making’, ‘Appropriate Assertiveness’, or ‘Negotiation Skills’ (personal journal, 26.6.1996).

3 Personal journal (20.11.2000).
(1982); Goldshmidt and Weller (2000) imply in their respective studies on masculinity and/or feminism, did not hold with the men at the Refractories. My impressions are supported by Connell’s (1995: 70) work on masculinity, in which he disputes the commonly presumed norm of male workers’ insensitivity. He states that the concept of men being masculine, and hence unable to express their feelings, is a sweeping generalisation that does not fit most men (op. cit: 78). He also notes that “there is not necessarily a working class masculinity” (op. cit: 76), though Donaldson (1991) states that one does exist. In contrast with the notion of workers in industrial settings not wanting to express their feelings, many of the workers with whom I spoke commented on the consequences of their managers not acknowledging their feelings or their ideas. They said this lack of acknowledgment affected how they felt about themselves, how they felt about their managers, and the overall view they had of the company.

The importance and potential power of feelings are also generally precluded from the dominant discourse of organisational management theory and practice, in which emotions are separated from 'rationality', as noted by Frost et al, (2000) in their work on narratives of compassion in organisations; and Vince and Broussine (1996) in their work on change and emotions at work. There are, however, several authors who write of the consequences of avoiding dealing with emotions in the workplace. They comment on the value and necessity of emotional expression and the essential part it plays in organisations. They note how avoiding this aspect of management negates the complexity of social relations is negated. Retaliation, sabotage or slandering the company result, leading also to chronic states of anxiety, depression, anger and aggression, all of which I observed at the Refractories.


5 The workers’ negative responses to management and the company were also dealt with in Chapter Two.
In this chapter I have separated the feelings expressed by the workers into sub-topics to highlight certain aspects of: stress and uncertainty, blame, self-esteem, relationships, lack of recognition, commodification, security, limitations, non-caring and happiness. The men connected all these feelings to how they saw they were managed. Most of the feelings they expressed display another dimension of the men feeling unheard.

“A Very Stressful and Uncertain Period”

Everyone is basically just riding at the moment. ‘Stay in the saddle and ride it at the moment’. It may be the worst decision I make, or it may be a fantastic place to work when the new company takes over. But who knows. It may be better to leave, and the blokes left may be left with the shit. If they’d tell me what’s going on, at least I’d know where I was going. They know what’s going on, which we don’t. Some blokes have been told that they’ll be going. You can adjust then. You know where you’re heading. Is it going to be a couple of weeks or years? We just don’t know. That’s the scariest part. At the moment we just don’t know what to do. Should I just leave or what? That’s the most scary part. Where will I be next week? Should I keep my shares or sell them? I can’t afford to be left with them. Should I sell or keep them? What should I do? No one can give you a real answer. I couldn’t give a fuck if the company name changes. I only care what’s going to happen to me and my work mates. What happens to me and my years of service and sick pay, and annual leave, and long service and pay rate? I don’t care who takes over. Tell me about what’s going to happen to me and my work mates. (Frank)

My blood pressure’s gone up since the sale, and the redundancies because I’m so stressed. It’s like the stress spreads from one person to another. (Vince)

Some of the guys will be on stress relief soon because they become so involved in it. This job is their life. (Ray)

The sale has given a lot of heartache to a lot of people for two or three months. They worry about it the closer it gets; the ramifications. (Harry)

Now this [the sale], and there’s more and more tension and stress in the joint. (Frank)

You come to work and you talk to a couple of blokes and you get depressed. It affects life outside of work. I don’t like to talk about work at home, but it’s never been this bad before. We’ve never been sold before. We changed names before, but weren’t sold. (Frank)

My time here has been a very steep learning curve. I still look back on it and appreciate the time I spent here because I value all the learning I got out of it. But it has also been a very stressful and uncertain period. It's the first time I've ever personally felt threatened as far
as a job goes. I've never before had to face the reality of being retrenched. It's never been a threat that I could lose my job. The older you get the more financially dependent you get, with family and commitments. (Troy)

With the proposed sale of the company came an explosion in levels of stress, fear and anxiety. The men were worried and afraid because of the uncertainty of their future with the new company. They also realised that the accepted way of doing things as part of BHP would no longer exist. They were uncertain as to how and where they would fit in the new regime.

Their fears were often emotively expressed as anger and resentment, said to be a common reaction to uncertainty, secrecy and misinformation in workplaces. The animosity shown by the workers toward management was largely related to what they believed were obligations not met by their managers. This then translated into a desire for revenge on the company.

Workplace surveys have found that a large portion of the workforce feels anger at work (Maurice, 1999; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This state of anger "has existed probably for as long as humans have been working for other humans", the organisational behaviour consultant Bensimon (1997: 28) notes, as part of his advice to managers on how to deal with anger in the workplace.

Most of the meetings I attended, where the workers and the managers were both present, were hotbeds of contention. The more outspoken workers vehemently expressed their anger at various managers. One way the managers had of dealing with the anger at meetings was to discontinue them. It seemed they would rather avoid the confronting and aggressive

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6 As mentioned in Carey's (1993) work on critical perspectives of Australian industry; Colson's (1971) remarks on decision making at work; and Maurice's (1999) comments on anger at work.
7 This anger was also mentioned in Chapter One.
behaviour associated with the strong anger, than accept that they existed as legitimate and
typical forms of behaviour. The men seemed to be seen as "irrational, hindering adaptation
and progress toward particular managerial ends", a phrase used by Robbins (1998: 632, in
Fineman & Sturdy) in his work on the reluctance of managers to deal with workers’
emotions. Such expression of the men’s feelings seemed to be regarded by many of the
managers as threatening and non-productive. It was through this denial of the men’s
feelings that they felt a sense of low self-esteem.

“If You Keep Putting People Down For Long Enough, They’ll Believe It”

I said to the acting boss: ‘Is a team leader higher than a leading hand?’ He said ‘No’. I said:
‘That makes me about as low as a rat’s arse’. He said: ‘No. Lower; a snake’s belly’s!’
(Owen, team leader)

[The supervisor] shoots us down every step we’ve made ... We used to sit around this table
with the engineers but we were just a piece of shit, it was just a token gesture. (Harry)

If you’ve been bitten, you tend to bite back after a while. Management has treated me
badly, so I bite back ... That chip on my shoulder is coming back again. I don’t want it, but
it’s being forced on me. (Frank)

We’re less bright than they are. They’ve been in the industry for longer, and so have it over
us ... Like all the workers have achieved nothing except that they have a job, and are paying
off mortgages and family support. But all the managers are doing the same, paying off a
house and having kids, but they have achieved more in society and status-wise. (Ray)

Workmen might not be able to say what they want to say properly. They know they have
less intelligence. The others up there can string a few words together, and they seem to be
more intelligent. (Nev)

I tell everyone what I know. I don’t regard managers as being on a pedestal. I have a mind.
I do know things. I’m not stupid. I’m not too scared to stand up for myself. [and in
contrast] I’m only on the floor. I’m not educated like these people [managers]. They
should know. (Frank)

I think there’s a lot of scope here to improve, but they’ve got to get the men to have their
confidence back. (Chad)

If you keep putting people down for long enough, they’ll believe it. (Ken)
The overall sentiment of the workers was that they saw themselves as less educated, less intelligent\(^8\) and less articulate than the managers. The managers, along with their higher status, were seen to know more, and hold privileged information not accessible to the workers. The many references the workers made to how they were seen by the managers reinforced the sentiments they had about their own levels of ability. The feelings of inferiority they expressed were reinforced by such harsh statements as the one reported by Owen who was told by a supervisor that his place in the company was "lower than a snake's belly!"

**Self Perception and Ability**

Vince was confused by one of his supervisors who said to him: "You're an idiot." Vince told me that he then replied 'Yeh, I know I'm an idiot, I'm stupid like blah, blah, blah.' Vince said he had gone "along with him and he [supervisor] goes: 'Don't you say that, there's nothing wrong with you. You're not an idiot. You've got a lot up there.' And I says well: 'You just called me an idiot.' I went to walk down the stairs and he shook his head. If he wants to call me an idiot he can."\(^9\)

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\(^8\) 'Intelligence' in this case is taken to mean the traditional narrow view of people as having the ability to think in particular linguistic and logical senses. It is not used in the much broader sense that Gardner (1983: 6) uses it, to indicate a variety of cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles. Interview (3.8.98).

\(^9\)
Self Perception and Ability (cont.)

Chad, who wanted to broaden his work role, often talked about ways he could see that changes could be implemented. He was a man with very little formal education, yet he had deep insights into the business. Many of his predictions about the future of the company and some of its managers eventuated as he had said they would. With the encouragement of his new supervisor, Paul, he started attending basic language and mathematics courses outside of work. He said that he was doing this because he wanted to be more likely to keep his job with the new company. ¹⁰

The workers, on the whole, did not hold themselves in high esteem. Many of them talked of the work they did with some disdain. The image of inferiority they felt because they worked for BHP has been encouraged through adverse media coverage of BHP over many years, ¹¹ giving an impression of disapproval of BHP from outsiders. BHP has commonly been seen in the broader society as an exploiter of individuals who work in extremely trying conditions. ¹² Even though the public image of BHP has improved over recent years, there is still a stigma attached to working there, encouraged by negative publicity the company receives from time to time on such issues of safety, pollution and strikes (see Appendices 8 & 9).

Frank’s criticism of the company to his friends in New Zealand who asked him what type of company he worked for, reflects how the workers expected BHP to be viewed by outsiders, and hence their image of themselves in the wider society. The general tenor of the workers’ talk about work was in line with Donaldson’s (1991: 29) comment that “paid

¹⁰ Personal journal and interview (11.6.98).
¹¹ See Appendix 5 for an example of this public disregard can be seen in an article directly related to the Refractories in the local newspaper in mid-1998, which describes a book published about the Refractories which is detailed in Chapter Five.
¹² Kriegler (1980).
workplaces have been constructed to induce and reinforce feelings of stupidity, ignorance and powerlessness."

Workplaces send powerful messages about who we are and how we are valued by society. These messages are then translated into what Weick (1995: 14) sees as people creating a world image that they then fulfil. In a study of garbage workers in Ann Arbor, Walsh (1975) found a close correlation between job stigma and self-esteem because of the images the larger society has of certain jobs. “The work which people do becomes closely bound up with their very conception of self” (author’s emphasis) (Watson, 1980: 83, 110).

How people see themselves is often influenced by how others see them, perpetuating a cycle of how they are treated and how they act. These images, according to Sahlin-Andersson’s (1989: 73) concepts of identity at work, are then internalised to become part of that individual. They are interconnected between the personal, social and organisational identities that “link emotion and meaning in organizational life”, Albert et. al. (2000: 14) note in their work on identity and identification.

Many of the workers at the Refractories, such as Ray, Nev and Frank, spoke about themselves as less adequate than their managers. They referred to the managers as being more educated and more knowledgeable than them. Employees with low self-esteem usually see themselves as inadequate in their contributions, and in effect unable to contribute more within their immediate tasks. It may be, as Fox et al. (1993) and Watson (1980) maintain, that this view of workers being less than adequate has been created by the

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13 This sense of source of identity is noted by several researchers in the field of identity and work such as: Dutton et al., (2000); Gersick et al. (2000); Gubrium & Holstein (2000); Harre (1987); Honess & Yardley (1987); Scott & Lane (2000); Sevón (1996).

14 There have been many studies to affirm this assumption, for example: Albert & Whetten (1985); Dutton et al. (1994); Pratt & Foreman (2000); Brown & Starkey (2000); Gergen (1991a); Watson (1980).

15 Morrison & Robinson (1997: 240) stress the link between self-image and work output in their work on violation of psychological contract.
myths of those who have traditionally viewed work that involved hard labour as demeaning and unimportant. It may also have been part of the control that comes with what Deetz (1992: 299) refers to as 'managerialism', which is how the workers described the management style they experienced—top-down, disciplined and highly mechanistic. When, for instance, the managers reported business facts to the workers in language that was uninteresting and incomprehensible to them, the workers’ lack of understanding was then interpreted by the managers, so the workers said, as a means of declaring the workers as unintelligent. This type of scenario can be seen as a deliberate stratagem to put workers in a “position of considerable disadvantage” (Donaldson, 1991: 15). These situations are “constructed by those higher up the hierarchical ladder” as a control mechanism (ibid: 29). And even if the managers closer to the workers at the Refractories did encourage the men, any attention to feelings or intuition was lost in hierarchical structure. Because the managers at the top of the hierarchical ladder had little contact with the men, they were unaware of the men’s feelings.

Not all the workers considered their work group to be less smart than their managers, and some such as Frank realised that in some areas the workers had more knowledge than the managers. In a focus group session I had with several of the workers, some were astounded that their peers actually believed that managers were more intelligent. I too would dispute this perception. The workers’ level of knowledge was demonstrated in many instances that I observed. For example, the workers were well aware of the financial savings they could make for the company if given the chance. They also made informed comments to me about marketing, managing the workers, diversifying products and changing processes.

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16 As noted in Chapter Two.
17 This concept was referred to by David Napoli, as outlined in his diagram in Chapter Three.
18 As pointed out in Chapter Two.
The workers who viewed the managers as more intelligent had an impression of the managers as having a high opinion of themselves in comparison to the workers' low-self image. Ray commented that the managers showed their awareness of their superior position in the company "by the way they walk. They feel good about it. They've achieved something more than we have." The workers' perceptions of manager superiority had been "internalised as a definition of [their own] social inferiority," brought about by quite damaging previous experiences with authority figures, says Donaldson (1991: 7).

To add to this sense of inferiority, several of the workers alluded to being treated as commodities, as a means unto an end, that is, profit. The workers feelings align with notions of centralised systems in which workers are treated as cogs that can be replaced with new parts at any time. They resented this view of themselves only as tools for profit making, voicing frustration at being manipulated and controlled. Ray expressed his feelings in this regard, saying:

They [managers] don't think the men have lives outside of BHP. They're just machines ... It all comes down to money. In any business, money comes before people. (Ray)

The men did not feel as though their personal wellbeing was relevant or important to the managers or the board of the company. Some of the workers said they made efforts to let management know what it was like to do the job of workers, but they felt the managers did not have any interest in what it was like for them.

The workers are supported in their need for personal recognition by Deetz's (1992: 45, 63) statement that organisations also produce people and hence "people produce

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19 To be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.
20 Martin, Callaghan, Frost, Stamps & Walter's (1997) in their work on the nature of bureaucracies, and Cahill (1997: 107) in his reflections about learning organisations, go as far as saying that most employees in traditional organisations are systematically mistreated.
organisations.” The “products [produced] are viewed as independent” from the people who produce them.\textsuperscript{21} This disconnection and the disempowerment it engenders, can lead to psychological strain, reduced job satisfaction, and increased absenteeism,\textsuperscript{22} all factors to which the workers at the Refractories referred. Because the workers saw that they were treated as commodities, they were not interested, they said, in supporting their managers.

It is said that men gain self-respect through their work.\textsuperscript{23} If that is the case, then when self-images are damaged, people will be likely to act destructively towards the object or person to whom they attach identification with these hurtful feelings.\textsuperscript{24} Hence perhaps the previously mentioned sabotage of materials at the plant could be expected.\textsuperscript{25} Chad aligned work outcomes with self-image, noting that if the men’s confidence could be restored, work results would consequently improve.

The men saw intelligence as linked with status, their work and their possible contributions to the company. The men’s expressed lack of a positive self-image, in many cases, could be related to lack of care from their managers, which they often expressed to me, as noted in more detail later in this chapter. In order to address their low self-esteem, the workers said they needed some indication that their contribution was recognised. They believed that this acknowledgment could impact on their morale and hence their interest in working harder. Their feelings of being treated oppressively were expressed as a sense of disenchantment with their lives generally within the company.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Held (1982: 2).
\item According to the findings of a study of hospital employees by Koberg, Boss, Senjem & Goodman (1999: 80).
\item Fox & Lake (1993); Watson (1980).
\item Cornelius & Faire (1994); Dutton et al., (1994).
\item Mentioned earlier in this chapter and in Chapter One, where a worker who threw away finished ingots into the rubbish as a way of ‘getting back’ at the company, I was told about.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
"We’re Human. We’re Not Numbers"

They’re playing with people’s lives. It’s pretty bad. It’s alright while you’re not involved in the circus of losing your job. I have no enthusiasm for these people [managers] because they don’t help me. (Frank)

Managers haven’t got the time to spend listening to us. They’re too busy doing other things. (Ned)

He hates ‘em, hates ‘em, hates ‘em [referring to a supervisor’s feelings about the workers he supervised]. He doesn’t want to have anything to do with them. He can’t stand humans. He said to me: ‘You wait Ray, you’ll find a job one day that you want to do and it’ll involve something you hate doing.’ I was just blown out thinking ‘why did they give this guy the job?’ Half his job is to make sure all the guys are cool so the plant runs properly, he’s the supervisor. He doesn’t give a shit! Even when I went up to him to report my back, I said to him: ‘Mal, I’ve gotta report this; I hurt my back.’ Straight away: ‘Oh, so it’s the company’s fault is it?’ I just said: ‘Woh! Hang on buddy. I have to report this, because you told me that any injury has to be reported.’ Just the wrong guy for the job. Just wrong management. While they’ve got people like him in here it affects the business ... When they make up the shifts, they don’t think that the men have lives outside of BHP. Workers are just machines ... It all comes down to money. In any business, money comes before people. (Ray)

The [plant manager] won’t talk to any of us. I never see him. He never says, ‘How ya going?’ even. He won’t talk to the blokes on the floor because perhaps he thinks we’re not worthy enough. (Rohan)

Generally, the place ran better when the managers used to speak to people. A previous general manager had personality and would speak to people on the floor and people felt like part of the place because he recognised them. The way management’s gone over the last few years, it’s changed. It’s just a name now. We might as well not have a manager, appearancewise. We were better off without them. (Cain)

But obviously by the time you get to a manager’s position you’re not really thinking about that sort of thing, how people feel. You just think: ‘I’m climbing the ladder’, and up you go. (Ned)

If he [plant manager] comes to our meetings he just draws flowers on his paper. He’s not interested. (Stan)

See, the big problem here is management; it’s all dehumanised; management don’t give a shit about whether you’ve got problems. [Our supervisor’s] the only one who’s aware that if you have trouble at home you’re going to bring that trouble to work. No one else really thinks about that. No one else treats it properly ... If it’s equipment they’re efficient, but if it’s got anything to do with the men, they’re hopeless. They just come in and tell you
what they're going to do, with no warning and they'll just give us a new roster two days before we start. They don't think that the men have lives outside of [work]. They think the men are just machines. He [the plant manager] never talks about humans. He probably doesn't know what that word means. The thing is that he doesn't understand and he doesn't try to understand. We're human; we're not numbers. (Ray)

Lack of self-esteem was reinforced by the men's expressions of being treated with disregard. Ray indicated his belief that attention to workers' personal needs was of prime importance to the men, although the managers did not see this. He referred to the managers' lack of interest in the workers as people with human needs as dehumanising, a widely held view, Watson (1980: 85) notes, in the sociology of industrial work organisation. Held (1982: 61) in his reflections on critical theory perspectives comments that workers are "often reduced to being mere adjuncts to the means of production." The men often alluded to feeling as though they were not an important part of the company. They said they were made to feel readily expendable, partly through the use of contract labour to do work they said they could do. The offers of redundancies, which happened four times during the time I was at the plant, added to the men's sense of superfluity.

A lack of consultation with the workers, as described in some detail in Chapter Two, also contributed to the men's expressed feelings of neglect, discontent, resentment and alienation.

\[26\] Also referred to in Chapter Two and Three.

When I met with Mark Hermann, the director of the British film, Brassed Off, in London in July 1998, I asked him what made this film especially touching and memorable. He talked of the importance of recognising the humanness of people. The movie, which is about the lives of coal miners during the closures of mines in Britain in the 1970s, struck a strong chord with me as I reflected on what was missing in both the way the workers at the Refractories commonly saw how they were treated and the lack of humanness in much of the writing about organisational management.
Shift Work Decisions

When the teams for shifts were made up, the managers did not consult the workers about who would work best with whom. Jerry explained that the managers were unaware of the intricacies of the relationships on the shop floor, because the managers had no part in the day-to-day interactions of the workers. He said the managers had no knowledge and did not care about who would work well with whom or the possible ramifications of placing certain workers together. The managers would write up the shifts every three months, and tell the workers who they would be working with. The workers had no opportunity to alter these plans. Even when they made suggestions, Jerry said, no one would listen. The workers sensed that the managers were not aware enough, or indeed cared, how much their decisions impacted on the workers’ lives.28

They talked about not being consulted over work problems, such as processes they used, development of products or who they would work with. Some of the decisions went beyond direct work practices to involve recreational time.

Disregard of the Worker’s Wishes and Needs

On fine days the men used to play soccer or volley ball at meal breaks on the paved area outside their crib room. They were infuriated when management ordered them to cease these games one worker was hurt while playing. There was no discussion with them about this incident, they said; just a directive to stop.29

This was to them yet another way of disregarding their wishes and needs. They suggested that stopping the games was also linked to the managers' need to exercise control over them by taking away some enjoyment they might have had. The workers felt as though they

28 Interview (24.6.1998).
29 Personal journal (17.7.1997).
were being punished for the ball game accident. They told me they had seen the time they had to relax in the ball games as a positive team-building opportunity, and “sometimes even the supervisors joined in.” They complained about how once again, they were not consulted about a decision that affected them.

The managerial aim dominates. “Always, always, always, economising values define the central goal”, Frederick (1999: 370) stated in his work on corporate ‘complexity-chaos theory’. Eric Eisenberg (pers. comm., Feb., 2000), in commenting on this perception of commodification as I talked with him about my thesis said: “One thing that is true about workplaces is that individuals don’t really matter. If the company doesn’t make money—that’s the most important thing.” This perspective debases human relationships and makes no connection between human labour and the product people produce.30 While the men wanted to be acknowledged in their own right, without this recognition of both their needs and their knowledge, they indicated that the business missed out on what they could have contributed.31 Where a humane approach is ignored much of the wisdom of an organisation goes untapped, Suzaki (1993: 5) found through his work on shop floor management in Japan.

Relationships with fellow workers made work meaningful to many of the workers.32 The ball games they played at lunch times were symbolic of this comradeship. Mateship was high on the agenda.33 Work was a source of friendship and a focus of much social activity,34 as well as being the base that Dutton et al. (2000: 239) note shapes self-concept.

31 This is also mentioned in Chapter Two in relation to the lack of consultation with the men at the Refractories.
32 This sentiment was supported by interviews with steel workers from BHP Newcastle on the day of its closure. In a television broadcast Steel City: The Big Picture (26.10.2000), workers said that “the most important part of the place [was] the people”.
33 As discussed in Chapter Three.
34 Also mentioned in Chapter Three.
The disregard felt by the workers hurt them because it separated them from their friends at work and alienated them from their managers.

Interpersonal relationships with co-workers and supervisors have been cited by Eisenberg and Goodall (1997: 200) as amongst the most significant factors affecting employee morale and motivation. Fulop and Linstead (1999) base the entire context of their overview of management in the realm of relationships. The importance of relationships in the context of management was something of which the men were well aware. They regularly commented on the impact of the quality of relationships, both with their fellow workers and the managers, on their work and on themselves. So, management making decisions that affected this mateship, such as stopping the ball games or scheduling shift work with no attention to who would be working together, contributed further to the men’s feelings of being poorly managed.

The men often linked their negative feelings about their relationships with management to the managers not listening to the workers. The men held that lack of communication was the base of the poor relationships at the plant. The lack of genial relationships between the managers and the workers appeared to be entrenched in an atmosphere of cultural and historical expectations. The more they felt distant from the managers, the more important became the connection they had with their work mates.

The workers connected the disregard the managers had of workers to what they perceived as a lack of ability and responsibility to manage effectively. Several of the workers had strong opinions of what constituted good management, and emphasised relationships as the

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35 This is supported by Boyle’s (1999: 7) work on organisational communication through relationship building based on effective listening.
36 As mentioned in Chapter One.
37 As mentioned in Chapter Three.
basis for successful management, as well as the practical details of managing. They did not entirely blame the managers personally for their inattention to the workers' needs. They could also see this human relations aspect of their organisation being influenced by external pressures placed on the managers.

Management's disregard for the workers led to feelings of alienation from management, which in turn made the connection they had with their co-workers take on even greater significance.\(^{38}\) Though they talked of their workmates in terms of 'chatting with', 'caring for', 'getting along with', and 'relating to each other', terms used to describe their relationship with their managers were largely derogatory, such as: 'scum', 'bastards' or 'hate'.\(^{39}\) These relationships reinforced the reality they carved out for themselves.\(^{40}\) Because of the workers' feelings about the importance of relationships, the disregard many of them said they experienced from managers influenced their expressed sense of inadequacy, which compounded their sense of insecurity.

"We Always Thought: Once a Part of BHP, Always Part of BHP"

Big companies are good because they're secure and they have a lot of power. (Ray)

The union's point of view is we want to keep as many conditions as possible [when the company changes hands]. It doesn't matter who's running the show, as long as we keep positions and security of employment. (Ully)

They're [other workers] not sure of what their contracts will be or if they have to pay back loans or sell shares; and they get no reassurance from the company, because they mistrust them. (Owen)

I think it would be good if we could stay here as far as job security goes, but we'll see what happens, and take one step at a time. (Norm)

\(^{38}\) As outlined in Chapter Three particularly.
\(^{39}\) Also mentioned in Chapter Three in relation to words of war.
\(^{40}\) There is a connection here to the previous chapter in regard to identity formation and belonging.
There are always options and room to grow in BHP, because it's a big company. If it was a small company, there is a likelihood of further retrenchments. In BHP there's always something going. It would be easy because I'm already in BHP. It's only a matter of getting a transfer. People have done it in the past; gone across the road. (Mitch).

We always thought: 'once a part of BHP, always part of BHP'. (Tex)

With the impending sale of the Refractories, the sense of security of employment that the workers said they had with 'The Big Australian' was gone. The workers were very conscious of job security, because unemployment was at high levels in the region. Most of them lived in the local area. This was their community, and BHP had been a large part of that community for over eighty years. The workers had thought they would be secure in their jobs for life, if that was what they wanted. This sense of security is somewhat surprising given that BHP had reduced its workforce from 20,000 to 6,000 over the past fifteen years. Nevertheless it was an image that persisted.

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A commonly used term for BHP in Australia.

Referred to in Chapter One.

Unemployment in the local area was high. In 1997 the unemployment rate for Wollongong stood at 10.3%, rising to 12.3% in 1998. This compares with the State averages of 7.9% and 7.7% respectively. While the State average dropped Wollongong's rose (Source: derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1999, Regional Statistics, New South Wales). Job security has been shown to be more important to workers than status or other workplace factors, as documented in a survey of industrial workers by Walsh (1975). Garrety (1999).
Fear of an Unknown Future

Six of the men, while taking part in a focus group, expressed a great deal of concern for their future. There was consensus amongst them about the fear of financial loss that they thought would occur with the sale of the company. They talked about their concerns of having to take out bank loans to pay for their BHP share allocation. When one worker said he had personally geared down financially and had gone to his bank to renegotiate his house loan, the others said they too had made special financial arrangements to address the issue of shares.

The men talked about how, as part of BHP, they could transfer to jobs ‘over the road’ if there was not enough work at the Refractories. Some seemed to think that this option was still open to them, even though they would be part of a new company. Most recognised this protection was now withdrawn, and hence they were not sure how to react to events that needed attention. One of the key areas of negotiation the unions insisted on in the conditions of sale agreement of the company was the inclusion of a security of employment clause. So strongly did the workers feel about the inclusion of this protective clause that they held a two-day strike over it in August, 1997. They objected to a clause in the agreement stating that temporary workers were to remain ‘temporary irrespective of the number of contracts of service’. The current condition was that temporary workers would become permanent if they were ‘employed for more than three contracts or after twelve months service’. There were about twenty men who fitted into this category at the time. The men wanted permanency after three contracts and selection based on seniority, not merit as was the case currently. Tex told me that he was concerned that the new clause

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45 In the employee share ownership plan, BHP offered a number of shares at discount prices. Payments were to be paid back over 20 years or when leaving the company. The shares could not be traded for three years from the date of issue. If employees left the company they needed to repay all the loan at the time of leaving. The company gave an interest-free loan to employees buying shares.

46 Personal journal (23.8.1998).

47 Meaning the larger complex of BHP.

48 Each contract was for three months.
would open the door for all the workers to eventually be on contract, rather than have permanent positions.

The men expressed a distinct sense of vulnerability around the general conditions the new firm were proposing in terms of hours, overtime, geographical placement, wages and health and safety standards. Further apprehensions were also talked of in relation to the influence that their relationships with their present supervisors and managers could have on their future employment.

**Favouritism and The Future**

Vince talked apprehensively of not being recommended to the new firm for positions if he did not please the present management, whom he said would be taking on the role of recommending people for jobs. "I feel as though supervisors take a liking to some people and not to others" he said. It was common talk around the plant that some supervisors favoured particular workers, especially when it came to who would be given overtime (something many of the workers relied on to supplement their normal weekly income).

Even though the men said they generally did not like the work they did, they were apprehensive about their future in the company. Nothing was certain anymore. While the workers wanted a job in the Refractories in the future, they also expressed a sense of being stuck in the work they were in.

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49 The new company had other work sites in the area.

50 When the new company took over, the wearing of safety clothing became optional. This included the wearing of hard hats, safety glasses, visibility jackets and steel-capped boots, all of which had been compulsory when BHP owned the business.

51 Personal journal (3.9.98).
"What Else Can I Do? I’m Stuck Here"

Tomorrow we’ve got a briefing session at the Leagues club for the new company. That’s what the guys are looking forward to, just to get away; to have two hours away from this plant. Tomorrow they’re saying it’s going to be a good day because it changes the pattern of being stuck here. (Owen)

All the others [workers on the hierarchical ladder] are stuck at Level Five and Level Six, and they’re not fighting to get up higher, but they have a sense of ‘well that’s it; that’s as far as I’m going’. And, there’s no real career path for them and there’s no real incentive for them. They’re stuck where they are. (Nat)

Those guys went to Level Three and I stayed at Level Two because I was on the wrong plant. You had to be on plant number two to go up a Level and I was stuck in this one. I had no chance, I was just stuck there. Some of the guys kicked up masses of fuss; pushed, shoved, did everything to prove that they could do Level Three. (Ray)

Some think there is an endless money pot, but we are stuck between a rock and a hard place and can only spend small amounts. (Tom)

They’re [peers] affected by the past. You know, the false promises and all the shit that goes with it. They’ve just got stuck in that rut of life here and don’t want to pull out of it. And it’s bloody sad really. (Chad)

It’s stuck on both sides. (Rohan) [referring to the lack of ability of either side—workers and managers—to talk about overtime difficulties].

It's like having bubble-gum stuck in your hair. You have to take a long time to get it out. (Nev) [in reference to his view of how the company was managed in chaos.]

What else can I do. I’m stuck here. (Vince)

The men indicated that they felt stranded in an immovable system, in work they were not happy doing. Some talked of only being in their present job because work was so scarce in the region. They felt stuck either because they were engaged in work they disliked or else unable to move up the career ladder, or both. None of the workers suggested that they chose to do the work they were doing because they liked it. Yet even those who cursed the work wanted the opportunity to work.
Much has been written about people’s need to work. Part of the men’s clinging to something they cursed may have been linked to the need that Scott and Lane (2000: 144) state is a need to find a sense of self-continuity through organisational attachment. Work was seen as a ‘necessary evil’, a ‘penance’ to be undertaken for financial necessity. Perhaps they were also sensing the ‘emotional investment’ that Watson (1980: 104) claims creates some sense of “stability and predictability” in the lives of workers who do not gain a sense of self-realisation from the work they do. When I talked with Jack Mundy (pers. comm. 11.5.1998), a well-known Australian union organiser for the Builders’ Labourers Federation the 1970s and 1980s, he raised questions about the purpose of work, why people go to work and what they get from it. Even from his vast experience of workplace involvement, he did not have the answers to these questions as to why people feel the need to work, even when it is work that they do not like.

The men’s often expressed answer for working at the Refractories was that they were ‘stuck’ in a working life that was beyond their control. This ‘stuckness’ was exaggerated through their impression that the company was not likely to make changes to improve the plight of the workers. The men were unable to see a way through this intransigence, although they sometimes expressed the hope that perhaps opportunities for positive changes with the new company could arise. They felt stuck in instrumental jobs, stuck because they had no obvious alternative work, stuck because they could earn more money there than outside the company, and they were stuck at certain Levels within the company. Also, because they were not listened to, they felt there was little they could do to move things along. Their immobility was hence seen by them to be beyond their control.

52 Berneri (1987); Fox & Lake (1992); Scott & Lane (2000); Watson (1980).
53 Of which Berneri (1987: 81) writes in a treatise on why people work.
54 One of the workers in an interview on the day BHP Newcastle’s closure, in a television broadcast Steel City. The Big Picture (26.10.2000), said that he felt “a sense of worth when [he had] a job. It made [him] feel that [he was] doing something good”.

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The stuckness and the apathy felt by many of the men was a disappointment to some of
the others. Chad, for example, told me that he was “sad” that so many of his co-workers
felt as though they were “stuck in a rut” and did not “know how to get out of it.”

“Half of Them [workers] Don’t Give a Stuff”

People at the bottom don’t give a shit about the company, whereas they might if it was a
smaller company. (Tex)

When we see the superintendent walking around on the floor with his hands in his pockets
like he doesn’t want to be here, we think: ‘What am I here for?’ (Nat)

Why should we care? There’s no future ... We don’t know what they’re going to do with us
or who’s going to buy us. (Group of three workers on the shop floor talking about the sale
of the company.)

I don’t really care, as long as they leave me alone. I leave work here. There’s no use taking
it home with you. There are some things you’ll have a chat with your mates about, but
there’s no reason to take all your frustrations with you. All that will do is stuff up your
home life. There are things to worry about, but there’s no use getting too hot and bothered.
(Deon)

When they [management] get in a spot, I think that they like to get information from you
but I don’t think they give you any credit for it. It’s a shame because there are things that
have happened that you could’ve prevented and then you think ‘Why should I?’ because
they get paid for it; why worry about it when there’s nothing in it for you? (Jerry)

At the end of the day my life is my wife and family. I only want to think about my home
life when I get home. I want to walk out of here and shut off. I think about it at night. I
spend time at home thinking about problems I have here. I don’t want to, but I do.
(Rohan)

I don’t care what’s going to happen to this company. (Frank)

Others around here, people in these offices [managers], don’t think I give a rat’s arse, which
is not quite true; but if that’s what they think, good on ‘em. That won’t hurt me—in the
near future. What happens, happens. I don’t think I’ll have much to say about it. (Deon)

Half of them [other workers] don’t give a stuff about anything; they’ve got no care for the
joint. (Chad)
The sense of despondency at being ‘stuck’, expressed by many of the workers translated into a lack of interest in their work and in the company. They cited management lack of interest in them, their position at the base of the company, and their uncertainty about the future as the major causes for their lack of interest. They could not see why they should care about the company when the managers of the company did not care about the workers. Goffman (1961: 39) comments on similar effects in relation to game playing and its relationship to other life events. When participants are discredited by the opposition (in this case, management), he says, they lose interest and involvement in the game.

Tex’s comment, about how the size of the company prevented the workers from having any influence in the direction the company took, demonstrates the men’s sense of not belonging to or having enthusiasm, for the company. Some of the workers linked their sense of helplessness to what they saw as the pointlessness of caring about the company. Several of them talked about work as being of minor importance in their lives, and yet many conceded that they were concerned enough about their work to worry about it at home.

Many of the men I talked with over the months when the company was on the market expressed a lack of care about what was going to happen to the company. Some of the men told me about how their workmates were just not interested in their work any more, particularly just after the sale had been announced. Yet they said that a large part of their time was spent talking in groups about the future of the company and possible loss of jobs. Their verbalised lack of interest to me may have arisen from their feelings of being unable to affect the changes in any way, or a sense of being manipulated by the changes being suggested. Uncertainty and lack of immediate acceptance of change are most likely to occur as people go through stages of acceptance.

It has been shown by Costigan et al. (1998: 310) who comment on studies of interpersonal trust and work place behaviour, that when employers do not show an interest in their employees’ ideas or care for their feelings, their work suffers as a consequence.

Turner & Turner (1978: 2).
Inclusion or Manipulation

The workers presented strong opposition to the sale of the company, stating that they were concerned about the implications it could have for work practices. They said that they wanted to maintain the status quo, opposing the sale of the company, or at least resist changes to their conditions if it were to be sold. An offer from management to include a few of them in a planning committee around the sale of the plant was rejected. They said management meant this inclusion to break worker solidarity and manipulate the workers into accepting management decisions and actions.57

This type of resistance in organisations is often interpreted as sabotage by those in charge who see opposition as unreasonable.58 The feeling of being manipulated by managers links with the workers' attitudes towards those who left the ranks of the workers to become managers. They were seen as being manipulated by management and hence as traitors to their former workmates.59 Much change management literature60 considers participation in decision making as the key to acceptance, something that the workers at the Refractories said they were denied.61 The literature, both of corporate practitioners and strategic management, relates almost entirely to getting managers to manage change.62 Workers' thoughts on change and change-management are rarely canvassed.

Within the changing conditions at the Refractories, the workers mostly saw themselves not as change agents but rather change recipients, part of the expected organisational managerial

58 Laabs et al., (1999) found this to be the case in their audit of worker resistance in a variety of organisations in the United States.
59 As mentioned in Chapter Three.
60 Such as: Bartlett & Ghosal (1995); Cooper & Markus (1995); Buchanan & Boddy (1992); Peters (1987); Whipp et al., (1989).  
61 As outlined particularly in Chapter Two.
power structure of which many organisational theorists write.\textsuperscript{63} One way management used to avoid losing their power, Ray noted, was through what he saw as a subtle tactic of managers to employ workers who were unlikely to challenge management positions.

Within the commotion of changing realities and doubt, which was so evident at the Refractories at the time of impending sale, it was difficult, the workers said, to remain committed to their work, either individually or collectively. It is not easy to live with the discomfort of instability when we are aware that what exists currently may not exist in the future, Forssell and Jansson (1996: 94) explain in their theories on organisational transformation. This sense of what John Van Maanen (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) referred to as “amorphous postmodern life” can create a sense of unease because it is so disruptive to the expected stability of organisational life. The men alluded to this unease as they talked about their need for stability through continuity of work.

Even though many of the workers talked about themselves or their workmates as not caring about their work and only being there for necessity, they still wanted to have a sense that they were cared about, and to achieve some job satisfaction. As Vince said: “I’m here for eight hours a day, I might as well get something out of it.” Many indicated that if they were cared about, they in turn would care more about the business.

\textbf{“Workers Want to be Looked After, Cared About and Have Their Needs Met”}

The managers should care more about the men and they’d get double the production that they do now. It’s their responsibility to see that the guys are happy and that things don’t go wrong. They don’t have the stress that the guys on the floor have. They’re much better off. If you’ve got a happy crew, then you’ve got a good production crew. That’s obvious to me, and I’m not management. If they employed people like me as managers, I wouldn’t treat the guys like arseholes and they’d probably work better for me. I’d look after them as

\textsuperscript{63} For example: Blumenthal (1994); Child (1997); Deetz (1992); Fiske (1991); Held (1982); Hill (1993).
best I could. I mean when you've got blokes on the floor crying there's something seriously wrong. I used to be on the side of the bosses. But not now [after four months]. They don't care about the people. They only care about the business. No wonder the guys can't stand management. Management don't care about them or think about them. For example, they don't give us safety equipment because they care about us; they only do it to save their own hides. That's how everything is. (Ray)

They [managers] very rarely care about the people and what happens to them. That's proven with what happens to safety. (Frank)

[One of the supervisors] told us at a meeting in the crib room just now that we would probably get silicosis in the future because of what we're breathing in here. He was almost laughing when he said it. He doesn't care. (Ned)

I have invited [the plant manager] to see what I do, to see what I have to go through each week, but he never took me up on my offer. (Frank)

You know, one of the biggest problems is management. They don't consider the workers. (Chad)

They're [managers] not at all compassionate. (Tex)

If management could be more like a family and ask how you are etcetera ... and we could talk to each other and tell them what's going on ... You never see management talk to workers. (Nev)

He's [The plant manager] viewed as walking around with his hands in his pockets; he doesn't really care, or he gives the impression that he doesn't really care. I don't know how true that is. I'm sure that he really does care; I'm sure he does care a lot. It's just how the boys on the floor see him. And it's important. (Nat)

Management know what the blokes feel in some things but it's bringing them down to your level. They don't want to listen. (Harry)

The Boards of Refractories and BHP don't care about what happens to us. (Urwin)

They [managers] may think they're going to become vulnerable if they have closer relationships with people on the floor. It's been proven world-wide that that's not the case. If anything, it enhances the business. (Ken)

[Workers] want to be looked after, cared about and have their needs met. (Harry)
The desire of the workers to know that the managers cared about what happened to them is not an unreasonable requirement, but not a likely one according to Deetz’s (1992: 37, 343) estimation of the general lack of consideration of “human costs of corporate changes.” The workers’ sense of not being cared about by managers was confirmed for me when I said to one of the managers that the lack of care was a recurring topic raised by the men. His sarcastic reply was: “Tell someone who cares!”

The workers aligned their comments about non-caring management with a lack of management integrity and credibility, a finding shared by Costigan et al. (1998) in their studies on employees in large organisations, and Harshman and Harshman (1997) in their work over many years on transformation in large organisations. These studies link the neglect workers feel to their disbelief of their managers’ remarks, as was the case with many of the workers at the Refractories. Workers are expected to care about their work, but as Suzaki (1993: 4) notes, they are not, in turn, cared for. This notion of management caring for workers does not take on a high priority in literature on organisations. Rather the concept of caring is more widely dealt with from the position of the need for employees to care about their work. Caring is not usually addressed as a two-way process.

If it is accepted, as mentioned earlier, that work is such an important part of people’s lives, then workers are likely to feel a connection with that work through caring interactions. Wing Han Lamb (1999: 5) found it curious that caring for workers as an important part of managing is largely ignored in postmodern organisational writing. The workers at the Refractories certainly did not observe that management had overriding responsibility for the well-being of their employees, which Harshman and Harshman (1997: 13) claim they should have.

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64 Fisher (1999) and Lewin & Regine (2000) both support this view.
65 Personal journal (27.5.1997).
66 In his review of Falzon’s (1998) work on Foucault.
Managers Who Do Not Care

Ewan had applied for a promotion to Level Five and had missed out on the position because the managers wanted someone else to have the job, due to past circumstances. The decision to move another person into that job took place five weeks after Ewan’s interview, which he saw as most unfair. He spoke with the manager, who he said “couldn’t care less” and would do nothing about it. Soon after this incident Ewan left for a management job in a smaller firm nearby.67

One of management’s responsibilities, mentioned by the workers, was to make the workplace somewhere the workers wanted to be. Ray expressed his view of the importance of being happy at work, because of its effect on both production and the workers’ lives generally. The workers maintained that happiness at work equates with improved performance, as do some management theorists.68 Other organisational theorists69 do not necessarily concur with this sentiment, other than to say it might have the effect of reduced absenteeism and turnover rates, although they concede that it is better to have happy rather than unhappy employees.

[One supervisor] is really good. He’s really good as a coordinator. I don’t know how good he is at his actual job, but as a person he’s really good. He’s been good to me. He’s fair to all the people. (Nat)

The big bosses and the ones above [the plant manager], they’ve actually come up; like when I fixed things up for them, congratulated me for what I’ve done and thanked me for getting them out of the poo. And I got a real shock. Like I didn’t think they’d give two cahoots. They came up and shook my hand. You know, they shook my hand. So that was a turn around for me. They actually had to see. It had to be visual. (Vince)

Some of the workers did see that some of those higher up the hierarchical ladder cared for the welfare of the workers, or were at least interested in their work. This was not usual

67 Personal journal (27.5.1997).
68 Such as: Carey (1993); Lewine & Regine (2000); Stoneman (1999).
69 Such as: Alford (1997); Eisenberg and Goodall (1997).
practice, they said. Vince expressed some amazement to me when he told me about how he was actually thanked for his efforts by senior management.

Lewin and Regine's (2000) extensive case study observations in the United States strongly suggest that care and mutual trust, which lead to feelings of enthusiasm about work, equate with 'the bottom line'. To stress their emphasis on this principle the final chapter of their book The Soul at Work is called "Care-nections and the Soul at Work" (2000: 316). Other organisational theorists\(^7^0\) suggest that if workers are treated fairly and openly they will respond in a way that is positive for the company. A problem here lies in perceptions of what is fair treatment. It is not likely that the workers and the managers at the Refractories would have had the same definition or schemata of what is fair, or what constitutes caring in many situations, partly because their agendas differed.

"It Always Seems to be the Blokes' Fault"

'Mr. high-and-mighty' passes the buck down the line and it comes all the way down to me [a Level Two operator] ... They [workers] blame BHP for what's happening to them. They don't think the company has treated them well. (Ray)

A lot of time we look bad because we're not getting things done because it's out of our hands. We get slandered when things don't get done because of political things. It looks bad but it's not our fault a lot of the time. (Ully)

They're quick to blame you for something that goes wrong. You'll often hear it from everyone else, not the supervisor himself. It gets around the rest of the blokes. The blame will be put on one of us. (Jerry)

It always seems to be the blokes' fault if machines are breaking down. He's [plant manager] basically blaming us. (Frank)

\(^7^0\) For example Alford (1997); Fisher (1999); Laabs (1999); Morgan (1993); Morrison & Robinson (1997); Olsen (1998).
The men interpreted incidents where they were blamed for mistakes at the plant as being aligned with blaming them for anything that went wrong at the plant. They were constantly on the look out for hidden motives of the managers. For example, the new crew interpreted my study as an attempt to change the way they behaved because the managers saw them as being ‘bad’. They in turn blamed management for their problems. Accusation was one of the common elements in their conversations.

*Where Blame is Laid*

When an ill-mixed batch of cement caused the bricks not to set properly, Chad blamed the pressure put on the men who made up the mix. They were, he said, encouraged to mix a certain amount of tonnes per day. This, he explained, led them to be less careful with the formula, placing more emphasis on the amount produced. He also blamed the supervisor, who he said the workers did not like, and so they did not want to produce high quality material for him.

Some of the men blamed BHP as an entity, or the systems employed in running the plant, when things went awry. Many considered that blame was passed down the line to them when things went wrong, “passing the buck”, as Ray pointed out. Rarely did the men talk of themselves as having a part to play in the unacceptable situations in which they said they found themselves.

The workers' view that blame emanates from the higher echelons of the organisation is supported by Jackall's (1988: 85, 122) findings that those at the top protect themselves from blame and resulting loss of credibility, because, he says, to admit liability for mistakes

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71 I refer to the ‘new’ crew in contrast with the men with whom I had already been working at the plant as a consultant before this research project began. The differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ crew will be explained further in Chapter Six.

72 Personal journal (4.11.1996).
can bring dramatic public consequences. Blame is much more likely to be allocated to those who are politically vulnerable or expendable, like the workers.

I noticed blame operating in the two-way process that Argyris (1990: 125) writes of, where managers and employees blame each other when there is disagreement. This blaming mentality at BHP Refractories was evident from the very top of the company.

A Culture of Blame

Following a presentation of the future direction of BHP, a senior executive of BHP from Melbourne, the hub of the organisation, was asked by an environmental scientist in the audience about the effects of an operation in a third world country, where enormous environmental damage had been caused by the company’s mining operations. The executive replied that because the government of the country had wanted the mining operation to go ahead, the company had proceeded with the project, even though they knew it was environmentally unsound. This ‘passing the buck’ was saying in effect that the company was not responsible for the disaster, that it was the responsibility of the government.73

The workers aligned their blaming of the company with the backtracking and evasion they experienced from their managers.74 They described themselves in terms of the ‘external agents’ that Jackall (1988: 85) talks about, who are blamed by management for all mishaps.

“I Sometimes Think They Don’t Know Where They’re Going”

I believe this place could be run a little better. I wouldn’t say better, but more consistently. It’s like taphole. You go down there and they’ve gotta make fourteen ton, fourteen ton to break the record to make themselves look good. But what’s the good of making fourteen

73 Personal journal (10.11.1999).
74 As detailed in Chapter Two and Three.
ton of taphole when ten ton of it's reject? Why don't they just make seven ton of good stuff and be happy about it, until they get a routine running. Same as raw materials. Why not try making good raw materials, instead of bashing sixty/seventy ton out of shit, giving them a barbecue, and fifty ton of the stuff is no good. Like they are penny pinching about crib time and how long you have. But who cares? Like at the end of the day if you've got two loads; if you've got the bricks that are required at the end of the day, at three o'clock who cares, really? Penny pinching only upsets people; it drives a wedge in between people. I think we ought to get back to the basics, run it as a business. Management and workers should work together. When they [managers] come down here to order something, they should come down to the operators and say: 'What do you think? Do you think we can do that at such and such a time?' But now they come down and just say: 'That's gotta be poured now'. (Chad)

They do so many dumb things every day I'm here. They screw things up every day. (Ray)

Some of the managers have no idea. They have no idea of how things get done. Some things you never find in a book, that's for sure. (Uly)

He [the plant manager] comes to me and asks me questions. I'll say to him: 'Look, you've got to be on this floor to know what the guys are going through'. (Owen)

They have never had a plan. The last six months we've been working seven days a week. We've created an artificial downturn in the industry and we have to shed blokes. Why run twelve-hour shifts when there's no work ahead? There's a $13,000,000 machine doing nothing for a lot of the time. It runs three days a week. It'll only be running for 33% up time. This puzzles me—the way they do things. They run it flat out and then have it sit there for four months doing nothing. It's puzzling. That thirteen million could have been put elsewhere where it could be working. (Frank)

I notice with Paul [a supervisor]. He's like a role model around here. He'll go outside on the balcony for a smoke and he's that popular, that respected, because he understands. He's been in the game for ten years; he's done the lab, he's done production, he's done everything, and so he has an understanding of the products, the machines, the whole thing, the whole lurks and perks. The guy should be running the place. He commands that much respect that if any worker sees him just standing having a smoke, they'll jump on him, just to talk to him ... It'd be really good to give the guys an early mark for doing a good job and not have to look over my shoulder and worry whether someone's going to ring or come in or come in for a spot check. Because I've done that. Like when they've done tonnage and I say: 'You've done really well today guys; see you later'. You know. 'You've done really well'. And give them half an hour or whatever. That's stuff all. Because they're only going to stand around for that half-hour anyway. But in reality, in that half hour I'm like waiting for the phone to ring or waiting for [a supervisor] to turn up or someone to come in. They [managers] do that. They come in for a spot check, to see what's going on and things like that. That sort of thing. [The plant manager's] turned up once at three o'clock in the morning; [The supervisor's] come in at eleven o'clock at night; real odd hours that they
wouldn’t normally come in. That sort of thing breaks down relations really. (Nat, team leader)

They should look after the blokes. That’s the best way to get the work done. (Harry)

I sometimes think they don’t know where they’re going. (Stan)

The managers were not seen to be doing a good job of managing the company by the majority of the workers. The workers made several suggestions about how the business could be managed more efficiently, many of which were based around managing through relationship building. They also wanted more information about what was going on in the business through regular meetings, as part of a two-way process of managers also being aware of what was happening on the shop floor. They talked of ‘strange’ decisions being made, such as spending around twenty thousand dollars on a new laboratory when the company was already sold. No one explained to them the reasons for this decision, leaving the workers with the impression that the managers were either keeping something secret, thought the workers did not need to know, or that managers were irrational and incompetent decision-makers.

The men were conscious of the managers’ disregard for their possible contribution to the business. They interpreted this treatment as disrespect, as they were not given credit for being able to broaden their input into the running of the company. They considered that they could make a difference to the standard and quality of the business. This could come, they said, through their direct work input, and also through the sharing of ideas gathered through their experience with the products they were creating, their knowledge of how the workers operated, and the insights they had gained into the business over the years. Jerry demonstrated the men’s ability in considering the broader aspects of managing the business when he told me that his crew had just written a policy of how to use contractors. “There

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75 A finding that also appears in Markey et al.’s survey (1998: 29) of industrial workers in the Illawarra.
76 This disregard was mentioned also in Chapters Two and Three.

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was nothing in writing,” he said “so hopefully it will solve a lot of problems and get us back on track a bit.” 77

This factor of contribution has been termed ‘social capital', 78 in which trust and goodwill are part of cooperative and caring relationships between people in a workplace. “The strength of the organisation lies with its workers”, Laurie Joyner (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) asserted as we talked about the individual’s place within an organisation.

To emphasise the considered views of a group of the workers about management practice, I include here two tables made up of points a group of the workers put forward in a short workshop session I facilitated with them as part of a workshop run by David Napoli, the consultant brought in as part of the change management program. Table 4.1 details the workers’ thoughts on the constitution of good management. Almost all of these are based around the importance of relationships in managing. None involved technical, planning or financial skills. In Table 4.2, they demonstrate their recognition of the many pressures placed on managers to perform in particular ways, some of which are external or structural.

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77 Interview (23.6.1997).
78 A term used in this way by the Australian feminist sociologist Eva Cox in the Boyer Lectures (1995).
Table 4.1 The workers' perspectives of what made a good manager

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Good management = strong management</th>
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<tr>
<td>• No blaming others</td>
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<td>• Team involvement</td>
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<td>• Accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <em>No games</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Listen</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Personal skills/social skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enforce principles</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Committed to decisions, ideals and people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Support staff decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Delegate authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Follow through with decisions/ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Involvement of people in decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support in deployment of decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open/honest communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask what's happening and why</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Utilise resources (not abuse them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistency in all decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have resources available (people and equipment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caring</td>
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Table 4.2 The workers' perspectives of the pressures managers faced

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Why they don't do these things</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Part of their salary package</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Old hierarchical attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pressures from all directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Expectations from above</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Part of a political process</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Career moves</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Overwhelming jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prove themselves through short term wins</td>
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<tr>
<td>• They feel responsible for making decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Concern that the job may not get done</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Easier, quicker to make decisions alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Following irrelevant external measures</td>
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</table>
The workers demonstrated their respect for the complexity of management. They were not just whinging. They understood what was going on. They did not see that their managers were competent in areas that they saw as essential to good management, personal relationship building being of prime importance. They would have preferred the managers to be able to deal with difficult, often emotive situations in a more even-handed, personable way. They would have liked to see more openness from managers, and acceptance of the workers’ concerns in a consistent, resolute and supportive manner.

They considered that the managers needed to be fair in their dealings with the workers, able to take a leadership role, while still including them in decision making. They wanted them to have the personal skills that would make the workers feel as though they were cared about. Good managers would see where needs were and budget for the resources to meet these requirements.

To further emphasise the workers’ understanding of situations beyond their immediate tasks, and how they reflected on management issues, at another short workshop session I facilitated for David Napoli, a different group of men summarised their thoughts about what they considered could improve management’s approach to the running of the business. They noted the following points:

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79 A very detailed example of their impressions of their workplace can be seen at Appendix 6, which was taken from a one-day workshop facilitated by David Napoli for a selected group of workers and lower level supervisors.
Table 4.3  Points considered by a group of workers to be necessary for improvement of management approaches

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Build in satisfaction, respect, accountability, rewards and recognition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Give people the opportunity to work with pride.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Include people who are involved in the design of the job and decision making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Create opportunities for variety, using job rotation and whole job approach (this can result in fewer injuries).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Allow workers to take responsibility for their own work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Encourage worker involvement in plant decisions (that affect them).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Provide training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Allow workers to interact with customers (internal and external) to provide a whole picture and make the work more meaningful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Make good equipment available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Broaden skills to involve other aspects of the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Allow for new skills to be put into operation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Create a career path.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Provide job feedback processes.</td>
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</table>

These statements about management styles are more than just generalisations. They include some very specific suggestions for practical inclusions involving both immediate tasks and broader decisions and interactions. When I showed these statements to the anthropologist Dan Rose during my visit to the United States, he pointed out that, in the States, many firms are now incorporating these points into their management styles. My contention here is that the thoughts presented in Tables 4.1. 4.2 and 4.3 on directions of the company, management attributes and styles, did not come from managers or those who write about management, but from the workers, who are not seen by management (or in the literature on management) as having the ability or interest to comprehend such management issues.
The men showed an understanding of the difficulties their managers faced from both internal and external pressures. They were aware of the personal limitations of managers, and the fears that were created because of the stress placed on them by the many factors that surrounded them. They understood the job of managing was highly stressful and often extremely difficult because of the number of tasks to be undertaken. And yet the bottom line for them was that management had the responsibility to make the company work effectively, which included looking after the welfare of the workers.

“*It's Up to the Management to Take Responsibility for Things*”

[The manager] just says: ‘Manage it. If you can’t do it I’ll get someone else who can’. This is the sort of support you get these days. Every time I see [the manufacturing manager] he has an axe in his hand. You don’t hear from him at other times. That’s not management skills. (Tex, leading hand)

The really good planning has gone because there’s not enough manpower to do it. It’s too top heavy. (Rohan)

They [managers] expect people to be responsible for everything but not get paid for it. [comment made in a general meeting of workers].

Teams are ‘out’! They’ve been overdone and have lost their meaning; so has leadership. (comment made in group discussion on the shop floor)

They [management] must have some sort of plan [re the sale]; either shut it down altogether or some sort of plan. (Troy)

It's up to the management to take responsibility for things, and to have regular meetings to find out what's going on on the floor. It just doesn’t happen. What happens now is that we just have a go at [the supervisor] and he gets the shits. (Nev)

There was quite a dichotomy amongst the workers over who should have responsibility for making the plant productive and a place in which people would want to work. Who was responsible for work to be done was often confused. Even though the workers wanted to have a say in the running of the organisation, often because of frictions between themselves
and their managers, they refused to take on tasks beyond their immediate job descriptions. There was a good deal of conflict for the workers in this dichotomy: wanting to contribute more, and at the same time being wary of being taken advantage of, or blamed, if they did.

**Whose Responsibility?**

A group of workers had asked their supervisor for an assessment of new equipment they considered necessary. He told them to work out what they required and how much it would cost. They in turn responded by telling him that it was "his job do to that, not ours." The supervisor then used their response to indicate that the workers were not able to take on extra responsibilities. The workers were incensed at this because they said what he had asked them to do was going beyond what workers were paid for, or expected to do in the present general working climate.80

The workers were told that the change program that was being introduced through an outside consultant (before and during the time this study was taking place), aimed to hand some responsibilities over to them. The intention was to move towards self-managed teams, but this mode of operation did not eventuate. The program faded out before it got past the line supervisor level,81 well before the advent of the sale of the company. The workers said they would have liked to be part of a self-managed program and yet, at the same time, many were cautious about taking on the extra roles it would bring. They were not sure how the whole process would reflect on them. They felt it was up to management to take the load of responsibility of how the teams worked. Don said to me several times that he did not think that his crew was up to taking on the responsibility because they did not have enough skills or understanding to make it work. He was responding to some of the

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80 Personal journal (30.1.1997).
81 See Appendix 2 for the hierarchical structure of the plant.
unsuccessful efforts to move his crew to a self-managed team. He perceived that the workers were skilled in some areas, but not enough to take over management tasks.

**Selection of a New Team Leader**

Harry had worked for the company for many years, and was chosen as the team leader of one crew over someone who had only been with the Refractories for a year, even though this person had been in supervisory positions in previous workplaces. In his new role as team leader, he continually had great difficulty in managing his new position. Some of the men told me how the members of the crew continually gave him a hard time. As well as dealing directly with the workers, giving them their work plans each day and seeing that these were achieved, he initially had a great deal of new organisational and technical computing skills to acquire in a very short space of time. 82

Harry's selection for team leader by management was done without any consultation with the team he was to lead. Nor were they consulted on the proposal to become a self-managed team. The workers told me that at no time were sessions held between the crew and management to draw out the workers' perspectives on their possible approaches to the proposed change of operation style. As an example, there was little discussion around the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to hand over the authority of overtime to the workers. 83 Difficulties in delegation of responsibilities also arose around the review of sick leave provisions.

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82 Personal journal (27.5.1997).
83 As mentioned in Chapter Two.
Sick Leave Entitlements

The workers and the managers received different sick leave entitlements, for which the workers felt much resentment. (The exception to this was in Slidegate because they had been given the same sick leave entitlements as managers when the plant was originally set up). Consequently, a trial was initiated for the workers, who were attempting to gain the same privileges as their managers (and Slidegate workers). This would give them unlimited sick leave, instead of the three single days without a doctor’s certificate per anniversary year, to which they were currently entitled. Over a six-month period, the workers were given unlimited time off for sick leave. This was then monitored and compared between the managers and the workers and between divisions at the plant. The sick leave sheets showed that staff had far less sick leave than the workers. The sick leave sheets showed that the staff levels averaged .31 days per person per month, Monolithics 1.5 and Castings 1.3. Slidegate was .78 and Maintenance .48. While there may have been several reasons for these discrepancies, alternative explanations, other than bludging, were not considered by management. Nor were the workers’ opinions sought. Whatever the reasons for the disparity, the end result was that from the raw figures the managers decided the previous sick leave conditions would be reinstated, because it was seen that the workers were taking advantage of the system.

The men expressed a great deal of anger and resentment over what they saw as another discriminatory issue, occurring in this instance in relation to responsible behaviour regarding sick leave. The simplified solution to a complex issue left the men with a sense of frustration and an unwillingness to participate in attempts to move toward self-management and other types of change.

84 In Appendix 7, I set out my thoughts on possible explanations for the differences in use of sick leave. Personal journal (3.7.1997).
85 The most common reasons for absences from work, Gordon, Kiser & Picard (1999: 19) found through their surveys of several companies in the United States, is personal conflict at work and family issues.
“Management are the Ones With the Power to Change Things; We’re Just Workers”

If you had workers working with a few more management decisions and managers working with workers more on the floor, one-to-one, working things out together as a team, the whole thing’d become a lot smoother. Decisions and changes should be made in a group with everyone so that everyone’s happy with them. (Ray)

Change is great if it’s for a good reason. If there’s going to be a change for the sake of change, it’s useless. When I look back on the rationalisation projects over the years, they’ve always been to cut jobs. TBI (Total Business Improvement) reduced the workforce by 40%. They spent the next couple of years undoing all that had been done. Some jobs disappeared and reappeared in the process, under a different name. There’s this thinking that ‘we’ll show we’re managing’, but it usually doesn’t mean anything, it actually gets worse. (Cain)

But I think a lot of changes have gotta be made here, especially with supervision of the plant. There’s a lot of shit that goes on here that shouldn’t happen and I mean that deep inside. How do you stop it? If the supervisors won’t stop it, there’s no chance I can, because if I said anything I’d find myself without a job. So the supervision’s not done correctly. (Chad)

It’s the guys at the top who don’t get their head out of their arse who have to change, because they’re the ones who make the decisions ... They [management] don’t want to change. Why would they? If they don’t want change what hope have we got? If you’re on the floor it’s hard to change if they don’t. (Ully)

I’m not in a position to make the changes. There’s no good telling us. Management has to change, not us. They have to implement change. In the end, they make the changes. It’s just a crock of shit unless they’re going to change. They’re the ones with the power to change things. We’re just workers. (Deon)

The workers were conscious of their lack of power to change the way things were done. They told me new ideas were always introduced through management, such as the TQM practices introduced before this research took place. The men were very sceptical of any suggested attempt to involve them in decisions around change, even though some attempts had been made to run sessions with them by an external change consultant. Their

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87 As referred to in Chapter Two.
88 As mentioned in Chapter Two.
experiences in the past of misplaced trust, they said, had made them very wary of management's motives to include workers. They were dubious about the numerous attempts at consultant-led change-management programs that they had witnessed over the years. These ventures were seen to be idealistic, bypassing many basic problems of workplace relationships, including hierarchical tyranny and entrenched behaviours. They generally felt that it was quite beyond them to have any influence on the proposed changes.

Various changes, the sale being the most consequential of these, happened in the time I was at the plant. Other changes included regular movement of supervisory staff, changes in structure, shift and employment patterns, and changes to production and output. Changes also occurred in the numbers of operators employed, in the number and type of meetings held, and in the demise of training programs and other learning opportunities.

The workers often commented on the inability of their managers to apply the caring, democratic principles of how to manage change in ways that they were supposed to have learned in management their courses they attended. “Management goes off to courses and comes back and everything's different for a week, and then they go back to the way they did things before; it's back to square one” Rohan commented. Rohan's impression is supported by the work of Argyris (1990) and Scott (1994) in their organisational research in the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively. They both observe that, when pressures build up, managers who appear to have undergone transformation in their management styles through learning programs revert to traditional authoritarian modes of managing.

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89 As referred to in Chapters Two and Three.
90 Team meeting (22.5.1997).
Urwin felt that the changes he had seen at the plant, in the three years he had been there, were only superficial and that nothing had changed at a deeper level. He maintained that actual work practices and behaviour had remained static during that time. Perhaps what the workers were sensing was similar to Bourdieu’s (1993) and Fulop and Riikin’s (1997) observations that organisational learning is often designed to bring the workers into line with management’s wishes, rather than from a serious desire to effect positive transformation in working conditions for the workers. Giuliano and Carillo (1998: 107) are also sceptical about the whole notion of managing change. They see it as rather “like trying to manage a stampede—it's virtually impossible.”

The workers felt that if management did not change then there was no point in workers changing. They saw that managers held the key to change being implemented. Many of the workers said they were expected to change their ways of behaving, while they saw that because of the control that managers had over how the company conducted its affairs, it was up to them to change before workers could modify their position. Mary Catherine Bateson (pers. comm. Feb., 2000) noted that “the whole industry of consultant-based training creates alienation. People at the top see it as a good idea, people in the middle implement it. People at the bottom receive it.”

Ugly and Ray expressed the sentiment that management would never change. They found it difficult to imagine that those with the power to take action, that is management, would change first, a proposition put by Kofman and Senge (1993: 12) in their work on learning organisations. Rohan, in commenting on my work on team changes at the plant said that I “should look at others higher up first.” This approach of starting at the top and working down is one that Argyris (1990: 130) says he uses in his consultancy work. Yet he also states, as does Field (1997), how it is unlikely that people entrenched in power positions will work toward changing that situation, even though they want others to change. In
explaining the top down approach to change, Bill Torbert (pers. comm., Feb., 2000), a former student of Argyris, stated:

Argyris says you have to start at the top, not because it is then the top telling the bottom what to do. He is saying that you have to start at the top, because then the top realises that all it has been doing is telling the bottom what to do, so that it [those at the top] begins to act differently; so that other people begin to believe, begin to gain hope that a different way of managing will evolve. But he started saying that thirty five years ago and there hasn't been a complete revolution yet.

The sense of scepticism noted at the end of this comment aligns with the feelings expressed by the workers (as it does with mine) about the top down approach. The workers saw that their managers were unlikely to relinquish their power positions easily, as changing the way they managed would mean giving up power. This was the sentiment that Kriegler (1980: 123) expressed in relation to the situation at the Whyalla steelworks. He noted that those who have power are likely to “resist changes to this power because it is too sweet to be lightly given up.” “Managers have traditionally been wary of any whittling away of their managerial prerogative”, Markey and Reglar (1997, in Gollan, 1999: 12) comment in their work on unionism in workplaces. Managers are unlikely to relinquish their power by giving control to workers, Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) found in their study of issues of control and worker involvement in automotive firms in Canada.

Starting at the top need not necessarily lead to failure. At the Refractories, though, a problem lay in that changes, or indeed opportunities to consider change, did not necessarily translate down the line. Far more opportunities for personal development and managerial skills were provided for top management than workers. These opportunities were not replicated for those further down the line. Opportunities for learning in a formal setting decreased in number while descending the organisational ladder.
Opportunities for Participation in Change Management Programs

As part of the change program at the Refractories, senior managers attended nine days of intensive personal development/management 'in-services' held in Victoria with high-powered consultants; supervisors attended three-day courses held in a country setting near the works with associates of these consultants; and the workers had occasional one or half-day sessions at the plant or in the local company facilitation rooms with associates or lesser known consultants.\(^9\)

According to the workers, the personal development training had been doing with some of them was an outstanding exception to usual practice. Their previous learning opportunities were all based, they said, around practical work tasks or safety issues. Some other efforts were made while I was at the plant to hold change management sessions with the workers, but these were spasmodic and did not continue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchical levels</th>
<th>Type of courses offered</th>
<th>Position on the ladder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>senior managers</td>
<td>9-day intensive courses in an interstate resort</td>
<td>the top rung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisors</td>
<td>3-day courses in the country near the plant</td>
<td>second tier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workers</td>
<td>Half-day, or less, sessions at the plant or in the local company facility</td>
<td>bottom rung</td>
</tr>
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Figure 4.1 Courses offered in relation to the individuals’ place on the hierarchical ladder

My observations at the Refractories showed that some of what was learned, either formally, or informally, involved people acquiring skills in how to appear to be democratic, how to avoid responsibility, how to minimise effort, how to set up negative outcomes, how to manipulate or how to get revenge. For example, Ray talked about how he had "learned to hate management." Although this would not ordinarily be seen to be a useful contribution to a business it made considerable sense to Ray; it was part of belonging with his peer group. What may be seen as negative learning in one situation, may be advantageous in another. Some of the learning involved how to work against organisational goals. Learning involves a complex set of circumstances based around relationships.92

The men were also aware that the mere recognition and acknowledgment of feelings may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes. There could be a danger of these feelings being manipulated by those who learn to recognise them, possibly playing into the hands of the organisational power brokers.93 The men expressed their annoyance and frustration at being blamed for things that went wrong at work, and at the same time blamed the company and its managers for the way they were treated.

There is ample literary discourse, Lewin and Regine (2000: 15) note, about creating better work forces through learning and changes in management styles to increase the profitability and efficiency of a company, or to make the work of managers easier. While the workers had experienced many attempts at change programs within the plant, they could not see that things had altered very much in practice, even though the rhetoric of change was occurring around them. The workers were disappointed in what they saw as the failure of managers to change the way they behaved toward the workers, even though they had gone through extensive formal learning opportunities. They were not totally surprised at this

intransigence, noting that managers were not likely to give up power that was prized by them. I noted how much of the learning could be aligned with what Henderson (1997: 41) termed 'superstitious learning' in his comments on learning in organisations. As the term indicates, learning is based on beliefs about a situation that may not be accurate. It seemed to the workers that it was an uphill battle to transform the way managers at the Refractories managed.

**Conclusion: “Too Much to Worry About to Think About Emotional Things”**

They’ve [managers] got too much else to worry about than worry about emotional things. Everyone’s got too much to think about to worry about that. (Ray)

These issues about learning and personal development in some ways represent a microcosm of what the chapter is about. My observation is that the reason it was such an unhappy place was that it was caught in a vicious cycle. There were opportunities to break this cycle that did not bear fruit, because of various mechanisms and forces—such as the BHP ‘mentality’, individual managers’ need for power and control, traditional ways of behaving in the company, at all levels—pulling them back into the negative practices of which the men so often spoke.

The men’s expression of their feelings and sense of the negation of those feelings by management provides some indication of how they made sense of their working life, as they reflected on their feelings about their work, the managers, management styles, the company and their workmates. I noted several common threads to the men’s feelings, a position to be expected amongst those who share common social, cultural and historical experiences (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999; Gergen, 1999; and Traweek, 1988). These commonalities were largely based around the treatment they received from those with whom they worked, and the frustrations they felt at much of that treatment. These mutual feelings do not, however,
indicate that they all felt the same about everything. Nor did their feelings necessarily always line up in a linear or predictable way for any one individual. I concur with Goffman (1961: 80) when he asserts that each individual has several selves, and by implication several ways of interpreting events. Nevertheless, the overall picture the men presented was cohesive in the sense of their impressions of being treated as commodities for profit making, with the consequent negation of their needs. Feelings were obviously important to them, although much of the literature, as well as what the workers experienced from their managers, maintains the notion that industrial workers do not place importance on, nor can they adequately express, their feelings.

High levels of stress and uncertainty were part of their concerns. Their statements about their feelings of low self-esteem arose from being treated as robots or machines in a job many said they did not particularly want to do. They felt ‘stuck’ in a non-caring environment where blame was the order of the day. They felt that if they were treated with some empathy the business would benefit, and yet they did not think these management changes would occur because the managers were not willing to take responsibility for making the place a pleasant one in which to work. Nor would they be likely to give up their power positions to include the workers in the broader running of the company.

It was often through their emotionally-charged responses that the men offered insights into how conditions could be altered at the plant. They said that by taking their ideas seriously and giving them some recognition for their input, they would be able to contribute more to the company. They were caught in a double-bind of both wanting to contribute, and seeing that major changes were not their responsibility or that there would be blame and reprisals if they did speak up or took on extra duties that ‘failed’. Many of the workers were keen to contribute to the better running of the company, while others openly expressed the view

94 A concept dealt with in Chapter Three in regard to relating within different sub-cultures.
they were only there as a means unto an end—to earn enough money to be able to leave. Yet these men also commented on how much happier they would be if they felt their managers cared about them and listened to and respected their ideas. They expressed puzzlement at the lack of change the managers seemed to make, even with all the learning opportunities available to them.

The picture the men painted of their workplace was of a 'care-less' work site. The lack of care they so often talked about from their managers, they surmised, was because the managers had things other than the well-being of the workers on their minds. The perception of lack of caring from management translated into the workers' lack of care for both the managers and the company as a whole.

In contrast to the devastating picture the workers presented of not being heard or acknowledged for their feelings, in the following chapter I present a specific example of one instance—which occurred through most unusual circumstances—showing that the workers' feelings and views can be heard, acknowledged and respected.

There hasn't been a lot of credit for ideas you have. (Jim)
CHAPTER FIVE

"THE OLDEST REFR ACTORY RAT, AMONG A PACK OF RATS"¹

They cracked the mould when they made that man.

He was from the old school. He’d just keep going.

He was always there to help you; whether you needed him or not!

I never heard him bad-mouth the company when everyone else was.

Two days before [Eddie died], we were saying that the place’d go broke without Eddie.

He was a man of few words and he did everything right. If he couldn’t get it right, he’d wait ’til he could find someone who would. He wouldn’t go home until it was done properly.

One of the jobs involved digging soft clay out. If Eddie was your forklift driver, he’d do it with his forks instead of us having to do it by hand. You wouldn’t get anyone else to do it with their forklift.

When I first started I didn’t know how to fill the trolley. He came over to show me and two hours later he was still there. Every time I did I’d break the bricks and he’d take over. He’d always help. He was good like that. He was a nice bloke. He would just jump off the fork, and help you if you were in trouble. He was really quick stacking things. He taught quite a few of the blokes how to do their job.

Eddie was the oldest Refractory Rat, among the pack of rats.

Eddie was fifty-six when he died of a heart attack while riding his bike home after a day’s work at the Refractories. Those who had worked closely with him, particularly in the recent days or hours before his death, expressed great shock. He had been an operator in the Refractories for thirty years. He was well thought of by both the workers and the staff, and was described as an icon of a ‘good worker’ by both groups.

¹ The quotations in this chapter are not attributed to any particular people, because this was requested by the men when I was collecting their stories about Eddie. The quotations used in this chapter are taken from the original book.
This chapter will describe a series of events that followed Eddie’s early and untimely death. I will begin by describing the grieving process that was set in motion by the plant manager to assist Eddie’s workmates manage their grief. This experience allowed the men who were part of it an opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions about the loss of Eddie. I then describe how their stories about Eddie were able to be recognised and acknowledged through the publishing of a book: *The Oldest Refractory Rat...Eddie’s Book.*

I have included this chapter because it details the process of gathering and telling workers’ ‘stories’, while it also demonstrates how its integration with the research, including its value as a verification mechanism. In telling about incidents that happened to Eddie, the men provide a candid and rare picture of life in an industrial setting. The anecdotes show, in a most frank way, how the workers see and relate to each other. The chapter is structured similarly to the thesis. The men’s voices are presented as a lead into dialogue on the importance of what they had to say. The process of formal grieving sessions involved me in asking the men questions that led them to talk about Eddie and their workplace. This gave the men a common focus, which I was able to bring together as a single event. They were able to reflect in a very deep way, not only about Eddie, but also about their connection to him and what that said about the Refractories as a whole.

The gathering of the stories and the compilation of the book is a tribute to the men at the Refractories as well as to Eddie. It is a way of giving them voice. They are heard and respected for their stories in a very tangible way, a way that emphasises the thrust of my thesis: the importance of listening to and legitimating the workers’ stories to present their

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2 The title came from one of his workmates, the one who told the story about breaking pieces of wood with their heads. A copy of the book is attached to this dissertation. A transcript of the launch is at Appendix 10.
points of view on their workplace. The men's stories about Eddie have been placed in “centre stage [to make] form a basis for [their] identity” (Plummer, 1995: 18).

**The Genesis of Eddie's Book**

A grieving process was instigated on site by the plant manager (the one usually identified as distant and unlikable by many of the workers). He contacted me (in my role as a consultant/counsellor) very shortly after Eddie died, when he noticed the workers' level of grief. He noticed that the plant was unusually quiet. No radios were playing, as was the norm, and the men were walking around not talking to each other, he said. He asked me to come to the worksite as soon as possible to facilitate whatever was needed to support the men in their grieving. I arranged with a psychologist to conduct a grieving process with the men. It was decided that work groups would come to the boardroom (a room rarely visited by most of the workers) to participate in the process. As they arrived, we engaged them in a structured group grief counselling process. Group sessions with the workers about Eddie and the impact his death had on them took place over the following two weeks. The formal gatherings were attended by between two and twelve people at each session.

The benefit of having a formal process was that it allowed the men time to reflect in an atmosphere that encouraged open discussion of events, behaviours and relationships. They were given the time and space to express their feelings and be heard and acknowledged for those feelings. There were no other distractions, and the men seemed to feel that there was no pressure on their time because these sessions had been set up by the plant manager. The faith they placed on the plant manager in this instance—following through with the promise

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3 The psychologist Jerome Bruner suggests this is a most effective way of presenting ‘reality’ (1986: 11).

4 This dislike of the plant manager has been referred to frequently in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

5 This process was designed by the clinical psychologist, Warden (1991). It involved asking each one of them to recall how they had learnt of Eddie's death and what they were doing at the time and what they did next; then they said how they had felt at that time.
of uninterrupted time—was in strong contrast to the way they usually expected him to behave, that is as a man not to be trusted. In this instance they appeared quite confident that any amount of time they spent in the grieving sessions would be acceptable. The ease they felt in taking their time was most likely because the plant manager had initiated the grieving sessions, and hence given them permission to follow the process that I led. During the sessions it was noticeable that the time and space they were given, the men saw as a combination of genuinely grieving for Eddie, having time off work and being given something by management.

By the end of several days of hearing stories about Eddie, I felt that I knew him well, whereas in fact my only personal contact with him was in passing when he always waved to me as he drove past in his forklift truck. As one of the sessions that involved eleven men on night shift was coming to an end, there was a quiet pause for a minute or so. No more stories were being told. The men began to leave. I light-heartedly commented to them as they were going that I had heard so many stories about Eddie I could have written a book about him and that it was a pity that it had not been appropriate to record them. Nat turned to me and responded: “Why don’t you?” That night I pondered the importance of what the men had been telling me about Eddie to the collective spirit of the plant. I wanted to honour that spiritual connection. I decided to do this by gathering an anthology of stories about him from his work mates.

I bought a small, hard-backed purple notebook in which I intended to collect stories about Eddie. I was hoping the men would write the stories themselves. Beginning the next morning, I followed through with this thought as I moved about the shop floor, in the crib

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6 And it was “his” forklift. Even though it was company policy that no one person would use one particular forklift, it was recognised that Eddie’s was his alone. After he passed on, the worker who was the first to drive Eddie’s forklift said it was one of the hardest things he had ever had to do. He said he could still feel Eddie’s presence there. At Eddie’s funeral the men placed a toy forklift on his coffin.
room, outside in the lunch area, or in offices and machine rooms. None of the men wanted to do the writing themselves, however. Perhaps this was partly because I was obviously willing and able to do that work. Or maybe they did not see writing as their work; that was my role; I was after all the academic. Possibly they were unsure of their skills in this unfamiliar type of competence. They might be opening themselves up to getting it wrong, not a positive experience in what they saw as the blaming culture of the Refractories. So, I wrote the stories down as they spoke, and then read them back to them to check that they were correct. They enthusiastically participated in telling me their stories. This was a similar, although compressed, version of the process I used for the interviews for the rest of this study.

Most of these men were not the ones I had interviewed for the rest of the study because they were from a different section of the plant. It seemed that everyone had a story to tell about Eddie. Eight months later, they were still telling me stories: “Did I tell you about the time when he ... ?”

The anecdotes that make up Eddie’s Book are unedited, which once again raised the issues of stereotyping workers in a negative way, as did eventuate (as detailed later in this chapter). The decision of which stories to include and exclude resulted from a collaborative process between the storytellers and myself. The decision to stop collecting more stories was made when it seemed that what the social researcher Pandit (1996: 4) termed “saturation” had been reached. My only written contribution to the book was in providing the headings and writing the short introduction. Ian, one of Eddie’s close mates, gave me some photos of Eddie to include in the original manuscript.

As mentioned in Chapter Seven in relation to the quotations used in the rest of the dissertation.
The resulting first draft of *Eddie’s Book: The Oldest Refractory Rat* was spiral bound on A4 paper. A copy was presented by the human relations manager of the Refractories and myself as a gift to his widow on Christmas Eve at her home in a local caravan park, where she lived with her pregnant daughter and infant grandchild. Other copies were made for the workers and taken down to the shop floor. These copies had each page laminated for protection from the dirt in the plant.

When I showed the book to a colleague she suggested that I get it published, so I went through a process of contacting various government departments who led me to Halstead Press, publishers of non-fictional books. The manager was immediately interested and offered to design and print the book, which was launched at the University of Wollongong by the Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Executive Officer of BHP Port Kembla. Some of Eddie’s workmates attended the launch, along with Eddie’s widow, daughter and grandchildren. The launch received quite extensive coverage on television, radio and newspapers. The local radio news repeated the story over five hourly news broadcasts and the local television presented it as a two-minute piece that evening on the six o’clock local news.

Publishing the book was funded by the Refractories. This generosity may seem to contradict the workers’ perceptions that their voices were not heard. In fact, the publishing of the book came at a most expedient time for the public relations department of the company. The company had by this time been sold and the public relations manager told me the book was useful as both a way to spend the funds set aside for farewelling the company and as a parting gift to the workers (along with t-shirts and a pictorial history of the company on a computer mouse pad).

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8 These two institutions have strong research and financial links.

9 These gifts were presented to every Refractory worker, one-by-one early one morning as they gathered for a barbecue breakfast at the plant as part of the celebrations to farewell BHP Refractories. This approach to formalising plant closure in BHP had become a traditional practice across the company.
The book is more than a story about Eddie. It creates a unique picture of the lives of the workers at the plant in specific day-to-day settings which portray part of the whole context within which they exist. It offers an insightful view into their relationships, their view of work practices, and their personal exploits; through all recalled incidents and memories focussing around one worker who was seen as an outstanding character in the company.

The picture that the contributors to the book have provided is not, as is the case with the rest of this dissertation, a complete picture of life at the plant—if indeed there is any way to do that. The Gestalt, or sum of the parts, is never the complete whole. The picture we gain is from the point of view of the contributors in a very specific circumstance and time. The stories about Eddie are individual interpretations of his working life at the plant, as his workmates remembered and told them. These were their stories. They were not necessarily how Eddie would have seen things.

All stories are to some extent flashbacks. They can change on a moment-to-moment basis, not because those telling them are wrong or mistaken, but because life is constantly moving, along with our perceptions of it. "Reality is constantly changing", Chia (in Reed, 1997: 24) notes in his work on deconstructing organisational analysis, because life is in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction. Many more anecdotes could no doubt have been told about Eddie. Some of these stories would have been omitted from the telling because they would have faded with time. Those that were told have probably been influenced and embellished with the passage of time, hindsight, inferences and assumptions.¹⁰

¹⁰ This notion of movement in recall is supported by Cohen (1993) in his work on memory; and Fiske (1992) through his work on communication.
"He Played Hard and He Worked Hard"

He was very conscientious. If he was able to, he’d work 25 hours a day, 7 days a week; it wouldn’t worry him.

I’ve often said, “If ever I had my own company I’d have no hesitation employing Eddie”.

The bosses said if they had their own business they’d want a hundred Eddies. If I had a business I’d want a hundred Eddies.

He played hard and he worked hard.

Many of the men’s stories were full of admiration for the value of Eddie’s contribution as a hard working man who helped everyone he could at work. They said that he was worth about two or three other workers because of the amount of work he did. There were stories about his family life and about a very tough and sad personal life. Still, the positive work stories were the ones that predominated. He was held in high esteem and seen as a role model by his workmates and the managers of the company. The agreed praise for Eddie’s work ethic from both sides of the chasm indicates there is some common ground between the workers and the managers that largely goes unacknowledged.

The men who worked with him said that if they had their own company, they would want to employ someone like Eddie, an interesting reflection that demonstrated their espoused values in relation to work practices. They generally acknowledged Eddie’s merit as an outstanding worker and the value that gave the company. As indicated in previous chapters, there were disparate views about the quality and quantity of work the men were willing to undertake. Some were disinclined to do any more than was absolutely necessary to keep their jobs, and yet it was sometimes these same men who admired Eddie for his work beyond his basic duties. There was a definite dichotomy for some of the workers between wanting to do a good job for themselves and not wanting to please, or be seen to please the managers.
“Who Else Could Get Away With That?”

He had his own set of rules. There was a set of rules for him and a set of rules for us.

He was the sort of person who you couldn’t write a job description for; he wouldn’t stick to it anyway!

Who else could get away with that? (Not join a strike until he had finished a job he was doing).

Eddie was one of the few men at the plant who was able to safely follow his own “set of rules”\(^{11}\) to work by, something that others found difficult to do in the collective climate of the plant.\(^{12}\) Many of the things Eddie did would not have been tolerated from other workers by the work group. In fact I did not see anyone else do some of the things Eddie did, and not be ostracised for doing them. For instance, although a strike had begun, he worked on until he had finished the work he was doing at the time. He had the exclusive use of a forklift, something that no one else had. He also took on other people’s jobs in order to help them, which would usually have been considered as a demarcation issue by the other workers. But these actions were acceptable for Eddie.

Through recalling stories about Eddie, the men reflected on and explored the part they played in his world, as part of understanding their world. They had the chance to use the semi-structured story telling experience as a powerful way to express themselves in relation to their working lives, how they sustained their identities and how they came to understand others and to know their world. Many qualitative researchers\(^{13}\) note that our narratives are our lives and from them we form our identities.

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\(^{11}\) Reference to informal workplace rules is also referred to in Chapter Three.

\(^{12}\) As referred to in Chapter Three.

\(^{13}\) Such as: Denny et al. (1983); Fiske (1992); Genette (1988); Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Goodall (1994); Kaye (1996); Labov (1972); Oliver Sacks (1985) in Mahyer (1990); Walker (1983).
"Funny Things, Sad Things, Pissed-off Things"

I remember him with teeth. He broke his teeth at work.

When we were in the multiple mixing, he was inside it. I threw a guard at it and he came out and he went off his brain at me. He got a hell of a fright and threw the shovel at me.

I used to take the mickey out of him. It was that regular, I couldn't count the jokes.

We were giving him heaps and I threw the banisters brush down the hopper, and he dived in head first into the bin and it's black as ... He used to get in there with the air gun and blast it out.

He wore his missus' glasses, but he couldn't see out of them properly.

I instigated this thing about breaking pallet boards across fork tynes. We had the tynes at waist level. They were pretty thick pine pallets. There were a few guys; we were all breaking them. Some of the guys hurt their hands. Eddie pushed us aside and I talked him into breaking one with his head. He tried and damn near broke his head with a big bang. It damn near ripped his head off.

We saw a lot of funny things, sad things, pissed-off things, the change in moods, in personality—just like everyone else here.

The men were straightforward in talking about Eddie. It was the advent of the death of a work mate that brought the expressions of the men's feelings to the surface. They talked forthrightly about their relationships with him and what he did, as well as the genial and destructive things they did. In the telling, they inadvertently drew a comprehensive picture of life at the plant, how the workers related to each other, what actually happened at work and what they thought of what happened. They earnestly poured out their stories with a sort of raw honesty, seemingly unafraid to say what they thought, even if it might be potentially embarrassing or even hurtful to others or even themselves. The stories did not paint an entirely charming picture. They were, however, straightforward, open and honest, showing a convivial and a harsh side to working relationships at the plant.
You are the story you tell about the work as much as the work itself, because the story is a commodity people may or may not buy and whose elements will shape interpretations of what you actually do.

Eisenberg and Goodall (1997: 190)

As the men connected with their feelings about life at the Refractories, through their telling of stories about Eddie, they openly expressed some deep and sincere emotions about their relationship with Eddie, as well as the more general aspects of their work and relationships at the plant. Story telling can be a particularly beneficial function of the grieving process, providing an opportunity for people to constructively express what has occurred for them in sorrowful events. The men openly declared their affection, sadness, bewilderment, shock, guilt, anger, frustration and fear. They were able to shed some of the artificial layers that surrounded them at work which can make the expression of emotions difficult. Most of the stories in the book come from operators. As they were telling their stories, they were not just individuals relating incidents; there was a strong feeling of community in their sharing of memories. The publishing and launching of Eddie’s Book legitimated these shared feelings.

An Authoritative Contribution to Understanding of Life at the Refractories

The gathering of the workers' stories in this time of grieving has proved to be an invaluable way of elucidating what went on at a deeper level of life at the plant. Through the stories we are given a unique perspective of the behaviour of the members of the community who do the telling.

14 Egan (1994); Mitroff and Kilmann (1978).
15 As referred to in Chapter Three in relation to masculinity and expression of emotions.
The anecdotes are part of a jigsaw puzzle. "They are stories within stories, all part of each other", King noted in a paper presentation he gave at a management discourse conference in London in 1998. They are "part of a string of increasingly larger stories" (Deetz (1992: 311), having varying levels of meaning and importance to different audiences. In narrative descriptions, such as the one told in this dissertation, we are allowed to view some of this puzzle, not all of it. Each person who contributes places a different piece of the puzzle together to provide a broad perspective of life, explaining its shape and emotional climate. This chapter then is part of the overall tapestry of my thesis, adding to other analytical perspectives of working life in industrial settings.

Eddie's Book is about workers, by workers. It is their voice(s) that tell the story, rather than an empirical study of life at the plant. As the plant manager said at the launch of the book: "When you read this book, you know what it's like to be in this place. Their stories tell you." This statement is a strong acknowledgment that recording workers' stories as evidence of workplace practice, which was used in the book (and indeed in the rest of this dissertation), is a bona fide way to reach insights about workplace practices. At the book launch, the general manager commented to me that it was most unusual to honour a worker in an organisation. His remark highlights the lack of opportunity people from this level of an organisation have of being formally recognised.

Several people asked what was so special about Eddie that he should have a book written about him. Perhaps this reaction stems from a general lack of acceptance of the power of talk of everyday life, of which Mannheimer, Woodilla and Boden (1994) comment in their work on conversational analysis. In the sense that Eddie was 'just another worker', there was nothing special about him. Yet, the men were able to express the qualities that they

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18 Kaye (1996: 8).
saw as outstanding to them, even though they may not have done so. These qualities may not have been expressed in ways that are acceptable or understandable as valuable in the broader society.

The publication and official launch of *Eddie's Book* suggests that there is a desire in the workplace, academia and the wider community to hear workers' voices. What then is stopping workers from being widely acknowledged? Do the workers themselves, or others, think workers' perspectives are not worthy of serious consideration in workplace theory? Their reluctance to write their own stories may be an indication of their perception of their contribution being inadequate. Do academics or practitioners think they are not valid? The dearth of serious consideration of workers' perspectives in the organisational management literature suggests this may be the case. Do publishers think the material will not be marketable? Halstead, while contributing so much to the publication of the book, did not take on the marketing of it. Or are writers not willing to write about workers' perspectives and insights because they think this information will not be of interest to other people, perhaps even frowned upon? An article about the book in the local newspaper supports this impression of the lack of worth of this type of work. A scathing report in *The Mercury* dismissed it as "quaint."19 This article provided an indication, albeit from one journalist's perspective, of how undervalued workers' voices are in society. She saw it as a trivial piece of work and a waste of time for academic study. Her cynically phrased response (for which she has a reputation amongst the Wollongong community) in the only daily newspaper in Wollongong, can be seen to have contributed to further devaluing of workers' voices amongst the community. Fortunately, the local radio and television stations reported the event in a much more positive vein, acknowledging the humanity of industrial life that it represented. Few everyday storytellers, Genette (1988: 82) notes, are seen as knowledgeable or powerful enough to give their stories legitimacy. The current

movement towards the acceptance of autoethnography, largely in the United States, is
addressing the lack of personal stories as a legitimate research method. *Eddie’s Book* has
shown that there are ways to express and legitimate workers’ voices publicly.

There were several different reactions to the book as people read it and judged its value for
themselves. Observing other people reading the book was an informative experience in
itself. Most people started to flip through it and then went back to the beginning to re-read
it from cover to cover in quiet concentration. This included people both within and outside
the Refractories. Comments on its appeal included:

i wanted to see what was in there. I wanted to see what differences were in the stories.
I was interested to see what they had to say. It was easy to read. It was quick. I didn’t
have to strain. Their meaning was quite clear.

It is a “No-Frills Franklins Home-Brand” basic tell-it-as-it-is book. There are no
artificial or external interpretations or creations given to analysis, no distortions: it is
succinct and uncompromising. The words have not been altered or tampered with. The
energy and emotion of the telling presents itself openly and freely.

When you see the things that people have chosen to talk about, and that they do not talk
about some things but do talk about others, it shows what is significant for them.

These are real male statements.

Each reader caught a glimpse, from their own perspectives, of the insights that are contained
in the words of a work such as *Eddie’s Book*. In their statements these readers express a
sense of ease in being able to gather a succinct picture of working life at the Refractories.
The workers have been able to present the readers with a distinct and interesting view of
their workplace, a view that is not generally available in the literature on organisational
management. It is through this readership that their voices can be recognised as having value.

Story Telling as a Contribution to the Research

The process of collecting the stories about Eddie was at first a digression from my doctoral research. However, it came to signify a specific example of the wider purpose of the research process: the collection of the workers’ views (stories) about their lives and work emanating from the close relationships they built at the Refractories.

The stories provide a strong, authoritative contribution to understanding how these men experienced their working lives and relationships. The sharing of their stories provides us with a “slice of life” (Kaye, 1996: xx, 16), in which events and people interconnect and interact to give an insight into the lives of the workers. They proved to be “a window into life in [the] organisation [providing a] fuller and more living account of people’s feelings at work” (Frost, Dutton, Worling & Wilson, 2000: 5). In sharing the stories about Eddie, the men provide an impression of a world that is not open to many of us. It allows those of us who are not part of that world to view it through the eyes of those who are. The process of gathering and telling the stories about Eddie aligns with the research method used for the bulk of this study, that is planned and informal interactions alongside reflective activities. I talked with groups of men about Eddie, held mini-interviews with others, observed their reactions, ‘hung around’ the plant, and used the mechanism of member-checking to ensure acceptance of the content by them.

My position, largely as a stranger to many of these men, may have assisted in relaxing their expectations of what they ‘should’ say, as I was distanced from the immediate pain they were experiencing. Talking to a stranger can be less threatening than to someone known, the
psychologist Marris (1974: 152) explains in her work on loss and change. At the same time my deep involvement and interest in the stories about Eddie seemed to encourage them to speak freely. I did not know Eddie well, which may have encouraged them to relate more than they would have done otherwise, in order to fill me in on what they knew. They knew something that I did not. They could probably sense that I wanted to know. They were letting me know, as part of an apparent convention of expectation that people know each other. As they were also in an environment where attention was paid to what they were saying, it was thus worthwhile for them to talk about these events and people. They were also establishing and verifying their sense of identity and importance as human beings as they dealt with their grief. They were telling the stories for their own benefit rather than mine. They may have been sensing the power that stories have to heal and instruct us about the “complexities of life” (Estés, 1993a: 16).

The men’s stories provide what the educational researcher Stake (1983: 74) called a “most authentic way to share the experience of how and why things are the way they are.” This confidence in the value of stories as a means of understanding organisations is not shared by all researchers, particularly not those from a positivist paradigm who are sceptical of such direct accounts. For example, Katz (1990: 235) in his work on the Metaphysics of Meaning claims that narrative accounts are a “a species of philosophical monism”, definitely not scientific. In contrast to Katz’s derogatory remarks, organisational researchers, such as Czarniawska (1994: 136), note that narratives can tap the subjective, emotional and valuational insights that scientific literature tends to omit.

Collecting information about the plant through the process of writing Eddie’s Book proved to be an invaluable and meaningful way for me to understand the plant. I was able to tap into “the reality and richness of a world” that, as Reynolds (1983: 123) asserts in his account of the responsibility of social science in the portrayal of people’s lives, has been
misrepresented by social scientists in the past. The simplicity and directness of people's stories, although often not easy to organise, adds much to the understanding of the nature of society and how people within that society view their world.\(^{20}\)

While my dissertation itself will be viewed by a limited number of people, mostly from the Refractories or in the world of academia,\(^{21}\) *Eddie's Book* has provided an opportunity for workers' voices to be publicly presented.

Each of the academics with whom I met in the United States was given a copy of the book. When I presented a copy to the organisational theorist Jane Dutton, she saw it as:

> a novel instrument for carrying the voices and the stories of those who are not usually heard, embedded in a series of actions that surrounded its creation and distribution, transforming many people's lives ... In addition to honouring Eddie, it also creates a memory, a text that honours the wisdom of the people who told the stories, of their condition and positions. These stories play a role that is typically invisible, and yet if we can pay attention to it, it is everywhere.

*(pers. comm., February, 2000)*

Jane seems to have captured the essence of the importance of the book. She has connected it to the importance of listening to and recognising the value of the voices of workers and the part their input can play in adding to the communal wisdom. She has acknowledged the workers' invisibility and described how the book would have affected people's lives quite dramatically.


\(^{21}\) When I tried to sell the remainder of the books through local book shops, the proprietors were not interested enough to even put them on the shelves, even though it was about people from the local area and it was explained that all the proceeds would go to the widow.
Conclusion: A Living Example of Workers' Voices. *It Can Be Done*

*Eddie's Book* is more than a series of quotations from the people who worked with Eddie. It provides a comprehensive picture of what it was like to work at the Refractories, with a group of people doing hard physical work in a sometimes tough environment. It is a human story, presenting a portrait of a worker (and his workmates)—his work, home life, past experiences, future dreams and hopes, his priorities and values, his skills and his knowledge—from the perspective of his peers.

*Eddie's Book* is a notable example of how workers can be heard. It supports the importance I place on the telling and hearing stories of those who are rarely heard or noticed in a way that honours their contributions to the collective wisdom. Much can be learned about working life in an industrial setting from the stories and events that led to the publication of *Eddie's Book*. The stories add to a greater understanding of how other people live their lives. They also provide valuable lessons for readers. Everyday stories have been used throughout history as teaching tools. The lessons of Buddhism also are taught through collections of stories, as is the case in many religions.

It was not until well after the book had been published that I realised what I had learnt from the entire episode. I felt intuitively at the time that the whole process was an important part of the research, although I was reluctant to use it as such, because it was around such a sensitive and personal matter. What I came to realise was that the process that went into creating the content for this chapter is a microcosm or a prototype of the rest of my dissertation.

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In the previous four chapters I dealt with the major topics that emerged from the experiences, observations, interviews and conversations I had with the men at the Refractories. I will now turn, in the following chapter, to the process I undertook to reach these interpretations. I will set out the complexities of undertaking the project and how these melded to form the dissertation.
CHAPTER SIX

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ANYWAY?"

Having considered the perspectives of the workers at the Refractories in some depth, it is now time to outline how the process of gathering these perspectives transpired. The placement of these two methodological chapters towards the end of the dissertation rather than the beginning, highlights the importance for me of placing the participants' voices first. Because the discussion of the method is placed at this latter stage of the dissertation, the chapter is reflective, rather than introductory. I look back on how I was able to gather so much rich information, capturing several of the moments that characterised how I pursued the study. In addition, the chapter is reflective in how it lays out lessons I learned about collecting information in a fairly volatile situation, with people with whom I had little in common. I also reflect on my role in the research, the impact I had on the study and how I see it is essential for me to gain a thorough picture of what I observed.

Within the chapter I will consider the workers' views on the study and their impressions of my role in their workplace. I will describe the various influences I saw impacting on the study, including gender differences and development of relationships. The complexities of my role(s) will be discussed in light of the concerns my place at the plant raised for me, including my influence on the outcomes. The following chapter then places the process within a theoretical framework of a number of research paradigms.

Over a period of about three years, I spent four or five days a week at the Refractories for up to six hours a day, first as a consultant and then as a researcher. During this time I was able, through a variety of activities, to build a framework of understanding about how the
workplace functioned. I came to recognise much of the informal social rules and language that was used by the workers to deliberate on issues.

The study was in itself a complex and intricate procedure, being both systematic and intuitive. It had elements of both being planned and negotiated, involving intention and intuition within a flexible pattern. It was necessarily a responsive process, moving with the rhythm of the people in the plant. The process was cyclic, moving from one type of activity to another and back again as the situation demanded. Insights developed irregularly as topics emerged, relying on a flexible, open-ended research design to collect information from its active source.

The caveat I put on the explanations I give of life for workers at the Refractories is that what I write here may not necessarily be precisely what I saw, which Foucault (1970: 9) identifies as a normal way of writing. "It is in vain" Foucault said "to say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say."

Moving With the Process of Gathering Information

Some of the research activities were planned in advance, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, workshops, keeping a personal journal and undertaking a literature review. Others were more informal, such as attending social functions, 'hanging around' the plant, and joining in informal conversations. Each component of the fieldwork made a unique contribution to my insights of the events and strategies that intersected to form my perceptions of life at the Refractories, as shown in Figure 6.1.
focus groups  
workshops  
interviews*

Planned interactions

literature review

analysis of material

reading of documentation

writing and presenting reports

unobtrusive observations

socialising

observations

attending meetings

informal interactions

casual conversations

member checking

'hanging around' the plant

* Unstructured and/or structured with operators, maintenance, union organisers, managers, and supervisors, other parties.

** P = perceptions

Figure 6.1 Intersecting processes that contributed to the formation of my perceptions

This multi-pronged approach to the research extends the usual description of social research in a 'participant/observer' model referred to by Saville-Troike (1986) and Stenhouse (1981). The various strategies I used interwove to reveal the issues and theoretical insights that have become the central foci of the thesis. Each of the interactions, whether planned or informal, formed a vital part of the whole.

Because of these complexities and the multiple roles I played, I was conscious of the many necessary requirements for conducting social research. One of these was tenacity, to be able to continue when various barriers were raised, and flexibility, when plans changed at very short notice. Another was acceptance of individual and organisational needs and accommodation to difficult situations. Patience was called for when I had to wait for the

1 More of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.
right times to talk with people, to sit around while seemingly doing nothing constructive towards my thesis. I was also continuously aware of the social circumstances, politics and doubts of individuals and stakeholder groups. These characteristics were all underpinned by my previous social action and research experience, which allowed me to handle the inevitable complications that transpire within the uncertainty that surrounds a grounded theory approach.  

The process of the dissertation aligned more often with the concept of chaos theory, which mathematically describes the behaviour of non linear dynamic systems, as described by Frederick (1999) in his extensive work on chaos theory and complexity in organisations. It is a state where "things [are] not necessarily ... what they seem to be" Leigh and Spindler (1999: 3). I was attempting to understand the "seemingly random behaviour [that can] grow exponentially over time", which Matthews, White and Long (1999: 448) note in their work on complexity sciences in organisations. The more focussed my interest became on specific issues for the men, the more details I was able to discern, and the more complex my understanding of their world became. I could not predict how the men would react to me or the research process. Nor could I anticipate how the interviews and other interactions I had with the men would proceed. While the process that built this dissertation was generally planned before the study began, that was not how it always eventuated. Much of the information I was able to glean was gained through unplanned, casual encounters. On looking back over the process, it is clear that a research pattern, although not necessarily a linear one, did emerge, as seen in Figure 6.1, out of what seemed to be chaos at the time.

It was comforting during the process of 'muddling through' to know that I was in good company with the anthropologist, Mary Catherine Bateson, who had been told as a child, by her father Gregory Bateson (1972: 19), that coming up with some ordered form of

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thought requires first a state of being in disorder. That was certainly the state in which I found myself as I gathered and analysed the large amounts of material generated by the study. The statement that “much of the world dances to non linear tunes” Lewin and Regine (2000: 17) emphasise is the notion of the science of complexity in relating it to theories on management practice.

A relevant analogy to my approach to this research project can be seen in *Alice In Wonderland*. As Alice began to play the ever-shifting and uncertain game of croquet, the arches (playing-card soldiers) stood upright, the balls (hedgehogs) unravelled and the mallets (flamingos) walked away. Alice stated that the world was becoming “curiouser and curiouser”, a sentiment that expressed my experience of the research process in which I was involved.

The fieldwork progressed through an ever-changing environment from an initial plan, to disorder, back to the plan, again to disorder and eventually to the thesis, following which the process could continue its movement between order and disorder, flexibility and persistence. Before I began the field work, I devised a plan of action that followed earlier research and consultancy work I had undertaken. I presented the plan, as outlined in Figure 6.2, to the senior managers.
Shortly after I presented the plan to the managers, I was introduced by the supervisor to the crew with whom I would be working. I explained to them the nature of my study and outlined what I wanted to do to achieve my intended aim of finding their perspectives of management. They agreed as a group to participate. By the end of the meeting it had been decided that I would also take the minutes at their meetings. In this role, I was placed in the socially accepted female role of 'secretary'. I was not concerned with being given this stereotypical role, because it gave me an opportunity to be able to give something back, in a

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3 From here on called the 'new' crew.

4 The issues of gender, in relation to my place in the plant, will be discussed later in this chapter.
small way, in return for the men’s contribution to my study. At the same time it gave me
an associate role to play in their meetings, instead of only being someone who was watching
them.

The gender difference between the workers and myself created some interesting tensions
and dimensions. As a woman I brought a different energy to the all-male environment, and
provided an interruption to the male context of their workplace. I was aware of an
undertone of what I felt was amusement at seeing a woman on the shop floor, a rare
occurrence at the plant. At times I felt somewhat uncomfortable as I moved about the
plant, feeling the eyes of some of the workers on this ‘strange female presence’ in their all-
male world. When a female becomes part of an all-male environment it can affect the way
men see themselves, Donaldson (1998: 7) asserts in his work on industrial environments,
consequently affecting their reactions to the female in their midst. The all male industrial
labouring world is not seen as a place for a females. It threatens workers’ masculinity to
have their environment encroached upon by women, because their presence disrupts the
social context (op. cit.: 10). Much male behaviour, it is said, is to keep women out of
places that men have adopted as their space, Langelan (1993: 47) notes in his work on
sexual harassment in the workplace.

When I asked the workers of the new crew\(^5\) if it was acceptable for me to attend their
morning meetings, they agreed, at the same time warning me that they would not change
their behaviour because I was present. They were alluding to their language and behaviours
that might offend me as a woman. When others, mostly from the old crew, used language
they considered was not appropriate for a woman to hear, they would apologise, even
though I told them that I did not mind that they used such language. Eventually, they

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\(^5\) As mentioned earlier, the ‘new crew’ refers to the men I began working with for this study, as opposed
to the ‘old’ crew with whom I had been working as a consultant leading up to the study.
stopped apologising and continued the language they were used to using. They seemed to have become accustomed to having me in their space.

Collection of Information

The formal collection of information began in a time of uncertainty around the sale of the plant. Because the company was put on the market soon after the research began, it appeared imperative to collect as much information as possible while the present company retained control. There was no guarantee that the new company would want to continue the commitment to the study (although they eventually did so).

It was within this context of uncertainty and upheaval that I observed the social practices of the workers on a day-to-day basis as I searched for explanations of their physical and social world. One of the most useful methods of collecting information was through unplanned encounters with the men, where I became aware of the more subtle politics in play. Of vital importance to me was that the length and depth of my involvement allowed for the possibility of all those involved to be heard and acknowledged, to be understood, not just fleetingly, but within an extended time frame that allowed for the men to feel comfortable talking with me.

At times, I would by chance meet the workers in the upstairs office or in the corridors where I passed the time of day with them. Through these unplanned moments, when I spent considerable time with the workers as they worked, had lunch breaks, or socialised, I became aware of dominant forms of behaviour—how they talked to each other, how they worked and how they spent their break times. In observing these social practices, I was able to gauge the mood and atmosphere in the plant, and see how people were coping with
the many changes occurring around them. I was also able to offer an interested and caring ear.

I used a personal journal and sometimes took notes while I was talking with the men, if that seemed appropriate at the time. I was able to gather copious amounts of material for what many researchers refer to as dense or ‘thick’ descriptions, so that I could make compelling meaning of the information I gathered. Not surprisingly, this approach of gathering detailed description was extremely time consuming. It generated a large volume of complex data over a long period of time. I needed to regularly check back with the men and follow up issues and my perceptions to ensure what I was following was in line with what they thought. These interactions and their analysis took most of my working time during the eighteen months of fieldwork. Much of that time was spent listening to the workers talk about a variety of things in which they were interested. I tried not to let an opportunity go by when I could engage with the workers.

Sidelights

Tex liked to talk about various events in his life, including how he had built his garden and back patio around his love of feeding the native birds, particularly the magpies and kookaburras. We often spent ten or fifteen minutes in conversation on the topic as we stood or sat in one of the temporary tin sheds within the larger shed.

Saul regularly talked to me about work issues, as well as his family problems with his children and step-children, as we stood by one of the mixers or the kiln near where he worked.

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7 As Pandit (1996: 9) states is expected in grounded theory research.
8 Personal journal (9.10.1997).
On one occasion I was asked by a supervisor if I would help Vince with some issues he had around his step-mother's death, which I did.¹

It was partly through social conversations such as these that I became familiar with and immersed in the site. This level of involvement is noted by many social researchers as an essential element in social research.¹⁰

The factor of time was a pervasive element throughout the fieldwork. The study captured a span of time within a long history of the plant. The collection of the material was encased within the imposed time-frame of a thesis, governed by the prevailing conditions at the plant. It was a time of trepidation for many of the workers because of the extent of the changes to the company.

The Informants

Of the one hundred and thirty workers at the plant, I talked with over a hundred during the time I was at the Refractories. Most of these were casual conversations on a regular basis, whenever I was at the plant. I conducted pre-arranged interviews with twenty-four of these men. Seven of the workers were key informants and were very generous with their time. I interviewed four of them several times to expand on particular points that had been raised in their and other interviews. These men proved most able to articulate their feelings and assess the situation at the plant. Ray, for example, had some deep insights into life at the plant and the complexities of communication, Nat reflected upon and assessed approaches to management strategies and Chad had some farsighted visions about the direction in which the business was going. Hence these men have been quoted more often in

¹ Personal journal (19.6.1998).
¹⁰ Such as: Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Rosen (1991); Saville-Troike (1986).
leading the discussions in the dissertation.\textsuperscript{11} I found that what they had to say usually substantiated what others talked to me about in the interviews, casually or in the focus groups or workshop sessions.

Two of the men in particular (Ray and Ned) were very forthcoming in talking to me about their impressions of life at the plant. They lived near my home and I saw them quite regularly away from the workplace. They talked with me after they finished work on a weekly basis over a period of about a year. They were both working at the Refractories with the intention of making enough money to travel. They saw themselves as less attached to the job than some of the others. There were also those who talked with me more on a casual basis, both inside and outside the workplace. Many of the other men continued to talk with me well after the formal fieldwork had been completed. Whenever I visited the plant, right up until about two months before the dissertation was completed, they would talk quite enthusiastically to me about current events and happenings at the plant.

The men ranged in their Levels from the base of the hierarchical ladder, workers who followed directions to undertake the heavy manual labour of lifting, mixing and carrying heavy materials, to team leaders who oversaw the work of the others while still doing some of the manual work. The men worked either as operators or trades people, electricians or fitters and welders in Monolithics, Castings or generally across the plant. Their ages ranged from mid-twenties to late fourties.

The specific quotations I have used in this dissertation arose almost entirely from the interviews, because they were taken from the directly transcribed words of the men. The focus groups and the workshops proved to be useful supplements to the interviews and

\textsuperscript{11} See Appendix 11 for details.
analysis of the material from the interviews, as did the casual conversations. My observations around the shop floor and at meetings added further to my depth of understanding of what I had been able to gather at the interviews.

The Interview Process

The interview process began with one-to-one, largely unstructured interviews with the workers from the new crew, shortly after I had been introduced to them in May 1997. The first of these coincided with the notice of the sale of the company, adding an unexpected dimension to the research. This first series of interviews continued over a two-month period. The next round of interviews with a further five workers, began eight months and later continued until August 1998. The extended time frame was due to unforeseen circumstances at the plant which delayed my ability to conduct interviews for several months. The interviews lasted between half an hour and two and a half hours, totalling about thirty hours.

The workers of the new crew resolutely stated they did not want their interviews tape recorded because of their fear that taped interviews could be used against them at some later date. Fortunately I could write shorthand. Recording in this way had its disadvantages. I was not able to get every word written down. As I wrote, much of my time was spent looking at the paper rather than at the participants, so that I missed much of their body language. There were also some advantages. Whilst taking notes in shorthand, I needed to have total concentration on the words being spoken. Because the process also focused my attention on the writing, it gave the speakers free rein to speak without interruption, or intimidation by eye contact if they happened to be shy, which some appeared to be. In

\[12\] Without deliberately planning for it to be so, the quotations selected for this dissertation have included every worker who was interviewed.

\[13\] There could be another whole thesis written on this topic of the delay.
some instances, the very act of my writing seemed to relieve some tension in the interview situation because the men were not being scrutinised. Writing also avoided the problems that can occur with the technical aspects of tape recording.

To begin the task of interviewing, I prepared a schedule of interview times, based around the workers' shift work availability. These times frequently had to be rescheduled to fit in with workplace demands. Often the men were unable to come to interviews as planned. Some told me they were reluctant to come. Sometimes they were working on a specific task that could not be postponed, or machinery had broken down which always had to be attended to first. On occasion strikes or unplanned work meetings were called or work schedules were abruptly changed. Hence I met with whoever was at hand at the time, or just waited around until someone was available. The difficulties I encountered in being able to meet with the workers are classified in Table 6.1 to show a separation between the workers' personal issues and those that were work related.
Table 6.1  Factors that affected worker participation in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Organisational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• sickness</td>
<td>• too busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• misunderstanding</td>
<td>• levels of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• scepticism</td>
<td>• clashes with other meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• other commitments</td>
<td>• shift changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mistrust</td>
<td>• downsizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• perceived educational and social differences</td>
<td>• change in work schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• suspicion/uncertainty of my role and my connection to management</td>
<td>• tensions amongst work groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• unfamiliarity with the research process and me</td>
<td>• clashes in timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• disinterest/no value seen</td>
<td>• machine breakdowns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• gender differences</td>
<td>• non-availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• researcher relationship with management</td>
<td>• strikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• lack of supervisor’s support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the workers told me they liked coming to the interview because it took them away from their everyday working situation. “A change is as good as a holiday”, Harry said, as we walked into the meeting room. Once they were actually in the interview the men demonstrated a willingness to talk about their work (some more than others).

14 The dichotomy of Table 6.1 was not completely clear-cut. Some items could have been classified into either or both columns. I have separated them based on my observations of the sense I got from the men for their reluctance to participate. Some of the personal factors were influenced by their sense of their place within the organisation. And some of the organisational factors were influenced by personal issues.
The initial interviews with the workers were held in a rather barren neutral coloured meeting room located on one side of the shop floor. It was a temporary tin shed, containing a long metal table, chairs, a white board and an air-conditioner. I placed the chairs (the only two in the room) diagonally opposite each other at the corner of one end of the table, with the intention of creating a degree of communication and connection, while at the same time building some personal distance with the table. This positioning of the table in between the chairs was intended to create a ‘conversational space’ (Jane Dutton, pers. comm., Feb., 2000), while minimising any sense of intimidation I or the men may have felt, in line with Goffman’s (1963: 99) comments on facilitation of informal talk.

Some of the later interviews took place in ‘my’ upstairs office. In here there was a more comfortable atmosphere, where the participants could be offered tea or coffee. Here we would both sit at the side of a desk on an angle, half facing each other. This arrangement provided me with the necessary space to write at the desk as they talked, and still maintain a level of personal connection. Yet other interviews were held in the offices of the leading hands, located in the centre of the plant. These offices were very worn and had a dirty appearance because of their position in the plant.

The pre-planned interviews took the form of generally open discussion, in a semi-structured format where the workers were asked to comment on their perceptions of management at the Refractories. The purpose of this approach was to maximise diversity in the men’s responses. These interviews were the basis of my initial analysis, with topics later substantiated by insights from informal conversations, focus groups and workshops. In these initial interviews I worked to avoid using pre-determined questions or selecting specific topics to influence the direction of the interviews because of the risk of taking control over the flow of dialogue. This approach of following rather than leading the interview is essential, the novelist Helen Garner (1996: 9) maintains, in writing about her
own interviewing techniques. The relinquishing of control is not a form of passivity, but rather an abstention of managing the direction of the conversation. This direction brings with it much uncertainty, Glesne and Peshkin (1991: 63) note in their work on qualitative research methodology. Was I able to let go enough to find out what the men really thought? Would the informality produce enough meaningful information?

Informality in the interviews is recommended by several social science researchers because it tends to minimise researcher-bias. It “establishes rapport and allows presuppositions and frames of reference of the interviewee to emerge”, (Belenky et al., 1989: 10) while allowing the participants to have more control over the content of the interview. Interviews involving specific questions would have meant that I was leading them. The information gleaned from them would have followed my predetermined line of thought about the workplace, rather than gathering information from the workers’ base of knowledge and perception. The radical educator, Paulo Freire (1970: 86), in his literacy work with oppressed farm workers in Brazil, specified the need to follow a more informal path rather than be led down the path by the dominant voice of the researcher. One of the benefits of using unstructured interviews was the men did not seem to suffer from the tedium or boredom mentioned by Traweek (1988: 12), which arises when an interviewer asks what can seem, to an interviewee, like mundane or trivial questions.

During his interview, Stan threw in comments from ‘left field’: “Did I tell you I had a dog? I thought I’d just add some light stuff”, he brightly stated. When he gauged I looked bemused and surprised, he commented that he was making an effort to “lighten up” the

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15 The links between research and control are further expanded upon in Chapter Seven.
16 A fear also expressed by the well-known Australian author Helen Garner (1995).
17 Such as Belenky et al. (1989); Briggs (1986); Glesne & Peshkin (1991) and Saville-Troike (1986).
18 The notion of researcher bias is explored further in Chapter Seven.
19 The feminist researchers, Cotterill & Letherby (1993: 73) note in their work on storytelling in research.
20 Back (1997); Jeffrey (1995) support this notion through their work in gaining meaning through ethnography.
interview. Later in the same interview, he jokingly asked for “royalty rights” to “the Refractories’ Bible”, which he perceived “could make a fortune!” He then told me he had made these comments to make the interview “more interesting and personal.” His manner when he said these things did not give me the impression he was uninterested in the interview; rather that he wanted to hide a sense of discomfort with the interview atmosphere, as well as to wrest control of the interview process, without any practiced mechanism to do so. He seemed to be quite unsure of this whole process, which was quite unfamiliar to him.21

In effect, the casual nature of the interchanges in the interviews seemed to be a more satisfactory way of amassing information than would have occurred in a structured, interviewer-led discussion. By entering into the interaction with this relatively open approach, rather than having pre-determined questions to answer, the workers were given the opportunity to take the lead in expressing what was important to them.

Not all the workers at the Refractories were comfortable with this format of not being asked specific questions. Some needed to be prompted to continue the conversations.

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21 Interview (30.6.1997).
To Question or Not to Question

Nat suggested to me during our interview that he would have been able to give “better answers” if I had asked him direct questions, because he said he felt he was unable to give me the information I needed. His responses were quite profound. I was able to say to him the information he was giving me was extremely valuable, and that if I had asked him specific questions it would probably have meant the discussion would have been led by my interests rather than focusing on issues of importance to him. He seemed to accept this explanation and comfortably continued to talk about the topics raised.22

Each of the men responded differently to the interview. Some began by talking about the company’s basic purpose, which they saw was to make money and supply cheap products to BHP Steel. Others began by talking of their relationships with their fellow workers and their dissatisfaction with management. The interviews that followed the announcement of the sale of the company began with comments related to the uncertainty the men felt with the anticipated changes. Stan had, as was often the case, quite a different tack. He began by asking me questions about the research: “Do all of the interviews go the same way? Are they the same? Why are you doing this so late in life?”

As the interviews progressed the men raised issues about the plant, the managers, their peers, their work, personal matters and broader industrial issues. The talk flowed smoothly in most cases. When it did not, if the men seemed unsure of what to say or appeared to be embarrassed at the situation, I asked questions or made comments as a prompt, following on from earlier statements in the interview, or around topics that I had considered before the interview (see prompt questions in Appendix 12).

22 Interview (6.6.1998).
Some Examples of Interview Prompts

Uly said: I think they [management] know what's happening. The guys here will tell management how they feel, one way or another.

Prompt: Does management listen to the guys?

Uly's Response: I don't know. I think a lot of the staff here are really good, but a lot of management from [the plant manager] up ... I get on alright with [the plant manager] but I don't think he's a very good manager because he doesn't come across well.

(This was part of Ully's reference to management styles. I picked up on this particular point because he was alluding to the workers having a say in either an open or closed way, and I wondered if he thought they were acknowledged). 23

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Prompt: Has the uncertainty affected work?

Cain's Response: Not a lot of care is being put into things.

(The reason I asked this question, which came about half way through an eighty minute interview, was because Cain had moved the interview conversation away from his perspective to helpfully telling me how I could get information about BHP from a website. I used the prompt to shift the conversation back to focusing on his thoughts about the plant). 24

Each interview was a "unique social interaction that involve[d] a negotiation of social roles and frames of reference", Briggs (1986: 24) notes in his work on the role of sociolinguistics in interviews. Some of the workers were more vocal, perceptive and articulate than others. Some were extremely forthcoming, others more reticent, appearing to be overcome at being interviewed. Some told their stories in a narrative form while others talked in more factual

23 Interview (23.6.1997).
24 Interview (5.6.1997).
terms, describing principles about particular perspectives of management or their own role in the workplace.

I assessed the progress of each interview individually, depending on the response of the individual worker and my interpretation of their level of comfort. Depending on my assessment of the level of comfort and general personality type categorisations, I varied my level of involvement to follow their leads. They raised workplace and personal topics, such as football, families, music or gardening. I saw these topics as equally important as my selected topics. The different parts of workers' lives are not isolated from each other, as Donaldson (1997: 14) demonstrated in his work linking workplace and other parts of people's lives. Every conversation, observation and interaction that is presented in the telling of a story adds to its overall importance and meaning.

In accepting the diverse conversations as valuable, the interviews became a joint construction that led to what Glesne and Peshkin (1991: 65) refer to as "serendipitous learnings." For example, I was able to gather unexpected insights into the relationship the workers made between work and external factors, such as the economy and the state of the industry, in the formation of their identity. Most of the conversations, however, were work-related.

These diversions from the main interview topic are of concern to some researchers, who state the diversions create more information than the researcher can handle. While the

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25 As explained by Boas (1996); Briggs (1962); Eysenk & Eysenk (1956); Hollier et al. (1993). My reference to personality types is not usually linked with social construction. How it helped me was to give me an empathic framework from which to operate in the interviews. I was able to be aware of people's apparent preferences for interaction. For example, if a worker was a reticent type of person, I was aware of allowing for pauses in the conversation, and if another was more the type of person who wanted to hurry through the experience to get on with other things, that too was accepted without any concern on my part.

26 Argyris (1993); Goodall (1994).

27 Parlett & Hamilton (1983: 72) have noted this in other research work they have observed.
content of the interviews sometimes moved to peripheral matters, it always returned to the main topic. The more the workers were able to share on a broad range of subjects, the more chance there was for me to gain a thorough picture of the organisation and those who worked within it. I also saw these conversations as an important part of developing my working relationship with the workers and, most importantly, it was a comfortable and natural way for me to behave.

Leading off the interviews with a specific statement, however, meant there was a specific parameter to which to return. This focus on the central issue was partly brought about by my initial explanation of the topic at the beginning of each interview, and partly by my prompts when things looked as if they might stray too far from the topic. That helped to keep me from becoming overwhelmed with extraneous information. The ongoing cyclical method of proceeding through the study also helped to keep me focussed on information that was relevant for the thesis. As soon as interviews were completed, I typed up the transcripts and analysed them with a system of categorisation and analysis (examples are at Appendix 13), linking statements together. I was self-monitoring in each interview, assessing what I thought was giving me the information that might lead to deeper insights into the workplace.

I took it as my role to then sift through the large amount of information that was generated, and to select statements which were relevant to this study. Helen Garner, the Australian author (1995: 9), comments that it is to be expected people will tell an interviewer more than they want to know because “most ordinary people can't really believe that anyone else is interested in them.”

Most of the men expressed a fascination at being part of the interview and feedback process, a situation that none of them had experienced before. “It's weird asking what you
like about work”, Deon commented during the interview. Most required little prompting to talk about their perceptions of management and the workplace. Vince invited me to conduct the interview at his place so that he could talk more openly and give me more time. The general responses of the workers during the interviews were polite and friendly. I was surprised at how freely the members of the new crew spoke to me, a relative stranger. As noted, the majority of the men actively participated in the interviews, and they also spoke easily with me in casual situations, and sometimes casually called to see me in my office to tell me things they thought I might want to know.

As the interviews proceeded, the workers appeared to become more relaxed\(^{28}\) and less nervous about what they were saying, as they realised their points of view were being acknowledged. I too became more relaxed because of their interest and involvement in the interview. Yet, even when people are willing to share, “[they] know more than [they] can say”, the educational researcher, Kemmis (1983: 125) notes in his assessment of interview techniques and processes. They “act much more competently than [they] can describe”, as noted in an anonymously written article by the Institute for Research on Learning (1995). The doing is much easier than describing the action. In addition to this, because of the differences in willingness or ability of participants to impart their knowledge, only pieces of the story ever get told, as Vaughan (1990: 197) notes in her extensive work on interviews with individuals and couples. Stan implied that the other workers might need some help to tell me what they knew. He suggested that I “should have a bottle of alcohol to loosen the talk; or that truth drug!”

Stan was implying that the other workers would not be forthcoming in what they told me, perhaps because I was seen by some as a management ‘spy’. They did not know what they could expect of me. Even if, as Stan suggested, the others were not telling the ‘truth’,

\(^{28}\) A common phenomena in interviews, according to Bogden & Biklen (1992: 40).
Back (1994: 41) asserts that no answers in interviews are lies, but rather a particular way of answering. "The fact that the respondent chose to answer in this way represents an attitude, perhaps of fear, hostility, or misplaced sense of humour", Back states. Despite Stan’s doubts, I found it was the openness of the workers in talking to me that made this study so valuable and insightful for me. Yet, as the anthropologist Stoller (1989: 127) relates in his story of his attempts to find out some 'facts' about villagers, he finds to his dismay that they have told him what they think he wants to hear because, they say: "What’s the difference?"

**The Workers’ Willingness to Talk to Me**

When I went to do some photocopying in another part of the building, Don came into the room. He was from the ‘old’ crew. He was a very intense character. About twelve months earlier, during my time as a consultant at the Refractories, he and I had experienced some disagreements. I had heard since that time that he had been talking somewhat negatively about me to others around the plant. When he came into the room where I was talking with a company trainer, Don joined in the conversation. As we talked, he poured himself several cups of water from the water dispenser. This seemed to be giving him a reason to stay in the room to talk. After the trainer left Don stayed on for about an hour of in depth conversation about the conduct of the company, the role of the unions and the state of the industry generally.\(^{29}\)

So despite apparent animosity toward me, Don seemed to want to use me as a resource to open up on issues that were of concern to him. Several times after this he commented to me that even if I was not doing anything to change things in the workplace “at least [I was] someone to talk to.”

\(^{29}\) Personal journal (2.7.1997).
The reticence of some of the workers’ was to be expected. Belenky et al. (1986: 138) note, in reporting on their research into women’s voices, that “answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking.”

Throughout the research, both with the fieldwork and the literature review, I took on an attitude of learner.\(^\text{30}\) I approached the interviews with an attitude of a “beginner’s mind” Remen (1996: 304) talks of in relation to learning from other people’s stories. My behaviour as a learner seemed to contribute to the creation of a space of openness and reflection for the workers. In turn, it was their openness that allowed me to learn as well.

As part of my intention of demonstrating to the men my interest in learning from them, I used an ‘active listening’ approach.\(^\text{31}\) This involved me in attending closely to what the men were saying in as non-judgemental a way as I could. I acknowledged what they said, in an empathic framework, reflecting back to them what I had heard them say. I avoided taking over conversations, or using any form of derision or non-acceptance of the workers’

\(^{30}\) This concept of learner is expounded by the Russian educational philosopher, Vygotsky (translated by Cole et al., 1987), in his work on contextual, person-centred learning, and also by Glesne and Peshkin (1991: 80) in their work on the protocols of research interviewing Cornelius & Faire, 1994).
words. As the men talked, I monitored my own attitudes and observations. My paying
attention to what they were saying allowed relationships to be built that encouraged the
men to express their thoughts and feelings, as I found to be the case with the participants in
my Honours Masters thesis. The active listening approach also encouraged the men to
feel confident I was listening to them and so encouraged their openness. Active listening is
usually referred to in therapeutic terms, to benefit the talker, whereas in effect it is a two-
way process. I also gained from actively listening to the men. We were engaged in an
intersubjective interchange where we were both listening and learning.

When it appeared that the men had come to the end of wanting to talk, the interviews came
to a close. It was not difficult to assess when the workers had said what they wanted to
say and were ready to leave. This was also a situation that the ethnographer Vaughan
(1990: 200) said she found. In some instances the men would say they had something else
to do: it was their crib break, it was time to go home, or there was a union meeting to which
they wanted to go. Some of the men asked me if I had got what I wanted from the
interview. It is not likely that they would have told me 'everything' they could have,
although they had said what seemed to be reasonable for them at that time. At the end of
the interview with Harry, he said: "When I leave here [the interview] I'll think of things I
could have said." Harry had realised, as I did, that it was not likely that he would have told
me all he could have in this one interview.

Because being in an interview situation was so anomalous for the men, it could only be
expected to provide a snap shot of their thoughts at one particular moment, within the
constraints of being "separated from their broader patterns of thinking, feeling, and
speaking" (Briggs (1989: 2). Nor is it a typical way for me to interact with people.

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Much of what the workers were thinking would have remained tacit, hidden or obscured, influenced by external memories of things that occurred and internal memories of imagined or planned events. The workers would not have likely revealed everything they could have, only what they would want the ‘public’ to know. They would also have been affected by what they felt was safe to impart, partly influenced by their impressions of me. It was most likely that they were withholding much that they were unsure about, or they felt was inappropriate to tell me. They may also have considered that what they had to say would not be of interest to me. And what of the workers who did not participate? Theirs were perspectives I did not hear at all.

The things the men did reveal to me would have been influenced by many factors. The interviews were influenced by my interest in what the men had to say and their obvious interest in the topic. Their understanding of the study also affected their contributions. Cain, for example, asked me “What do you want me to talk about?” when I told him of my interest in workers’ perspectives of management. There were also suggestions that what they told me was somewhat dependent on what they thought might happen to the information they gave me, and how safe they felt to tell me what they thought. They also indicated that they had been talking about the study with their mates before they came to talk to me, such as when Ned told me he thought he was coming to see a ‘shrink’, because that is what his mates had told him. They appeared to be conscious of who else was present and where we were at the time—on the shop floor, in the interview room or in places away from work.

The Who, When, Where and What of Conversation

I was talking with Tex in one of the sheds on the shop floor. No one else was present.

We both sat on desk tops, talking about the site and other things, in a casual and relaxed

These are some of the factors that influence the information shared at interviews, noted by Cohen (1993) and Gergen (1991a).
way. I was enjoying the conversation. We talked for some time until Simon, a worker from Tex’s crew who had not been happy with my research taking place, noisily opened the door and stepped up the two stairs into the room. As he did this, Tex deftly leapt off the desk and walked towards an adjoining room. He was quite embarrassed to have been found by the doubtful Simon, talking in such an animated way to me.34

Vince often came upstairs to my office to talk to me about a variety of things. When he did this, he was quite conscious of who was around to see him come in to talk to me. He would come to the door and stand there looking around him and behind him, and then come into the office. On occasions he would close the door, and at other times he would stand away from the door where he could not be seen. I was not altogether sure who he was trying to ‘hide’ from—his work mates, or the managers who might see him as ‘slacking off’ from work.35

My understanding at the time was that there was tension between relating to me and at the same time being part of the crew. Because the workers sometimes told me about issues that deeply affected them, I naturally became interested and involved in their conversations. Pawson (1996) suggests that it is inappropriate for researchers to reveal their views or feelings on any subject. I did not attempt to feign a lack of my own feelings when the men were relating troubling, emotional or poignant stories to me. To remain cold and distant in response to another person’s distress or concern did not seem to me to be an appropriate way to behave at the time, even if it was part of a research process. The general flow of the

34 Personal journal (7.5.98).
35 Personal journal (9.11.98).
conversation in the interviews was comfortable, and in most cases the men talked without me needing to ask leading questions, although I did so sometimes in as informal way as possible to help the conversation to flow. For example: Ully, as part of a statement about management plans said: “I think they [management] know what's happening. The guys here will tell management how they feel, one way or another!” Then there was a pause and I asked: “Does management listen to the guys? I asked this because I wondered if he thought the men’s ideas were taken up by management. Figure 6.4 shows the dynamic that developed during the interviews.
Progression of interviews: a non-linear, non-hierarchical process

Through my extensive contact with the workers, whether in pre-arranged situations or through less planned encounters I had with the men, I gathered a great deal of information on their perspectives of life at BHP Refractories. My emphasis on the use of an iterative, recurring process of gathering information and gaining comments on my analysis of the input from the men on a regular basis, enabled me to gather the breadth of information that has contributed to the formation of the images of the workplace presented in this dissertation.

Iterative Process of Gathering and Analysing Information from the Participants

As part of the iterative process, transcripts were given to the workers in a sealed envelope as soon as possible after the interviews, sometimes on the same day, and no more than a few days later, when a weekend intervened. In most cases when the transcripts were handed back to the men, often as they went about their work, they read them immediately. They generally smiled as they perused their own words in quiet concentration. They made
few comments, except perhaps to say that they were surprised they had said so much. In some instances they shared parts of their transcripts openly with their co-workers who were present, indicating that they were proud of what they had said, usually in relation to statements about poor management.

In addition to the individual transcripts, I also presented a *generic* form of response to the men at focus groups and workshops in a *format* of claims, issues and concerns (as outlined in Table 6.2 and in Appendix 14). These statements were gathered from my initial analysis of the interviews in the form of claims, issues and concerns. The format of the analysis was taken from Guba and Lincoln’s (1989: 42) model of data analysis, and links well with Strauss and Corbin’s (1990: 38) method of searching for phenomena which can be collected into categories.

As the workers saw the analysis, it signalled to them that something concrete was arising from what they had been telling me. They generally agreed with the analysis, and stated that it fairly represented their individual and collective points of view. Their acceptance of the content was not surprising, as the phrases, terms and labels I used were taken directly from their own words. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.2</th>
<th>An example of claims, issues and concerns as presented to the workers for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Claim</strong></td>
<td><strong>Issue</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our future is uncertain</td>
<td>We’re afraid for our future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I took notes during the focus group meetings which were held in the board room, as seven or eight of the men talked about the issues raised in the analysis. Points were written on a
large photocopy white board as the focus for discussion. These sessions provided an opportunity for mutual reflection, as the workers shared their thoughts with each other. Through this activity they were brought more intensely into the process of the study. More intensely because it gave them more time to talk together in a constructive way about their lives at work; and more intensely for me because it provided me with an opportunity to deal more fully with the issues they had raised individually. They used the time to openly discuss the issues amongst each other, so that I could observe their interactions and the responses they made to the statements.

The responses from these groups were incorporated into further analyses. By the "continuing dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, and reanalysis [the] hermeneutic dialectic" approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 72) engaged the workers in reflective dialogue that provided information sensitive to their perspectives. The extended discussion and engagement created a form of social consensus which Gergen (1991a: 81) states he prefers to observation of 'facts'.

Two weeks after doing a set of focus groups, I facilitated a workshop with the twenty one members of the new crew. Workshop activities resulted in animated discussion on the claims, and corresponding issues and concerns we had discussed in the smaller focus groups. These were rated in order of priority by the workers (see Appendix 15).

Following the interviews, focus groups and workshop, I wrote a draft paper on the findings that had emerged which I would present at a management discourse conference in London. I took statements from this draft as a lead for the next round of interviews (statements are shown in Appendix 16). Key topics raised in these interviews were related to: decision making opportunities for the workers; the divisions between the workers and management; workers gaining their identity from their peers; and lack of opportunities for reflective
sessions for the workers. In this process I had translated my findings into two languages, as described by the organisational researcher Steier (1991: 174): one for the research community (the conference) and another for the workplace (the interviews).

In raising these specific points, as a basis for the second round of interviews, the men engaged in even more in-depth reflections than they had in the initial unstructured interviews. The statements gave the participants a tangible basis from which to contemplate the issues that I recognised as important to them. It allowed them to respond to, and question, ideas that were emerging from the workers collectively. This focussed inquiry would not have been as fruitful without the initial process of interviews, focus groups, workshops and analysis of the initial input from the men.

A further form of checking on the workers' responses to my analysis arose out of a presentation I made to academics and business people connected with my University. Three of the workers and the new manager attended the presentation at my invitation. Afterwards the workers enthusiastically expressed agreement with the tenor of the presentation and gave their approval of what I had presented, literally giving it the 'thumbs-up'. As part of that presentation, a large poster shown in Figure 6.5 was displayed at the University along with many more from other post graduate students. I later took my poster to the plant for the workers to see. The poster included quotations from interviews, the figure of the chasm between the workers and the managers36 and an outline of the methodology used for the study.

36 As mentioned in Chapter Three.
Figure 6.5 Poster for University presentation
When I took the poster down to the shop floor, about ten workers gathered around it and began a lengthy discussion amongst themselves and with me as to its meaning and merits. Not all of these men had been involved in the interviews. They commented on what the various parts meant to them and to the company generally. They noticed how their statements sometimes contradicted each other, statements such as: "I don’t want to be involved in the decisions" and "They should involve us in everything." This led them to discuss the difficulties of being able to change things at the Refractories because of their divergent ways of seeing the world. They were aware of the complexities of making generalised statements about the situation and acknowledged a concept of what could be referred to as multiple realities, commenting on the different statements and perceptions that each worker had. As Vince insightfully noted: "It's all true for each person."

The activity of discussing the poster was another way for me to double-check the meanings I had drawn from information I was receiving from the workers. The casual conversations, focus groups, transcripts from interviews and workshops also acted as forms of ‘member checking’ (Czarniawska & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994: 314), or what MacDonald and Walker (1993) refer to as “retrospective control”, helped me to formulate impressions that met with the agreement of the workers. The member checking process continued long after the field study phase was completed, giving me the opportunity to continue to ascertain that the picture I was presenting was acceptable to the workers as a fair representation of what they were saying.

The emphasis I place on the constant involvement between what the men said and my analysis of what they said is a vital part of my approach to social research. It was important for me in two ways. It provided me with confirmation of my assessment of the
situation, and it demonstrated to the men that what they were saying was actually being heard and acknowledged as legitimate and authoritative.
"What Are You [Cecily] Trying to Do?"

I'm not interested in being part of this. They don't listen to us at the end of the day. You leave and we're stuck in the same shit as when you came. (Simon)

I find it all totally ludicrous to be doing this while the team is being ripped apart through retrenchments and downsizing, and in financial difficulties. (Cain)

What's the aim of all this? What are we going to get out of it? (Tex)

What are you trying to do? How is it going to make things better for me? Are they [managers] saying that you're going to make things better? Are you going to give us ideas of how to deal with other people? It's too late now, anyway [referring to the sale of the company]. (Rohan)

While most of the workers were extremely cooperative in working with me in this study, many were initially very sceptical. They could not see any advantages in it for them at the time. Their doubts were not always easy to respond to. They indicated that the advantages for them were obscure. Although I explained that the intention of the study was to put the workers' points of view across so that what they had to say could be heard by their managers and those working in management generally, some were not convinced. They originally saw it as: "yet another one of management's new fads", or "another management attempt to change us", or "a waste of time." Some of the discomfort the workers expressed at having me conduct research at the Refractories arose from their perception of me as a 'plant' for management. This sprang from my entré through senior management (rather difficult to avoid, as it was the senior manager who had invited me to undertake the study). Hence I was perceived by the workers to have alliances with the managers. I was not trusted.

Ray suggested that my passage through the 'workers' world' might have been made more fluid if I had come in via the union. "If you were going to do this [the study], then it would have been better to come in through the union, because coming through management you're
seen as one of the 'enemy'," he said as we talked about the initial lack of acceptance of the study by some of the workers, and their scepticism of my role. He was expressing a common suspicion amongst the workers of anything that was connected with management. John Shotter (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) highlighted this dilemma when he said: "Anyone who is a friend of the enemy is not a friend of mine." And yet there were also benefits in coming through management because it gave me legitimacy to talk to the men at any time. Part of my role in working at the plant as consultant was seen by the plant manager as giving the men a chance to talk to someone outside of the company. This gave me a legitimate position from which to engage the men in conversation during their working hours.

Not all of the men at the Refractories wanted to work with me on the research. Some said they were reluctant to participate in these types of sessions because they just wanted to "get on with the job" or thought that it would be a "waste of time", or perhaps it was:

A good idea. But what's going to change? No one's going to change anything. (Ray)

Others thought these sorts of opportunities could help in creating a more favourable atmosphere in which to work.

I think it'd be a good thing if we had an opportunity to talk about things. A lot of the talk about work goes on in here in a negative way, just in between machine breakdowns, just standing around, this that and the other. So, if we had a place to do that, to get our opinions out and heard, even if it was only by our mates, even if there was no management there, at least it would make us feel better. And it would make us feel more together. (Ned)

In an attempt to overcome some of this uneasiness the men had around my role, I did what I thought appropriate to accommodate to their workplace, wearing clothing similar to that of the workers rather than management—navy blue, rather than the light blue of
management. I wore the same safety gear of a hard hat, safety glasses, yellow safety vest and steel capped work boots. I spent as much time as I could on the shop floor rather than in the offices. I bought raffle tickets the men had to sell. I socialised with them at social functions. The stand-off response of the new crew\textsuperscript{38} eased after a few months. There was noticeably less awkwardness in their interactions with me as they got used to me being around.

**Indications of How the Research was Viewed by Some of the Workers**

In the early stages of the study Simon was quite derisive of both me and the research project, saying to his workmates in a meeting where I was explaining what I wanted to do, that my work was a waste of time and that he saw that the crew were being used as part of a "management plan [to] get at us." Taking another tack, when the others did not agree with him, he said he would not be part of the interview process because, he said, he did not have time. He questioned how the firm could afford the time for the men to be interviewed when they could not pay them for overtime.\textsuperscript{39}

And yet, in time, Simon talked to me quite often as I moved about the plant. His resistance to the study eased, but he would still not participate in interviews. He was able to both resist and accommodate the study without losing face. His response also provided an example of the tension that existed between the workers, as well as between the workers and the managers.

Barriers were broken down when I was asked to conduct grief debriefing sessions with the workers after one of their workmates died (as described in Chapter Five). I was no longer

\textsuperscript{38} As was explained in Chapter Four, the meaning of this term 'new crew' is used, to distinguish it from the men with whom I had already been working at the plant as a consultant before this research project began.

\textsuperscript{39} Personal journal (22.6.1997).
so much the strange female academic wandering around the plant. I had a place as a confidante.

Another factor in my favour was that by the time I began conducting the study, I was not being paid as a consultant by the company. When the workers learned this, there was a clear easing of tension. They first expressed their surprise and then turned this into a slight on management, who they perceived as again "getting something for nothing."

The study moved through fluctuating stages of rejection, suspicion and acceptance by the workers. The perception of my presence as an outsider, who was brought in by management to change the way the men conducted their working lives, did ease generally over the time of the study. I became more often someone to talk to rather than a friend of the opposition, some of the men told me. Others continued to overtly reject my presence at the plant. The driving force behind the rejection was my link with management and the workers' suspicion of management's motives.

Other Support and Sources of Information

My perception of the role that management played in this research study was one of mutual benefit. The plant manager invited me to undertake my doctoral research at the Refractories while I was working there as a consultant and simultaneously undertaking my honours masters degree. He saw my research role as a dual one of research and consultancy, linking my study with the development work with which I was involved with the workers. His support included agreement to participate in the government's 'Application for Strategic Partnership with Industry—Research and Training (SPIRT) Support' scheme for my dissertation research, which involved the company in financial and
in-kind support.\textsuperscript{40} The plant manager’s interest and assistance in the study was most encouraging. I also had a great deal of encouragement from other managers, in that I was allowed clear access to the workers at any mutually convenient time and place. I was also ‘inducted’ into the plant through a process of testing my knowledge of the safety aspects of the plant, the same process employees undergo. This allowed me freedom of access to all parts of the plant. This level of support is not always available in business organisations.\textsuperscript{41}

Not all of the managers were so supportive, though. One of the supervisors quite often tried to stop his workers from participating in either interviews or focus groups because he said they were too busy and he did not want to give them time away from their work.

In the main though I felt as though I was part of the company, particularly in ‘my’ office, where the workers and other staff would come to discuss personal and workplace issues, and where I was able to transcribe the interviews. Having this office carried with it both benefits and disadvantages. It provided me with a permanent home from which to work, and a place where the workers could place me geographically. At the same time, it aligned my position even more with management because I was located in their area. I needed to tread a fine line between interacting with management and at the same time being someone with whom the workers felt comfortable to open up to.

The insights I received from interviews and focus groups with the managers, as well as meetings with the three relevant union organisers who were external to the workplace, strengthened my study by placing the workers’ perceptions in some context. As mentioned in the Preface, while the assistance and input of these people is acknowledged

\textsuperscript{40} The company agreed to pay A$5,000 in cash toward the scholarship and provide a further $5,000 in kind, through the use of resources at the plant.

\textsuperscript{41} A statement supported by the comments of Bob Jackall (1988, and pers. comm., Feb., 2000); Sandelands, \textit{pers. comm.}, Feb., 2000); and Traweek (1988).
and greatly valued, their perspectives on the subjects raised in this thesis are not presented in this dissertation. I have undertaken this approach to emphatically stress the point that workers' voices need to be heard, undiluted by managers' perspectives.
Management Perspectives that Confirmed Workers’ Perspectives

As an example: the workers’ belief that management did not want to involve workers in
decision making was verified to me when Paul, who was in charge of one of the crews,
commented about the statement I made to a management focus group on worker
involvement in decision making: “We talk to them too much; that’s why nothing gets
done. Some things you can’t discuss with them and some things you have to discuss with
them. It’s as simple as that.” Ian, the assistant plant manager agreed: “When you talk to
them about issues directly related to their work, you really have to talk to them. (My
question: “Like what?”) About their workplace, how it’s set up; about their working
conditions; mostly related to their workplace and changes and things like that. When you
talk to them about some of the bigger issues it’s not worth it. When you give them input
into some issues like the contractors and capital works, they get greedy and they want to
take it off you totally. You get their decision making and they want to claim it as
theirs.”

It was comments such as these that provided me with confirmation of the statements the
workers’ were making to me. While I have not used the words of the managers or the union
organisers in this dissertation, their input helped me to understand the workers’
perspectives.

There were other subsidiary interviews that also broadened my perspective of the life of
manual workers. I met with the senior steel workers’ union leader in the United Kingdom
to try to gauge any similarities between the stories the workers at the Refractories had told
me and the situation in similar workplaces in Britain. There were many similarities between
the steel workers in Britain and at Port Kembla. To add a further dimension to my study I
was fortunate to be able to visit the United States from January to April, 2000. Kenneth

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42 Management focus group (9.3.1998).
Gergen, a professor of social psychology at Swarthmore College helped me to organise meetings with twenty-three well-known academics in the field of organisational studies, sociology and social psychology spread across thirteen universities (see Appendix 17 for details). During this time I also attended several conferences and seminars related to ethnographic and organisational studies.

The purpose of the visit to the United States was to gauge the opinions of academics with whose work I was familiar. I talked with them about their appraisal of the meanings I was gaining from my study. The insights I gained in our meetings certainly added new dimensions as organisational theories came alive for me as we compared notes and they acknowledged my work. Most of the academics were working not only in a theoretical domain but also in work organisations in an action research role outside their universities. Because they related practical experiences of their work to my own, it gave me a sense of the value and relevance of my own work. The meetings I had with them began with a discussion on individualism and collectivism in the workplace. This led to consideration of the importance of people being able to tell their stories and have them acknowledged and recognised for their inherent value, and then followed on to how this could and in some cases was being done in workplaces in the United States.

The many people who were involved in this study have added to its value in many different ways. The contributors other than the workers provided me with a variety of perspectives that placed the voices of the workers in perspective for me.
Conclusion: Weaving an Intellectual Cloth

In reflecting on the process that brought this study together, I see a complex, fascinating conglomeration of factors which contributed to its accomplishment. The intellectual cloth that has been woven together presents perspectives and theories that have been governed by the warp that already existed before my arrival on the scene. The intervening weft of the workers’ and my own understandings, struggles and value systems, along with a combination of individual and collective accounts, make up the texture and pattern of the fabric that is presented here. The dissertation has been formed by a cyclical process of what Chia (1996: 15) refers to as “rewearing webs of beliefs” to understand how insights into human relationships are formed. It is a tapestry of the workers’ accounts of their workplace. My weaving is different from theirs. Geertz (1973: 146) sees the threads of understanding through the research process as being brought together as “webs of integration [where] all the parts are united in a single causal web.”

The willing contribution of the men to be involved, even those who were somewhat reluctant, proved to be the most valuable factor in the development of the study. They taught me how to weave my fabric together. My fabric is more crude than theirs. The workers know more of the texture of the material than I do and my rendition of their workplace is influenced by the need to present it for outsiders.

The multiple facets of the process were an essential part of the tapestry. Each played a vital role in bringing the whole together. My abiding interest in people and their lives propelled me to try to present the voices of the workers and it also eased the process. My

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43 As part of my attempt to locate myself in this weavers’ paradigm, I created a physical weaving that provided me with an alternative way of experiencing the research process. I have described this process in Appendix 18.
sense of the issues that were of importance to the men were verified by my continuous search for responses from them on my thoughts.

The tension of the cloth was influenced by many factors. Among the most influential was the way the men talked to me, even though they initially were suspicious of my motives and my alignment with management. The fashioning of the cloth in my study was not smooth, nor was it clearly defined into neat rows. While I experienced several difficulties along the way through this study, on looking back I can see that these were part of the nature of the workplace and the people working there. They became part of the informative nature of the project, influenced by and influencing the substance presented in the dissertation. I could never be aware of the whole of their story. I was involved in only one portion of an ongoing state of affairs. The weaving continues beyond my involvement.

The practical considerations that I have outlined in this chapter will be followed in Chapter Seven with an explanation of my perception as to where this study is located within the literature on research paradigms. It will focus on concerns I have about how this type of research affects the participants who are involved, and my role as an outsider in their workplace. I will consider the variety of perspectives that can be seen in the process of gathering research material from a variety of people. The genre in which I see the study being placed will be outlined to demonstrate how and why the material was handled in the way it was. The possible use of the information I have gathered in other worksites will also be considered.
CHAPTER SEVEN

“WHEN I LEAVE HERE [THE INTERVIEW] I’LL THINK OF THINGS I COULD HAVE SAID”

The process of the research that has been applied to form this dissertation will now be placed within a paradigmatic framework. The conceptual underpinnings of how meanings emerged and were derived from information gathered at the site will be outlined. My purpose in presenting this chapter is to explain the complex and eclectic way this study was undertaken which allowed for the voices of the workers to be given prominence in the dissertation.

The picture I present of BHP Refractories has been achieved through the blending of various methodological approaches to qualitative research. Goffman’s (1972: 13) notion of ‘gleaning clues’ from the observations and the input of those who are part of the study, was how I put together a picture of the ‘nature’ of the plant. Continuing on from the descriptions of the process outlined in Chapter Six, I will also expand on my personal concerns which arose while conducting this study. I will then reflect on the possible applications of my research to other workplaces.

Multiple Approaches to This Study: Ethnography, Symbolic Interactionism, ‘Theography’, Case Study, Constructivism, ‘Responsive Ethnography’ and Grounded Theory

The eclectic approach I took with this study involved crossing several methodological boundaries. The reason I chose to draw from such a wide range of paradigms is that I do not see that it conforms to one specific methodology. I felt most comfortable within the multiple paradigms of ethnography, symbolic interactionism and ‘theography’. A vital part of the process was to bring together the features of theories of management and social relations.
The joining of these two aspects of research has been referred to as 'theography', a word indicating the practice of "working from a more theoretical level to bring new life to theory that is joined with 'ography'.". The theory becomes an intrinsic part of experience, aligning with Stoller's (1989: 140) notion of "humanistic anthropology" which involves presenting meaningful descriptions of human lives.

The diverse nature of the study fits within the symbolic interactionist paradigm, which, Altheide (2000) explains, assesses the social relevance and negotiated meaning of identity across various theoretical discourses. A constructivist, case study approach within a mindset of grounded theory seemed to be a suitable way for the study to proceed. Whatever the method is called, it involves noticing and reflecting in practical and theoretical terms how people fit into their social context.

My choice of methods was influenced by my preferred style of being in the world, learning through social interaction and finding innovative ways of doing things, such as 'hanging around' the plant, talking with workers outside of work, and working from 'my' office. The actual methods were underpinned with my natural liking of people and a fascination of how they live their lives. A certain amount of intuition, supported by my broad experience in workplace evaluation, came into play for me in my assessment of how to conduct this study, who I needed to relate to, and what processes would be beneficial.

Within the realm of social science, Maas (1999: 47) notes that asking workers for what they want or their opinions on management theory and practice is seen as an unusual idea. I am comfortable in finding diverse ways of interacting with people in response to what I perceive as their needs as well as with regard to my own needs. The process was a

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1 The first time I heard this term was when Kenneth Gergen spoke at the SSSI Ethnography Conference in Florida in January, 2000.

2 As described in Chapters Six and Seven.
dynamic one that allowed me to become immersed in the organisation through a variety of activities—conducting interviews, workshops, focus groups, observing the situation with a critical eye, processing my thoughts through various methods of feedback and member-checking,\(^3\) reading documentation and archival reviews, and participating in various social aspects of Refractory life. Such in-depth exploration of the site gave me an opportunity to delve deeply into the meaning behind the façade of life at the plant. Only through the use of mixed methodologies could I come to present such a unique picture of an organisation.\(^4\) It is likely that if I had not operated in such a flexible way, the information I gathered would have been far less rich or meaningful.

The context of the study places it in the case study genre, in the sense that the information was collected from one particular worksite. However, to label it a case study could give the impression that it involved one site in isolation. It did that, and much more, because it brought into play a great deal of my experience from other work sites and was blended with the men’s experience of other organisations and the organisational literature.

The benefits and disadvantages of undertaking a case study approach to research have been well debated. Can we learn from a single case study? Geertz (1973: 22) asserts that studying in a confined locality is preferable to a broader social study, because it allows for a ‘fine-comb’ view to give a ‘sensible actuality’ to social situations in a creative manner. By

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3 This concept was referred to in Chapter Six in relation to getting feedback from the workers.

4 The benefits of various methods of conducting qualitative research abound within the research literature. For example, Czarniawska (1995); Denny (1983) and Smirich (1995) emphasise the value of narrative studies. Eisenberg & Goodall (1997); Geertz (1973); Kunda (1983); Latour & Woolgar (1979); Rose (1990); Rosen (1991); Saville-Troike (1986); and Steier (1991) focus on ethnography/anthropology. Glaser & Strauss (1967); Peshkin (1988); Strauss & Corbin (1990) expound the virtues and methods for undertaking grounded theory. Eisner & Peshkin (1990); Groeben (1990); Hamilton (1983); Kemmis (1983); Pandit (1996); Stake (1983); Stenhouse (1983); Schratz & Walker (1994) describe their involvement with case studies. Morgan (1993); and Stringer (1996) write about the importance action research as part of social research. Schön (1991) considers the place of reflexivity in qualitative research; and websites such as ‘Squerm’ (1998/2000) aim to bring together social researchers from across the globe in debate about qualitative research methods. (Squerm is an acronym for ‘Supporting Qualitative & Ethnographic Research Methods’. It is based at the University of Manchester, UK. Website address: http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/Squerm, covering a variety of approaches).
undertaking a case study approach I was able to learn something about human existence through the acquisition of a “high degree of insight into ... a collective experience” (Krieger, 1983: 195). At the same time the study is placed in a context specific domain, Zhou (1993: 1135) notes in his studies of organisational learning how he considers this approach to be a useful way to capture the intricacies of a situation. In this way I gained the benefit of intense involvement from being in one place rather than spreading my concentration across different settings, so that I can share the richness of my experience with readers who have not had the opportunity to go into this workplace.

Being able to engage in detailed fieldwork, which involved me in many aspects of the company’s activities, provided me with a more in-depth knowledge of worker’s perceptions of managing than if I had spread my work over several organisations. I was able to capture the intricacies of human experiences as they emerged, such as seeing the effect on the workers of the process of the sale from when it was first mooted through to the take-over by the new company—exactly one year later. By concentrating on everyday events and interactions, it has been possible to gather a picture of the plant from the point of view of the workers which shed some light on working in an industrial setting.

“Being there” was the most effective way I could learn about what Goodall (1994: 182) refers to as the “mysteries of life”, in an environment that had been unfamiliar to me. I was able to “situate [myself] in the larger scheme of [the Refractories], so important when working with disadvantaged groups\(^5\) in society”, as Hastings (2000) points out in her autoethnographic study of a very trying time of her own life. The broad ethnographic approach I took gave me a way of seeing and describing the experiences of the men at BHP Refractories in some detail, something which may not have occurred if I had come from a more constraining methodological perspective, such as using surveys or detached

\(^5\) The concept of the men seeing themselves as disadvantaged at work has been dealt with in Chapters Two, Three and Four.
observations. My experience with the men at the Refractories led me to believe that they would not have been partial to completing written surveys, particularly as some were not fluent with their reading and writing skills. The personal contact I had with the men also allowed me to gather a very rich amount of material, concentrating on quality rather than quantity in the information I collected. “Not everything that counts can be counted” (Ornish, 1996: xv) aptly describes my sentiments in relation to the study of people. The methods I used are not designed to replace, but rather complement other more traditional social science inquiry methods such as surveys and questionnaires.

Ethnography is commonly referred to as a research process that can achieve insights to present what Denny (1983: 2) refers to as “complete accounts of some culture-sharing group.” Fineman and Sturdy (1999) consider this approach is under utilised in organisational research. The notion of ‘completeness’ signifies that nothing has been left out, that all aspects of a situation have been considered and included, a state I was not even endeavouring to achieve. Rather I worked to attain Chia’s (1996: 63) aspiration to “capture the essence of [the] organisation.” I was able to follow Geertz’s (1995: 19) way of working, that is, to “keep up, more or less, with what, perhaps, [was] going on”, through what Czarniawska (1997: 5) refers to as “a bubble.” I could see the workers’ world in a way that allowed for inevitable ambiguities that emerge between people and actions. These complexities and anomalies are inherent in all qualitative research.6

The process of ethnographic research is a way to overcome the positivist genre that has often been used to explain society and organisation. The emergent focus I gave to interviews and observations at the plant avoided reliance on what the social science researchers, Hansen and Kahnweiler (1993: 1399) refer to as “universal laws of cause and effect.” Furthermore, I did not want to limit my inquiry by quantifying social reactions

through the use of ethically developed questions and issues. Another significant aspect was that the diversified methodology I used helped to avoid the superficial situation of a one-off interview, which could have resulted in a less in-depth look at the lives of the workers at the Refractories. It also avoided making the dissertation into merely a reproduction of facts. The personal association I had with the men in a variety of interactions provided an intuitive dimension to the study.

In questioning positivist modes of social research as a means to finding ‘truths’, I am also, in turn, questioning the postmodern approach of openness to all realities and lack of need to find immutable evidence for any reality, as considered by Lyotard and Foucault. Lyotard (1985) throws doubt on the function of research as a method of proof, particularly in terms of meta-narratives. He questions everything that is received.

The postmodern approach is strongly criticised by Windschuttle (1994: 131-2). He comments on the contradictory nature of Foucault’s philosophy of the relativity of truth in society. He asserts that Foucault’s claim “that no claim can be true for all societies” (ibid: 132) cannot not be true, because if nothing can be proved right or wrong, this paradoxically challenges the correctness of its own philosophy. Windshuttle’s (1994: 132) scathing remark that “instead of talk about real issues, all we get is talk about talk”, indicates his strong scepticism about postmodern thought. He also criticises Foucault for making changes to his theories over time. And yet it seems to me that this is precisely what Foucault was intimating; that is, there is no absolute truth, and hence ideas will, and indeed must, change over time. This inconstancy was certainly the case with the development of my thoughts as my study progressed. I initially had certain images of how the workers might think and act, based on my less detailed observations in the past. These were challenged as I began to consider more intensely what the workers were saying and doing. I question both the positivist and post modern approaches. The argument between
positivism and postmodernism seems to me to be a circular one. I place myself in the realm of postmodernism, a position in which my eclecticism sits comfortably, and at the same time, I believe that there are certain values that for me have a basis of stability, within my own way of making sense of the world. Hence my consideration of the importance of attending to the words of those who are not usually heard.

My interest in what others have to say led me to extend the boundaries of ethnography by practicing what I call ‘responsive ethnography’; responsive in the sense of providing an opportunity for the workers to reflect on their situation in an atmosphere that allowed them to be acknowledged as they told their own stories; responsive in the sense that I acted as a moderator, offering restorative energy in the less than healthy work environment they told me they experienced. My presence as a responsive audience provided the context for the men’s disclosures. They were not talking to me in order to maintain a position in the ‘pecking order’. They were in a situation where they were generating information that was then mirrored back to them, enabling them to clarify their thoughts. In the process of attending to them and writing down what they said and what I perceived was happening, followed by further reflections on their input in both verbal and written form, I facilitated a process where they could see that their thoughts and words were valued.

An important part of the reflective nature of the study involved coordinating with the workers to clarify the research direction and invite their assessment of the analysis. Responsive ethnography allowed for reflection that led to a mutual sharing in a two-way response process. I was able to change my understanding of their situation in response to what I was seeing and hearing.

Most significantly, the research process I employed provided an opportunity for the workers to recognise that their working lives were considered to be important enough by a
researcher to want to take the time to study and explain her view of their situation. It provided a space for the workers to tell and reflect on their stories, and come to overtly recognise the importance of their contributions and their knowledge of the organisation. They seemed to be pleased to have an opportunity to tell their stories, which is not surprising because people like to talk about themselves and be heard, as the journalist Caudron (1999: 26) notes. Through the feedback processes in which the men were involved in this study, they had a chance to question what they had said and reflect on it through further opportunities to talk about the issues they raised. These opportunities for reflection were not the norm in their life as industrial workers.

The dual processes of conversation and then seeing written transcripts of their talk, gave the men the opportunity to understand their own perspectives about their world. "It is through conversations, including imagined conversations, that we come to know ourselves and what we believe, or understand about the world", Brett and Collie (2000) note in their work on narrative inquiry. The men became their own interrogators, analysing their specific thoughts and words. As they read their transcripts, they engaged with their own words from the page. Reading their own words gave them another way of viewing their own thoughts.

I set up a scaffolding system where their thoughts were expressed as speech, written down by me, read by them, and responded to and extended in further dialogue. Their speech became the text, moving away from their usual form of discussion, into context-bound language. They were developing and building their own argument. When I asked them to clarify the meanings of what they had said, they were challenged to be explicit, which provided a basis for self-clarification. So, in helping me to understand, they were clarifying their own positions. It seems to me that whether their statements eventually made sense to me or not was less important to them than their own sense-making.
I was also conscious of concerns that social inquiry often takes from participants without reciprocation. Hence I was pleased to be able to find occasions when I could directly give the participants something in return for what they were giving me. In a practical sense, for example, I took notes for them at their meetings, facilitated workshops with them, and compiled *Eddie’s Book*. These were things various workers mentioned to me that they appreciated. “It was great. You did a great job”, Owen said to me about *Eddie’s Book*. Some also told me that it was “good to have someone to talk to.”

The research process I followed led me to search for explanations of the experiences of the workers, rather than approaching the study from a base of unexamined *a priori* hypotheses that I then set out to prove or disprove. This aligns with the general notion of grounded theory as described by several research theorists. My role as a researcher formulating meanings was to explain my observations rather than have theories guide the interpretations of my research. Grounded theory, to me, is a mind-set of openness to new ways of looking at and making sense of phenomena. In using this approach, I am not suggesting that I started with no theories in relation to the study. I did not, nor indeed could not, go into the plant as a researcher without some *a priori* thoughts or philosophies on workplace activities. I had already formed some theoretical conceptions about the work environment at the Refractories through my earlier engagement as a consultant, and had gained prior theoretical knowledge from my previous organisational studies and consultancies. The grounded theory approach provided me with a means to find fresh perspectives on events and actions to critically analyse what was emerging.

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8 *All of which are mentioned in this chapter.*
9 As outlined in Chapter Five.
My constructivist approach allied with grounded theory. As described by many research theorists,\textsuperscript{11} with this type of research explanations develop from experiences of the participants, including the researcher. I was more inclined to highlight the particular significance that arose from the stories the men related, searching for the meanings and understandings of the situation, not just as academic theory might suggest. Constructivist theory\textsuperscript{12} allowed me to detach from forming a priori assumptions. It also allowed me to build categories to help me understand and get a rich picture which is derived from the workers' words rather than what the theory expressed. I have been able, in this way, to present a synergistic picture that is greater than the sum of the individual people, experiences or issues.

Of the many ways I considered to conduct this study, none provided me with fixed rules or a comprehensive formula of methodological guidelines to follow for understanding human affairs. The intricacies of social situations, as the educational researcher, Smith (1992: 102) notes, are much too complex to fit into formulae. Each research project [and each researcher] is unique.\textsuperscript{13} Of paramount importance to me was the ability to incorporate the humanness of the situation, through documenting and developing my understanding of the people with whom I was interacting, as the basis for understanding the dynamics of their workplace.

I was able to be part of a process that emphasises human connections through allowing insights to be gained into everyday lives beyond the obvious manifestations of behaviour.\textsuperscript{14}

As I look back to reflect on the way I conducted this study, I see that a most important


\textsuperscript{12} Cohen (1993); Gergen (1999c); Groeben (1990; Markova (1987); Semin & Gergen (1990) all expound on the virtues of a constructivist approach to research.

\textsuperscript{13} Cotterill & Letherby (1993: 73).

\textsuperscript{14} A point made by Rosen (1991: 8) in his work on the gathering and reporting of information through ethnographic studies.
influence on its progress was my intrinsic interest in people, their work and working conditions. As I moved about the plant I was able to observe more closely the work done and the interactions that took place. The workers would describe their work to me, helping me to understand more about the workplace and work processes, and their impact on the workers. The many hours I spent listening to the men were both a pleasure and a privilege for me. While “I will never know the experience of others, ... I can know my own, and I can approximate theirs by entering their world”, as the feminist sociologist Shulamit Reinharz (1984: 375) explained.

The combination of a constructivist and a grounded theory approach to research appealed to me for a variety of reasons. I was not constrained by pre-determined categories and so insights could emerge. It allowed not only for the acknowledgment of the free-flowing nature of human lives the flexibility of interpretations and meanings the men attached to their lives. It led me to finding a greater tolerance for difference within the process of interpreting social events at the plant. Openness to interpretation is possible within a constructivist approach to research.15 This flexibility is recognised by the feminist researchers Cotterill and Letherby (1993: 73) as necessary to explore human situations holistically. Constructivism encapsulates all the aspects of the various qualitative methodologies involved in my study.

The multiple approaches to my research, while creating many uncertainties for me along the way, allowed me to follow the lead of the participants in building the theories that formed as this research project evolved. The development of the theories could not, however, be purported to be free from other influences, as “no knowledge or observation can be theory-free” (Smith, 1992: 100).

Interpretations of Ethnography

While discussion around the use of ethnography indicates a need for flexibility and acceptance of variance in the process, some of the terms used to describe ethnographic research are applied as though they have established meanings. However, those meanings have varied amongst theorists since Malinowski (1922) described his work with communities in New Guinea as 'Ethnographic'. The term 'ethnography' is given a variety of interpretations by social researchers. This range includes ranging construction or deconstruction of themes, understanding of situations, or meaning-making within an established relationship, combined to learn other people's ways of living in their world. It is described as "cultural mirroring or interpretation of observers who analyse culture" (Rosen, 1991: 13). A danger in using specific terms such as 'ethnography' or 'grounded theory' is that they can act to place 'quasi-arbitrary' limitations on research, by providing formulae to be followed in order to achieve certain ends.

An ethnography, several researches note, involves the collection of 'thick' description, including depth, quality and quantity of the narrative. The question remains, how deep and whose narrative? Another requirement is for 'long-term' investigation. How long is long? Zahalick (1992) stipulates twelve months. Why this particular length of time? Surely it depends on what happens and the level of understanding of events within that time. Perhaps the time frame could be less, or maybe it needs to be more. Longitudinal studies (of at least a year on site) are said to provide opportunities to piece together the ebb and flow of relationships and events to allow enough time to focus on a 'sufficiently' large

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19 McNamee (pers. com., Feb. 2000) and Torbert (pers. com., Feb. 2000) commented on this aspect of ethnography when I met with them in the United States to discuss my research.
20 As mentioned by Denny (1983); Fineman & Sturdy (1999); Geertz (1973, Goodall (1998); 1973); Morgan (1993); Rosen (1991) and Strauss (1989).
number of actors over a reasonable period. *This amount of time allows for 'sufficient' sense-making from observations.* The requirements of time and quantity appear to be quite arbitrary. I could not determine the absolutely optimum amount of time and contact I needed to have at the plant. I was aware of learning things from the men upon which I could then reflect. However, I will never know what I would have found if I had continued collecting information from them beyond the two and a half years I spent at the plant.

I suppose I could call myself 'an ethnographer', although I am no longer sure what this term means because it has such a variety of meanings and a variety of ways that it can be undertaken. My selected way of doing the study is not the same as other ethnographers would undertake.

**Concerns of the Workers and Myself in Conducting This Social Research**

*I think people's personal problems reflect on their work. People try not to bring their personal problems to work, but they do. They can't just turn it off. They might use work as an escape and take it out on everyone around them. It's like a relationship. The first person you argue with is the one you're closest to; it's the same at work. You hope they won't take it to heart ... Now we're getting too deep again. (Stan)*

The complex nature of the study and the human connections it involved raise many issues of concern for me. Because I was so intently looking for meanings that were not always obvious, there was a danger of exposing feelings the men may not have been ready to confront. Stan was aware of how often he found himself talking about feelings and would allude to this and then change the subject quite dramatically.²²

²² As outlined in Chapter Six.
The role of the ethnographer is intense. How can it not be when we are dealing with people’s lives and interpreting what goes on in them? Where people are being ‘used’ in the conduct of research there is a multiplicity of delicate issues that require attention. I feel, along with the anthropologist Dan Rose (1990: 37), the “entire ethnographic process [needs] some questioning [in terms of] observational practices.” It is essential, for instance, to consider matters of confidentiality, personal rights and privacy of the participants. As the workers talked to me, not only of work-related issues but also about aspects of their personal lives outside of work, the study became a documentation of both their public and private lives.

Private Lives

Vince commented to me about the impact my continued involvement at the plant was having, not on his work so much as on his relationships at home. He reflected on how his interactions with his family had improved due to the input from my work with his crew on personal development and teamwork.

Ethnographic relationships involve care of the relationships between researchers and the other participants. Part of my research involved conducting workshops and personal counselling.

The men did not know what the study would entail, or what the implications could be for them; and I could not tell them. Nor could I tell them what the outcomes might be, because

24 As part of the University requirements for this study to take place, an ethics application was lodged stipulating that the process and expected participation would be explained to the participants. The participants were given written consent forms to sign to agree to participate and to recognise that they could withdraw their consent at any time.
26 The variety of topics the men talked about to me was referred to in Chapter Six.
27 The connection between private and public lives was also referred to in Chapter Three.
28 Personal journal (1.2.1997).
again I could not know. I was aware that the research could possibly affect their lives through what the research revealed, as Deetz (1992) and Morgan (1993) note is the case with all social research.

This potential vulnerability was heightened as the men did not choose to be watched and analysed. That was entirely imposed upon them. Even though it may seem that they chose to participate (or not, as was the case for some), their choice was limited by the knowledge of their options and other influences on their participation, such as group pressures, wanting to please, or the influence of management on their decisions.

I hope no one else will see what I said, because I said a few home truths that I wouldn’t want other people to know. (Vince)

Of prime concern was confidentiality. The workers were well aware of this need for themselves, for practical and personal reasons. Vince was mindful of the sometimes controversial nature of what he was telling me, and the ramifications it could have on interactions with those with whom he worked. Often when the workers talked with me about difficult situations at the plant, they added that they did not want me to do anything about what they had expressed as concerns. They preferred to deal with their situation themselves. They also expressed concerns about management learning of what they might say to me.

At no stage was information from interviews or casual conversations passed by me to other workers or their managers. After some interviews had been conducted with the new crew, their manager asked what I had “got from the men so far”, and I explained that I could tell him the generic trends only, not specifics. I had previously discussed this strategy with the workers, who found it acceptable. On occasion, when I presented some of the statements
to groups of the workers, some recognised others' statements, possibly because they were idiosyncratic to that person; these guesses were never confirmed or denied by me.

I was frequently placed in a position of walking a tight-rope between opposing factions on either side of the chasm. I listened to both sides of various arguments, hearing what the managers said about the workers and the workers about their managers. Occasionally I became personally immersed in some critical situations, such as when the workers talked to me about concerns they had in their personal lives or with difficult relationships at work. The balance between holding the knowledge gained from the participants and the potential to influence activity and conditions at the plant by subtle or unconscious use of information called my integrity as a researcher to account on a number of occasions. This self-questioning occurred particularly at times when the workers were expressing feelings of being abused by the system in relation to working conditions, and I was unable to pass this on to anyone higher up the ladder because of the confidential nature of my interactions with the workers.

The Position of Confidant

Opposing sides in a dispute over working conditions told me confidential information that could affect the outcome of sensitive negotiations. The managers told me about their planned negotiation approaches to put an end to an issue over a demarcation dispute, and the workers told me of their tactics to keep the issue alive until it was resolved to their satisfaction. The demarcation dispute was raised because one of the supervisors had used equipment that was designated for workers, not supervisors.

29 The chasm has been detailed in Chapter Three.
30 Personal journal (12.6.1998).
In building amicable working relationships with the men, which is vital and inevitable in social research,31 I found myself involved in issues of power and politics, as the workers vented their frustrations about the managers and vice versa. The workers were aware of the possible personal or political consequences that might have occurred as a result of the thesis, for example, as demonstrated in the initial reluctance of some of the members of the new crew to have the interviews tape-recorded for fear of what might happen to those tapes. They indicated their caution around the possibility of being exploited and disempowered if information was ‘leaked’ to management. They were seeing themselves as powerless, positioned in the wider industrial context of their organisation.

As with politics, one of the difficult tasks I set myself was to attempt to avoid making personal judgements (or at least to be aware of them) about the workers’ words and actions, particularly when situations directly involved me. I worked hard to try to loosen my frame of reference of how people do and say things. When, for example, I witnessed bullying towards less forceful workers or some outright sexist behaviour, it was difficult, if not impossible, to abandon my beliefs about the men’s behaviour.

At times my confidence in the wisdom of the workers wavered, until after spending so much time with them, and deeply considering what they said and in what context, I am now, more than ever, convinced of their understanding and knowledge of their world of work, and their ability to see beyond the immediate tasks they undertake. By this, I do not mean that everything the workers said and did made sense to me. But, then, nor did I comprehend, agree or accept what many of the managers said and did. It was through my deep analysis of what the workers said that I was able to see beyond the immediate impressions the men gave through their conversations and behaviour.

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The approach I used throughout my fieldwork was designed to avoid having the workers' commonly used language being "clipped and framed to suit the purpose of the researcher, often ripped out of context and source of meaning" (Schratz & Walker, 1994: 216). Because of my reliance on the voices of the workers to lead the theoretical discussion in the development of my thesis, I had concerns about how readers would view the typical language of the workers. Their language could be interpreted in a derogatory way by the dominant groups' (in this case, academics and managers) views of how language should be spoken, hence down playing the importance of the workers' statements and imprisoning them in stereotypical images. When I was putting this thesis through a computerised grammar check program, many of the workers' phrases came under question for sentence structure, use of colloquialisms and poor phrasing, because that is the way the dominant language users view its correctness.

To change the language of the participants would have been yet another way of perpetuating the stereotypical picture of industrial workers as irrelevant to meaning-making. It goes without saying that I have left their language as I transcribed it from the interviews. This direct use of their language could create a problem of sounding patronising when their vernacular is intermixed with academic language. And yet there is a possibility the inclusion of the original language may serve the purpose of acceptance and "emergence of new ways of talking", Deetz (1992: 90) surmises. Although I would like to think that was the case, it is difficult to imagine this could occur because of the hierarchical nature of organisations, such as BHP, and the subordination which comes with such a structure; language being part of that arrangement. The language used by the men would also have been influenced by the "situated dependent speech" (Smith, 1986: 74) of the interviews, where the formality of the situation "itself defines a speech context in which only one speaking style normally occurs" (Labov, 1966: 91).
Another critical question arose for me as I embarked on the process of analysis. The compression or reduction of the workers' perspectives may have led to a version of the workers' lives that was representative only in a fragmentary way, a matter in which many researchers have shown interest. I was concerned that such a reductionist approach could destroy the workers' cultural integrity if it did not consider them as part of a complicated human social systems.

The complexities of the workers' lives, represented in their transcripts and my record of interactions, have been broken into topics in order to create a succinct understanding of those lives. The separation of the dissertation into topics and sub-topics could create an image that the workers' existence can be compartmentalised within a textual framework. Their lives were, however, not so decisively delineated as this written text about them implies.

The separation of their lives is an expression of my power as a researcher. I have manipulated the information I got from them to form a picture that made sense to me. The concept of power in research relationships is a complex one. Social researchers and participants do not operate from positions of equal power. Within my study each participant, including myself, held particular information not available to the others, information that would have been perceived and used differently by each individual. As the researcher in the study I had a certain amount of control over how and what was studied and reported. The workers had control over what knowledge they would share or withhold from me. Those who funded my study along with my supervisors also had power through control over the broader agenda of the research.

32 For example, Belenky et al. (1989); Czarniawska & Guillet de Monthoux (1994); Diespecker (1993); Kofman & Senge (1993); Lewin & Regine (2000); Van der Ven (1995).
The dominance and understanding of situations under study by intellectuals is said by Foucault (1980: 27) to be a thing of the past. Perhaps in hegemonic theoretical discussion that is the case. However, from my observations, that supremacy still exists. Otherwise we would find more examples of the workers’ theories of managing in the literature on management. Even if, as is stated, intellectuals realise that they are governed by the same forces as the people about whom they are reporting, I would suggest that the researchers and the researched see these forces acting in different ways. For example, through my study, both the workers and myself were engaged in work on the same project and yet our intentions and involvement were affected by quite different influences. We were also both constrained by the boundaries of the Refractories, again in very different ways.

The predicament of researcher’s power compelled me to look at how I placed myself in the research process and to what extent I controlled the workers’ input through the nature of my interactions, analysis and writing. I could not experience the same events as the workers. Nor did I have the experience of the history of the situation to fully understand the emotive and practical influences and impacts of their position. What I was able to do was to observe patterns of the workers’ stated beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and present an interpretation of them. My choice of methodology also influenced how the thesis was developed and presented, with my decision to put workers’ voices foremost in this dissertation.

My Role as Insider and/or Outsider

The involvement of people entering workplaces for the purpose of research can be a delicate and sensitive game. As an outsider at the plant I could never fully access the subtle or intimate knowledge the workers had of the worksite. No matter how much time I spent at the site, I would always be an outsider in this sense. And yet I was an insider in my own
research effort, and because I spent so much time at the plant I came close to feeling like an insider there, too. I came to see myself both as one of the participants in the research as well as the mechanism through which the workers’ stories could be heard, both within and outside the Refractories. I became aware of many of the rules, both formal and informal, that made up the culture and the climate of the company.

Most of the men accepted my presence, some with amusement,\(^{34}\) always seeing me as a marginal presence. Some tolerated my being there with a constant sense of wariness.\(^{35}\) I could relate to what Andy, a worker in the movie *Brassed Off*, (1997) explained to an outsider who was attempting to help the coal miners in the Britain:

> If help comes to something you’re a hero, but if it comes to naught you’re just another meddler.

As Rohan commented, I “could never know what it was like to work there.”

Feeling like an outsider was not necessarily a disadvantage. As an outsider I had the opportunity to see things that may not have been obvious to an insider. I had the possibility of what Remen (1996: xiv) describes as “experiencing the familiar in new ways.” One of the benefits for researchers being seen as outsiders is that there is no expectation by the participants that the researcher has in-depth knowledge about the work situation.\(^{36}\) Because the men saw me as an outsider it was acceptable to them that I ask questions, the answers to which seemed quite obvious to the participants. My lack of knowledge may have even been beneficial for the men. They were able to reflect on their own meaning and interpretation of events, and realise at a conscious level that they knew so much about their

\(^{34}\) As described in Chapter Six with their comments about me being a ‘shrink’.

\(^{35}\) Also mentioned in Chapter Six.

workplace. Some saw me as politically naive in relation to the state of affairs at the Refractories.

The external status of researchers is seen by some academics to create a sense of trust by participants because outsiders are not part of the subjective base of the organisation. However, my experience at the plant was that I was, initially at least, not trusted by some of the workers because I was an outsider.

As an outsider I was in a position of privilege. I was continually aware of using that privilege cautiously, being guided by “a special set of [situational] rules” as Goffman (1963: 243) describes the way this privilege must be addressed. I was also conscious of my position as an ‘intruder’ as I entered the ‘foreign culture’ of the Refractories as ‘the uninvited guest’ of the workers.

I played many roles during the time I spent at the plant. These multiple roles were an intrinsic part of my eclectic approach to the study, affecting and being affected by the process, as it must in ethnographic studies. My involvement was something of which I was aware and upon which I reflected regularly. My “shifting identifications”, a term used by the narrative researcher, Narayan (1989: 8), involved me as participant/ observer/ researcher/ counsellor/ confidante/ facilitator/ listener/ consultant/ friend/ secretary, and individual interested in the lives of the workers at the plant. These various functions confused some of the workers. Many were suspicious of my motives. They were not sure what to make of it all, or what they felt comfortable or safe to tell me. However, this multiplicity of roles was not necessarily an impediment. It was through the diversity of my roles that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of the men at the plant.

37 Such as: Argyris (1990); Egan (1994); Lewin & Regine (2000).
38 As I had done in the study I undertook for my Masters degree in 1996. Tom (1984: 79) also refers to this in his work in educational research.
39 Briggs (1986); Morgan (1993); Peshkin (1988); Stenhouse (1983).
It created opportunities for an abundant flow of information as the men related to my presence in different ways. Some of these roles were as an insider, such as taking minutes at meetings, while others were as an outsider (interviewing the men).

"Everyone Sees Things From Their Point of View"

My words are my opinion on the situation. It's not actually the whole situation. You're hearing it from my side, how I feel about it and where I'm involved with it. I'm sure if you interviewed him [the manager], you would get a whole different spiel on the whole thing; and we would both be right on the whole thing. (Ray)

You'll hear my story, their story and the truth. I believe our side of the story is the truth, but [the plant manager] probably believes his story is the truth. Everyone sees things from their point of view. But I see things from my point of view because it has happened to me. (Frank)

Ray and Frank were sensitive to variances in perceptions. Their comments were an indication that I could never present the whole picture of the Refractories. As in any social science research, this dissertation is my representation of the workers' stories. And yet, because of the nature of the study and my intent to present the voices of workers and through the iterative process of member-checking, I have been able to present a wide cross-section of opinions in my search for meaning. While the focus of the study determined its direction, I moved deliberately to limit this control by not directing the study through predetermined questions to the workers.

The study is interpretive as it searches for meaning. I acknowledge that I “made rather than found” that meaning, as referred to by Steier (1991: 191) and Taylor, McLean, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995: 28) in relation to their own qualitative research efforts. My depictions impact on the meanings derived. I have tried to present an acceptable transmission of the workers’ views, acceptable to the workers in the sense of its meaning to them, and to scholars in the sense of academic principles. I do not claim authority or definitiveness of
the topics considered in this dissertation, from some remote position of observer. As pointed out by many social researchers,\(^40\) certain biases are inevitable.

I did not enter into the research with notions of discovering or proving a new theory of management. The process was more in line with Pandit's (1997) concept of being open to a variety of sources of information and their implications. As Qui-Gon Jin (a Jedi Knight in the film *Star Wars* (1999) remarked to Obi-Wan Kenobi (his apprentice), “your focus is your reality”. I was an actor in what I was studying. From within this realm of “viewing [myself] as part of the lived experience, as affecting and being affected by the fieldwork experience” (Hastings, 2000: 9), my research is intrinsically subjectively portrayed. It cannot be otherwise. It was from within this position of accepting my own involvement that I found myself in a place from which I could more candidly investigate and write about the topics that arose out of my observations and analysis.

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.


My attention to my own awareness helped to give me a sense of my response-ability as a social science researcher to provide a “deeper understanding of perceptions and the meanings people attach to life” (Walker (1983: 123). I did not want it to be merely what

\(^{40}\) Such as Broeschke (1992); Chandler (1992); Fiske (1991); Guba & Lincoln (1989); Held (1980); Schön (1991); Schraiz & Walker (1995); Smith (1992); Strauss & Corbin (1990); and Stringer (1996).
Kemmis (1983: xx) alludes to as a "selfish pursuit created to prove a point for the research community". I was aware of the need for constant personal monitoring of my motives and presentation of my thesis. Was I seriously intent on listening to and presenting the voices of the workers? Was I tuned in as much as possible to their concerns? Was I analysing situations in a way that the workers found acceptable? I attempted to address these concerns in various ways; I kept a personal journal which included my reflections on my relationships and activities at the plant.

**An Example of My Personal Journal Notes**

"Despite their [workers'] sometimes scepticism of me and my role and my relationship with [the manager], I think that my work with them has been of some use to them—and that is my main purpose in doing the work, and wanting to continue to do it. I feel comfortable with these men perhaps because I don't feel threatened by them and the fact that they are willing to participate in the activities I do. They are critical of some of the stuff but that doesn't offend me."\(^{41}\)

The writing of the journal contributed to my deeper understanding of events by providing me with a space and time to quietly and intensely reflect on my feelings around things that were happening at the plant. I also talked with colleagues and supervisors about my concerns. These conversations, too, were recorded in my journal. In the actual writing of the dissertation I became very aware of the value of the journal. I realised that the more detailed entries helped me to create a richness of description.

These entries were influenced by my perceptions of what I had observed. That is inevitable. I was aware of the many pressures to which the research was subject. Even though I was able to practice "observing people in the communication process and getting

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\(^{41}\) Personal journal (30.1.1997).
them to talk about their role as fully and openly as possible”, which Fiske (1991: 171) sees as essential to social research, the very fact of the artificiality and novelty of having their interactions, beliefs and values scrutinised would have influenced the workers’ behaviour and reactions. During the interviews in particular, the participants were well aware that whatever they said was being recorded. They commented on my shorthand, reflected on their own contributions, or hesitated as they looked at the active tape recorder or me writing.

There is much debate in the research literature about the level and nature of involvement of the investigator in research and the effects this has on the research itself. Separation of the inquirer and the inquired is not realistic because it is the “interaction that creates the emergent data” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 88). Indeed it may be beneficial for researchers to be included as part of the field study rather than as outsiders in their own research, as Schratz and Walker (1994: 184) note. I do not see how it could be otherwise. My opinions are necessarily part of the research. As much as I emphasise the voices of the workers, I cannot do that without some theoretical underpinning that arises out of my a priori concepts. A well-known Buddhist saying explains the impossibility of separation of researcher and other participants:

There is no dance separate from the dancers. The dancers and the dance are one.

Yet I could consciously watch the dance as I danced, a form of observation practiced in the Yogic tradition. I connected the lessons from the study to my own personal development. I recognise my own individual development in my research, as does Dutton (2000: 8) with her own ethnographic work. I did not maintain an illusion of "mental

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42 For example: Belenky et al. (1989); Fish (1980); Goodall (1994); Morgan (1993); Peshkin (1988); Rosen (1991); Schöns (1991); Steier (1991); Stenhouse (1983); Traweek (1988); Walker (1983).

43 Briggs (1987: 4) also sees such awareness as essential for a social researcher. Steier (1991: 208) refers to research also being about the researchers as they make an "attempt to make sense of their world".
distance’ which is sometimes called for in social research,\textsuperscript{44} because I saw myself as part of the totality of the workplace. Researchers are not “spectator-manipulators, [rather] agent-experients” involved with and influencing the research (Schön, 1991: 11). The acclaimed South African novelist, Doris Lessing (1972), notes that:

Nothing is personal in the sense that it is uniquely one’s own ... The way to deal with subjectivity is to see each individual as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience into something much larger.

There were many ways in which this influence occurred. I selected the topic for the study and decided on its general direction, and interpreted events. The literature I chose to follow while doing the study complemented my eclectic approach. “We create the world that we perceive because we select and edit the reality we see, to conform to our beliefs about what sort of world we live in” (Bateson, 1972: vii). What researchers come out with largely depends on what they go in with, and what they are looking for while they are in there.\textsuperscript{45} “Our theories determine what we measure”, noted Einstein (in Chandler, 1992: 175). Concerns about bias in qualitative research are questioned by Geertz, who wonders if the need to overcome subjectivity is entirely possible, or even necessary. “\textit{All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known}” (authors italics) (Belenky \textit{et al.}, 1986: 137).

It has been suggested by Kunda (1991: 224) that researcher bias can be overcome by ensuring the participants are treated as co-authors in the writing of the study. The men were not interested in taking part in the analysis or reading of the research material. It was enough, they indicated, for them to be interviewed and observed as their contribution to the thesis, along with their extensive contribution to the ideas presented in the dissertation.

\textsuperscript{44} By such researchers as Stenhouse (1983) and Parlett & Hamilton (1983).
\textsuperscript{45} Goodall (1994: 181).
While I influenced the direction of the study, it in turn influenced me at an intellectual and spiritual level. I learnt a great deal from being involved in the world of refractory life, a domain with which I was previously unfamiliar. “Interpretive construction is embedded in social interchange, rather than individual thought patterns and analysis” (Gergen, 1985, 1999). It is located within a historical and cultural context interpreted and framed by the researcher. My theoretical background in a broad range of disciplines including education, psychology, management and sociology, and my experiential background as a worker, manager and consultant provided the basis for my conceptual understanding of the worksite.

The writing process was in itself a challenge for me. I was trying to balance my interest in privileging the voices of the workers with the need to present a literary discourse. The process was a transformative one, with which I struggled for some time. The text I have finally composed is, I acknowledge, from my own images of the Refractories; I have self-selected quotes to emphasise what I see as key issues. I have not reached “writing degree zero where all signs of ideology or personal investment are removed” (Gergen, 2000).

Every text produces a ‘reality’ from the writer’s perspective that can be translated in various ways by the reader. Much depends on the clarity of the words, their context, and previously held meanings and understandings the readers have of the subject and the text itself. A fascinating consideration that arises out of the notion of interpretive subjectivity is the possibility of the chasm that I described between the workers and the managers extending to a chasm between you as the reader, and me as the writer. That certainly is not my intention, and indeed I have made an effort to avoid building a sense of exclusion in the style of writing this thesis. Art Frank, in a keynote speech about social pressures at an ethnography conference (January 2000), referred to these as “Reality Producing Machines
or RPMs [that create] textually mediated reality. This thesis is presented through my distinctive RPM.

You are the story you tell about the work as much as the work itself, because the story is a commodity people may or may not buy and whose elements will shape interpretations of what you actually do.

Eisenberg and Goodall (1997: 190)

How the information I present here is interpreted will also depend on where the readers' focus of attention lies. While the study has been influenced by many people with a variety of perspectives, it has presented a picture of a particular situation about a group of people who were involved in life at the Refractories through my 'Reality Producing Machine'. The process reminds me of the Johari Window, which goes some way to explaining shared and private perceptions (what is known to oneself, what is known to others, what is not known to oneself and what is not known to others).

**How the Information Was Handled**

As part of the process used to assess the information I was receiving, I returned to my preferred way of doing research, using multiple approaches to explore for meanings. Using a variety of ways of analysis is a tactic that allows for a more clear assessment of information, notes the social researcher, Briggs (1987: 4). Within this broad approach to the technical aspects of handling information, I found that I was impelled to be extremely systematic in my analytical role.

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46 More on this point in Chapter Eight.
47 First outlined by Dahlstrom, Welsh & Dahlstrom in 1973 and later by other authors such as Schratz & Walker (1994).
My primary source of analysis was the individual interviews, which stood alongside the other less formal associations I had with the workers, as well as my intensive observations at the plant. The interviews were initially manually analysed through a process of routine or open coding and decoding\textsuperscript{48} by highlighting what I saw as key words or phrases. From these phrases memos about the men's statements were written, and it was from these memos that categories were formulated (see Appendix 19 for samples of this analysis). Then I considered the meaning and connection of the categories to form patterns of meaning, a process termed 'axial coding'.\textsuperscript{49} Once I had completed this primary analysis, I examined the text more deeply using the text analysis software programs NUD*IST\textsuperscript{50} and Inspiration\textsuperscript{51} to refine the categories and sub-categories derived from the interviews, as seen in Figure 7.1. This gave me a much deeper understanding of the phenomena that were emerging to form the initial theoretical framework of core areas of focus and sub-topics, a process referred to by Strauss and Corbin (1989) as 'selective coding'.

\textsuperscript{48} Pandit (1996); Strauss & Corbin (1990).
\textsuperscript{49} Strauss & Corbin (1989).
\textsuperscript{50} 'NUD*IST' stands for: Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. NUD*IST was designed specifically to deal with large amounts of data collected in qualitative research.
\textsuperscript{51} 'Inspiration' provided a broader means of dealing with the connections between facets of the data.
Grounded Hermeneutic-WORKERS

Method
Listening; Interviews; Reflections;
Observations; Casual conversations;
Socialising; ‘Hanging around’;
Meetings; Documentation;
Member checking; Workshopping;

Emergent Constructivist Method

- "Scientists' words are often privileged over those of the lay person, even though language gets its meaning from the way in which it is used by groups of people. The scientist's terms are not more rigorously tied to the world as it is, nor are they more productive of events in the world. They both gain their utility from the respective social milieus. The scientific is not, however, more accurate or objectively true than that of the lay culture." Semin and Gergen (1990)

DECISSION MAKING
Recognition
We (operators) are always the last ones to find out.

Input
I don't want to be included in actual decisions.

They should be involved in everything. Especially something they have got to operate. Everything. Decisions on everything, from their pays to putting a new bolt in there which is going to change the whole running of the plant.

"Blue shirts" don't seem to do anything.

Everyone knows what the floor workers are doing, but what are they doing? Everyone seems to be blaming us because the plant is going badly.

Roles
Workers just want to get the work done, and leave the planning to management.

Values
There's a lot goes on there that they don't know about, but that's probably good. Workers have to have their own thing, too.

I take pride in my work. If I do a job I want to do it right. I suppose I'm from the old school in that respect. The young people say "Ah, that'll do." I'd rather take more time and do it properly.

There's plenty of double standards goin' on down there.

There's two different sides. They see it differently. One sees it as good; the other sees it as bad.

They're with the old way; they don't wanna change and that goes with management, too; both sides.

Figure 7.1 Mind map created from topics created through use of text analysis program: NUD*IST

COMMUNICATION
Meaning
The basic issue is communication with workers and staff.

Barriers
There's no real communication. Everyone talks a lot in here, but nothing gets said.

That's a big part of everything; how people feel. It's more than the fact that there's a lack of communication. That's just the tip of the iceberg.

You never know what they're thinking. It's part of managing the company. There are certain things that aren't wise for them to tell us. We'd like to know but it's their business.

Very little information is shared between the different levels.

Perception
They [management] change their story all the time and don't let you know what's going on. Maybe they don't know what's going on. With their track record, how can you trust them?

I believe one side of the story is the truth and he [plant manager] believes his side of the story is the truth.

Listening
The employees aren't getting the whole truth. They should see it's their lives, too.

All we want is to be listened to.
Figure 7.1 illustrates how the analysis I made of how the workers spoke to me about various parts of their working life. They talked about their relationships at work in terms of their personal feelings of self esteem in connection with their interactions with their managers and their work mates. They analysed what was happening to them within the organisation and how forms of communication and the responses they received from those around them had an impact on how they felt and worked. As part of these interactions, decision making, a common thread of discussion, was seen as part of their professionalism in the job. The men demonstrated a broad understanding of the way the organisation functioned, and the many factors that influenced how they worked. Most of these elements were again related to personal issues, with the main focus on the negative aspects of organisational relationships. It was these elements, they considered, that retarded their development in the firm and indeed the growth of the company.

The men viewed the culture of the company as being somewhat fixed in a deep-seated divisive, hierarchical structure. The overarching impression they gave of this situation was one of extreme frustration for them.

While most of the discussions focussed around the internal influences affecting their work, they were also aware of external factors impacting on their work, such as the current world markets and employment levels. Several of the men also spoke of the relationship between home and work and how the two interplayed one upon the other.

I later used NUD*IST to search for key words in order to gather groups of statements together. Another use I made of NUD*IST was as a tool for searching the literature I had on file for key words, phrases and topics.
One of the main benefits I found from using NUD*IST was that it provided me with a means for carefully analysing and organising the large amount of material I had collected. My immersion in the interview transcripts, while using NUD*IST proved to be an invaluable experience, giving me a deeper familiarisation with the text. From this close scrutiny I was able to create a 'mind map' from intuitive ordering (as in Figures 7.1) that helped to form connections between topics. NUD*IST spared me the card-file system that is sometimes used by qualitative researchers. As topics were linked under groupings that appeared as topics, sub-topics and sub-sub topics, a physical picture began to emerge from the text with the help of 'Inspiration' which allows pictorial connection of the NUD*IST tree.

The use of NUD*IST fitted comfortably with my constructivist, grounded theory approach. As categories began to appear, they eventually led to the emergence of the major topics: silencing, lack of involvement and communication (primarily dealt with in Chapter Two), division, personal identity and status (primarily dealt with in Chapter Three), emotions and management practices (primarily dealt with in Chapter Four).

The analysis of the material reached saturation point after about sixteen interviews had been analysed. No new categories were evident to me after that point, although I continued to analyse all the interviews and each one added more depth to my understanding. Extensive observations, casual conversations and reading of documentation supported the analysis.

I then undertook a further process of writing key words onto the back of old business cards (back to the human touch!) and pinning them on a board so that I could then move them around to form new groupings. The process of card shuffling went on for several weeks, as I looked more closely at them, or left them for some time to settle in my mind until I reached the final analysis now presented in the dissertation.
It was through these multiple and intense analytical processes that I was able to arrive at the range of sub-topics that are presented as the workers’ self-perceptions. Each stage of the analysis scaffolded the others, complementing the constructivist method of conducting the research itself.

**Generalisation from This Study to Other Sites**

A combination of the concerns I faced in conducting this research, including my interactions with the men, and the presentation of this dissertation, brought me to the consideration of the rights of the workers at a level of social theory in which all actions are shared communally. In 1972, the western philosopher Arne Naess coined the phrase ‘deep ecology’ to give the concept of interconnectedness a place in contemporary western thought. This view that all people are connected as part of one whole supports the Buddhist view of humanity explained by the social researcher Govinda (1969: 54).

While I acknowledge the inevitable connection of all human activity, I accept the restrictions of generalising the findings of my study to other settings. The information gathered at BHP Refractories has special status and legitimation in its own right as a construction to be taken into account. The empirical information that has been gathered through my study concerns one specific site. I portray a view of the Refractories within a particular historical, temporal and situational context, presenting a snapshot of people and events. If the study were seen from an alternative position, it would present another picture as each account of a situation is taken from a distinct stance.\(^{52}\) Hence the findings from a study such as this cannot be indiscriminately generalised.\(^{53}\)

\(^{52}\) Chia (1996: 16).

Yet what has been portrayed can add to or join with other studies aimed at understanding human interactions within organisations, where “points of recognition and comparison” (Krieger, 1983: 196) can be found. It can contribute to an overall picture of the human condition in the sense of telling of lived experiences. By tapping into circumstances and feelings at one work site, it may possibly inform other similar situations, a practice referred to Eisner and Peshkin (1990: 225) as “meta ethnography [as] studies are translat[ed] into one another in comparison [rather than] aggregation”. The experiences analysed can lead to patterns being developed and synthesised from the abstract to the particular and to generalisations that can be of use to others. Yet even where generalisations do seem appropriate they “decay through time” (Parlett & Hamilton, 1983: 82), and so are of value only within a temporal and historical context. As Foucault (1970: 68) notes, “No gaze is stable”, events and people can be joined in some form of conjunction.

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Conclusion: Never Reaching a Finale

Social research does not create a "master of truth and justice", Merquoir (1985: 149) points out in his explanation of Foucauldian thought. Nor does it provide an absolutely accurate account of an organisation. Instead it presents an account of interesting perspectives. What I have been able to show here is one way of seeing and experiencing life at an industrial site.

A study such as the one I have undertaken here can never reach a finale.\textsuperscript{55} It became clear to all those involved that my study was not going to provide answers to the predicaments in which the workers found themselves. I have concentrated on describing what I saw and heard from the men, how I interpreted the information and what influenced my findings. Because I conducted this study in such a diffuse way, I have been able to present a coherent and meaningful account of the workers' voices as I interpreted them. I did not set out to prove things right or wrong or to change the organisation. The burden of providing the 'truth' does not lie on my shoulders.

The research process I adopted has been built upon a flexible approach of mutual learning as I gathered together a sample of usually untapped voices. The words of the workers have led to the emergence of this representation of their working world. Listening to the men as they reflected on their views enabled me to come up with a human picture of an institution that is very different from what most management theorists present as the ideal modern organisation. I have combined theory with the experiences of the workers to create a substantial picture of a context that looks at an industrial workplace from quite a different view than is usually available. This picture of an industrial setting has not been presented in this way before. Because the dissertation is more than a description of the experiences of individual workers, we now have a comprehensive view of the organisation from a fresh

\textsuperscript{55} Pandit (1996).
perspective. I have been able to present this perspective because I am intrinsically interested in the issues raised by the workers and I was able to learn from them. The broad-based methodology described in this and the previous chapter allowed this learning to occur.

In the final chapter of this dissertation I will further outline how the methodology of the study contributed to the possibility of the men being heard. I will look at how I set out to understand the workers’ perspectives and came to realise the potential to include the stories of these people in the planning and conduct of their work environment.
CHAPTER EIGHT

"AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT THINGS"

Over the years you have an idea and you tell one of your supervisors about it and they generally say: 'No, we don't think so;' and a few weeks later they come up with the idea, which never comes back to the source where it came from. They say they don't remember you saying that. (Jerry)

There's a lot of workers to have one voice. It's going to take a group of workers to initiate that, and be separate from the union as well. But, if that would work, who can say? I just don't see that that could happen with the way it is now, at all. (Owen)

What you're doing isn't going to make any difference to what goes on here, but at least it's an opportunity to talk about things. (Don)

Most of the workers with whom I met spoke of how they were not listened to by management. They recognised they had something to say that was of value to the company but were not able to find ways to have their voices heard. The men expressed doubts that this state of affairs would ever change. I was able to learn that the workers do have valuable insights into how the business can be managed, as I attended to, gathered, and analysed their collective views on the management of the organisation.

This thesis has provided both the workers and me, as researcher, with an opportunity "to talk about things". We talked about how they experienced not being heard, the divisions within which they worked, their separation from management and the neglect of their feelings by their managers. We discussed what could be gained for both the workers and the organisation if the voices of the workers were heard, and their feelings were taken into account. I will reflect on the possibility of transferring what they perceive to be key aspects of managing, in regard to communication, identity and relationships, to inform other perspectives on organisational management. The workers have constructed theories around managing as part of a deep way of understanding the operation of their organisation in times
of crisis—such as with the sale of the plant—as well as in more regular times. They have focussed primarily on interpersonal factors as the basis for their considerations, while being able to place their work situation in the broader industrial climate of the time.

Different aspects of one organisational ‘story’ are presented in this dissertation, not in one unified voice but in many. While the workers views varied, enough of their observations were made repetitively to give an overall impression of how, as a group, they saw their workplace. Through “a sequence of stories [they provide] a broader and deeper insight than one tale [might do]. In each story fragment is the shape of the entire story” (Estés, 1993a: 1). It is the “million stories that build the legend of the steelworks”, as Kim Beazley MP, Leader of the Australian Federal Opposition, wrote in praise of P. P. Cranny’s (2000) work on the closure of BHP’s steelworks in Newcastle. The stories presented here are not necessarily an end in themselves. They act rather as foundations from which to build both general and specific understandings, because as others tell their stories, our understanding of events and people can be clarified (Gregory Bateson, 1972: 29). “There is no route to the world or other persons except through the experience of them” (Deetz, 1992: 116). “Stories are not random elements simply sucked from the culture: they are patterned, sequenced, formalised, given shape through the organisational frame of the settings in which they are generated” (Plummer, 1995: 35).

Each of the chapter topics, from Chapter Two to Four in this dissertation, interweaves with each other.

I don’t think managers consult the workers at all, really. Sure if there are things like [deciding on] shifts [3x8 or 2x12 hour shifts] and that sort of thing, but even down to a lot of the safety things; the only ones who are taken seriously are the maintenance guys. ... That problem can’t be solved—that management doesn’t listen to the workers enough. It seems like when we want something it takes ages to happen, but when they [management] want it, they get it done fast. (Ray)
The first topic of not being listened to or acknowledged, was described in Chapter Two, recounting workers' notions of communication and the differences between themselves and management. These differences brought with them a definite sense identity separated from management.

Workers are proud to be workers and management is proud to be management ... It's the them and us worker mentality. (Ray)

Along with this separation came a feeling of a lack of power or control, as outlined in Chapter Three. Because the men were separated from management, they were not heard, or was it that not being heard created the separation? It is difficult to know which came first. From this position they were very critical of how management operated.

But, you know, one of the biggest problems is management. They don't consider the workers and they don't care. (Chad)

The workers considered that part of what they viewed as mismanagement arose from the managers' disregard for relationships and the feelings of the workers, as set out in some detail in Chapter Four. These concepts of listening and acknowledging, identity, acceptance and interpersonal relationships form an overall picture of the men's ideas on how they were effectively silenced, which led them to consider how the business could be better managed. These topics are integral to contemporary industrial working life.

This arbitrary separation of topics into Chapters Two, Three and Four does not reflect how the workers acted, thought or talked, but is, as Gwaltney (1975: xxiii) describes in his powerful writings of stories of black Americans, a "lesson-strewn panorama of their lives." Each of the three topics is inextricably interlinked, as shown in Figure 8.1.
Each of the three topics interacted with the others in a constantly changing environment, influenced by internal company actions and external business, economic and community factors. The connection is illustrated, for example, in the links between the divisions the workers talked of between themselves and their managers, partly creating and being created by the phenomenon of not being heard. It was because of these factors that they considered management to be ineffective. Another example arises out of the workers' feelings of alienation which threatened their sense of identity which fuelled their fear of possible job loss.

In Chapter Five, an account of a way that the workers were able to be heard and acknowledged is presented. Chapters Six and Seven detail how that was done and how my role and the role of the research process I used played a part in providing time, a place and space in which the workers could reflect on their perceptions of their situation. This form of research can be affirming to participants in helping them to recognise they have “important knowledge and the intuitive logic” to share (Labonte, 1996: 18). In being able to tell their stories the men were able “to let off steam, defend[ing] themselves against attack, showing they are involved in the life of the system” (Denny, 1983: 29).
One concern I had in writing this dissertation was that it might appeared the workers' lives could be segregated into sections. Not so. The sub-elements interconnect and interweave in a rich fabric that for me represents life at BHP Refractories. The mode of reaching an understanding of the ramifications of this state was achieved largely through the medium of having the workers reflect on their experiences at the works. I have tried to depict this fabric through the ordering of the anecdotes and the way they are juxtaposed and connected, which present different viewpoints of BHP Refractory workers.¹ Most of the men seemed to appreciate opportunities to relate their perspectives, to be heard and acknowledged.² The sharing was based on the development of a relationship between myself and the workers, which was also based around the sharing.

The Theoretical Construct and Ways of Attending to Those Who are Forming Concepts of Managing

The compilation of the workers' accounts of their lives at the Refractories has offered an informative and unusual insight into how the men saw their working lives as part of a heavy industrial environment, and how they recognised and explained their views on ways of managing. It is rare to find workers' voices leading the dialogue on organisational management theory. Hence it has been my intention in this dissertation to place the voices of the workers in a primary position in the text as a preface to discussion of other theories. I have tried to create a picture of how the men saw the particularity of their workplace by emphasising the significance of their self-perceptions. In acknowledging these perspectives, we can hear an organisational narrative that is often left out of discussions about what makes up organisational practice and theory.

¹ As Susan Krieger did with the people who she interviewed in her study of couples (1983).
² This desire to tell our stories is a common human need, according to several popular and organisational psychologists including: Caudron (1999); Corrigan (1999); Lewin & Regine (2000); McKay (1994); Salopek (1999); Vander Houwen (1997).
I did not set out to resolve the emerging issues raised by the workers at the Refractories, nor to introduce yet another management tool to be used to manage workers more effectively. It was not my intention to predict or control possibilities for change at the Refractories. Rather the study was designed to provide an increased understanding of a complex situation through the eyes and words of the workers. I have attempted not to fall into the trap of drawing the conclusion that if something can be understood, it can be managed. This is something that Ackroff and Thompson (1999: 19) see is widespread in organisational behaviour literature. It is, as Denny (1978: 20) notes of this type of study, “unlikely to help in [finding] remedies, but it can facilitate problem definition.” It can also create a learning situation for those who hear these perspectives. The value of the study lies in the depth of understanding it allows, to reveal experiences which may resonate with outsiders, opening windows into worlds that are not commonly seen. It is not the ‘single best account’ on which to base decisions that is the desire of much modernist research; rather the study falls into the realm of intersubjective interpretation, recognising more than one ultimate position, adding a powerful level of description of organisational cultures.\(^3\) I have deliberately presented only one part of the BHP Refractory story, in an effort to extend the literature through emphasis on the perspectives of workers in the formation of management theory.

The workers’ stories provide a basis from which to form a fresh sense of their world. They allow us to vicariously explore the social and relational factors that constitute working lives, in this case in an industrial setting. It is from within such spaces that meaning and wisdom emerge.\(^4\) Gwaltney (1975: xv) writes that stories of those who are largely unheard:

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\(^3\) Garrety, Morrigan, Gadham & Zanko (2000), in their research on a training situation at BHP, note the power of stories in learning about organisations.

can be the beginning of a fruitful exchange. When significant attention is devoted to what any given people think of themselves, then the concepts [they express through their stories] ... will attain their most appropriate meanings.

This dissertation presents a view of a portion of life in the particular context of BHP Refractories, one which was affected by temporality, historicity and context, as is always the case in social research. The workers would have been unlikely and unable to tell me everything that was going on, or all they were thinking. It is not possible to 'tell all' to another human being, as Goodall (1994: 44) stresses in his extensive work on research methods in organisations. The stories they did tell provide an opportunity to find a common humanness, revealing how important is the search for identity, belonging and finding a place to those working in organisations, a point made by Ornish (1996) in her preface to Remen's work on stories around the medical profession. Stories and other forms of giving accounts and perspectives do not have to be verifiable and 'truthful' to be believed. They describe a picture in themselves, as an insight into how the teller sees things. They "provide a gauge for determining a system's culture" (Kaye, 1996: 30). Moreover, by choosing not to present the account from a managers' perspectives, and deliberately presenting the men's stories separately, I have attempted to extend the literature on organisational management. It was through attending to and combining the men's accounts that I came to understand their view of their culture.

What the Stories of the Workers at BHP Refractories Reveal

Within these vicissitudes, the consistent tenor in the workers' descriptions of being silenced weaves its way through the telling into many facets of their stories, bringing with it an

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aggregate sense of disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction with their working life.\textsuperscript{6} They felt they were treated with lack of consideration and respect by their managers.\textsuperscript{7} In turn, they expressed little respect or trust of management. Managers were seen as "power trippers",\textsuperscript{8} who wanted to control everything the workers did, and left them little autonomy or self-respect.

In order to maintain some sense of worth and identity, the men aligned strongly with their workmates, while keeping themselves at what they saw as a safe distance from their managers.\textsuperscript{9} The workers saw the need to support each other against this common "enemy".\textsuperscript{10} And yet, on some issues, they were diametrically opposed, such as who should be responsible for various tasks, who should get overtime, or what their shift work patterns should be. They asserted that this disconnected way of relating—mostly with management, but sometimes with each other—was entrenched in the company and unlikely to change. They could not imagine the managers wanting to hear what the workers had to say. Nor could they see that the managers would be willing to share power with the workers for fear of losing their ascendancy with the culture or their strategic positions within the organisation.\textsuperscript{11}

The men impart a very different representation of organisational management than is present in much of the current organisational management literature, which tells of organisations that are moving toward social involvement and democracy.\textsuperscript{12} While there are many examples in the organisational literature of companies that are run on so-called

\begin{footnotes}
\item[6] This sense of silencing is particularly dealt with in Chapter Two, and then in Chapters Three and Four.
\item[7] Dealt with in Chapters Two, Three and Four.
\item[8] Referred to in Chapter Three by Ray.
\item[9] Described in Chapter Three.
\item[10] Referred to by Ray and Norm in Chapter Three.
\item[11] As outlined in Chapter Three.
\item[12] Such as Lewin and Regine (2000) and Micklethwaite and Wooldridge (1997).
\end{footnotes}
democratic lines, the reporting on these companies is generally from the perspectives of management or academics. Where workers are included their perspectives on a range of management practices are not usually given. This seems to be particularly so in regard to workers in industrial settings.

The Refractories workers’ descriptions of the non-caring, disrespectful atmosphere in which they felt they worked do not match a concept of a democratic workplace that “includes full and free communication, regardless of rank and power”, as Slater and Benis (1964: 305) noted in what they saw as a growing number of emerging democratic organisations, nearly forty years ago. Nor does the picture painted at the Refractories align with the ‘complexity principle’ of business in which “valuing people and relationships is not just a good or espoused idea, but a conscious management action that has a positive outcome on the economic bottom line” (Lewin & Regine, 2000: 14).

The workers expressed a tension at the plant around issues of democracy in management. Some saw it as management’s job to make the larger decisions, because workers were not paid to do that. However, these same men, as well as other workers, also wanted to be involved because these decisions affected their working lives. They talked of a sense of frustration at being kept out of the picture and action of what was happening at the plant. Those who did want greater participation in decision making felt they were unable to do so.

The Value to the Refractories of Attending to the Stories of the Workers

Through this research, my belief in the vital importance of attending to the points of view of those who are usually silenced has deepened. I have a powerful sense of the importance of taking note of those at the bottom of an organisation’s hierarchical ladder. It is through their basic, and often long-term, understanding of the processes and products of the
organisation that they can contribute valuable information to theories of conduct of a company. The work they do on a day-to-day basis is framed within a broader context of the business of which the men at the Refractories displayed an often astute awareness.

Their work as part of a large steel-making industry was hard, dirty and physically taxing. Often people who work in these positions are treated as though they do not think beyond their designated roles. Not so the men with whom I worked. The nature of much of their talk showed they knew a great deal about some major issues at the plant.

As the men talked about work-related issues I became more and more aware of the vital contribution they could make to the running of the company if management would draw on them as a resource. These were feeling, caring people who were observant of the world around them. Given the opportunity, they demonstrated an ability to reflect adeptly on their own and others’ roles in their workplace and in the wider world of steel manufacturing. A picture arises for me of a group of men who were mostly hard working, thoughtful, sometimes angry people, who felt alienated and unrecognised for any contribution (beyond their immediate tasks) that they could make to a business of which they were a vital part. The classic Tayloristic notion of workers being without the intellect or ability to understand or be interested in what is going on in their workplace,\(^\text{13}\) was certainly not what I observed to be the case with workers at the Refractories. Just because they worked on the noisy, dust filled shop floor amongst the huge machinery, vats, kilns and bagged materials they used for creating the ‘bricks’, did not mean they could not think.

\(^{13}\) As commented on in Chapter Two.
People "on the shop floor can contribute to the defining of a clear course into the future", Suzuki (1993: 4) notes as he theorises about worker involvement in heavy industry. Unless worker contributions are taken into account within an organisation, only a portion of an organisational picture is represented, and everyone in the organisation, it seems to me, misses out on what could be substantial input to both the organisation and individual stakeholders. By closing the doors of attention to the understanding and perspectives of those who are seen as less able to articulate their concerns and knowledge, opportunities to consider other ways to conduct organisational affairs are lost. Tojo Thatchenkery (pers. comm. Feb., 2000) agreed that when knowledge is not shared, no matter from where it arises in an organisation, the organisation is disadvantaged because, as he said, it is not making use of the “diverse knowledge that exists.”

The workers considered that in some matters they knew more about the business than those at the top of the hierarchical ladder, whom they saw as being distant from much of the real management and knowledge of the plant. My observations and analysis of the running of the company support their assertion. By disregarding ideas the men had about equipment and use of materials that could assist the manufacturing processes, their suggestions on the implementation of health and safety measures, or the setting of work rosters, the company was not taking advantage of a pool of knowledge that was right on their doorstep. When “authoritarian solutions to production and social order exclude local knowledge embodied in local practices, they will fail”, Shotter (1996: 33) notes.

As I talked with Tojo Thatchenkery (pers. comm., Feb, 2000) about the workers at the Refractories being silenced, he spoke of a commonly held assumption that knowledge of company decisions and information is controlled hierarchically, flowing one way, from the top down, implying that knowledge held at a lower level of the hierarchy goes unheralded and under-appreciated, thus “disadvantaging the company.” He referred to an ideal
exchange of knowledge as "Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge (ASK)", not something to be manipulated, but something to be nurtured by providing a favourable environment within which it can be expressed.

Parallels Between the Reflections of the Workers at BHP Refractories and Workers from Other Organisations

All the anger, sense of betrayal, failure of trust, lack of being cared for that comprise the men's descriptions of their life as workers at BHP Refractories was partly due to this particular company's way of operating as part of a large industrial system. It seems that the way of behaving in this company had built up over the history of the organisation, which aligns with industrial alienation, institutionalised labour and the bureaucratic management of industrial life. And yet these workers are not alone in their perceived plight.

While this study concentrates on one particular context in a particular point in time over a two-and-a-half-year period, I have heard similar sentiments about being unheard and unrecognised from many workers in other organisations. As I went about my study, I spoke with people from many walks of life about my conclusions that those at the lower levels of organisations—and society in general—are not heard, and that through this disregard, organisations and society in general miss out on a vast untapped pool of wisdom. Those with whom I spoke included a saleswoman in a shoe department, a railway worker, university lecturers and administrators, school and TAFE$^{14}$ teachers, miners and council workers. A common response from all of these people was animated agreement with my observations, as they considered my case study findings in the context of their own working situations. These extended insights into working life in so many organisations have led me to consider that it is not just large industrial organisations that suffer from the malaise of alienation, misgiving and disregard.

$^{14}$ Institutes of Technical and Further Education.
Watson (1980: 45) notes, in his discussion of the work of the early interactionist researcher, Everett Hughes, that by concentrating on the work of manual operators, light can be shed on other occupations where “factors of general relevance to work experience [are] taken for granted.” Hughes, in 1958, focussed his studies on the working lives of manual workers because he saw that such experiences formed a universal base that may not be “noticed in more conventional kinds of work.”

There are opportunities for generalising to other workplaces, and with these possibilities go some dangers. It would seem unreasonable to assume there could be an empirical formula for reaching conclusions from a study such as the one I have undertaken here, when the meaning for that study is socially constructed, derived by participants and different readers, individually and collectively. John Shotter (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) put it this way:

There is no one single framework, no one single place or position. Social construction is not a position or just a movement in an intellectual sense. It is always to be on the move and to move to understanding something from within the involvement, but also then move outside to understand it from outside the involvement.

A social system’s behaviour is so complex. It will probably never be completely analysable, as with the fractal attractors of mathematics. Nor is it likely that my account provides universal laws of cause and effect, or a search for ‘ultimate truths’, or answers.

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15 The untapped wisdom of marginalised groups has also been noted in work on the benefits the mainstream can gain from listening to Aboriginal students. Gluck and Vialle (1998) developed a process identifying unmet needs of these marginalised group of students at their university who had previously been seen as deficient. Through the recognition that these students could provide a leading edge in defining appropriate and useful learning techniques, such as incorporating concept maps into text and delivery, mainstream students also benefited. Such as Lewin and Regine (2000) and Micklethwaite & Wooldridge (1997).
What is vital is that these accounts can be placed on the public agenda. It means that at least they can be talked about, a possibility sought in many organisations by workers.

What Can Emerge From a Storytelling Approach to Research

Listening to workers' perspectives in organisations could reap benefits for all those involved: the tellers, the writer and the readers. Stan, during the interview process, with his comments on emotional aspects of telling his story and of getting others to tell theirs to me, was aware of the art of storytelling, and its place in the organisation. He was not only telling his story, he was talking about the issues of storytelling, operating at a higher level of reflection. It is not the content of the story that is so critical to understanding but "the process that [it] ignites", Simkinson and Simkinson (1993: 1) note in their work on the relevance of narrative in social research. It is through stories, such as the workers' at BHP Refractories, that we can learn of the complexity of people's existence.

The value of using narrative in the organisational context is that unlike empirical analyses of organisations which often concentrate on production processes and task analyses, social and relational elements assume a central focus in storytelling. They add 'lifeliness' to analysis. "Telling and attending to stories is a liberating experience for everyone concerned", Mary Catherine Bateson (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) commented. The use of narrative research as a medium for learning about human life has been described in feminist research as a search for space and place "outside of modernity" from which marginalised groups can find a place to speak (Leach, 1996). Not only are stories informative, they "can provide the most potent remedies for past, present and future ills" (Estés, 1993: 5).

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17 As referred to in Chapter Six.
Gaining wisdom through narratives is not a new way of learning. Indigenous peoples from around the world have traditionally taught and learnt through oral storytelling traditions, Estés (1993: 1) notes of the stories she heard through her own indigenous background. Stories create spaces free of coercion, where sincerity and cognisance of situations can emerge. Narratives “contain the complexities of people’s experience [that] allow readers to connect with their passion” (Lewin & Regine, 2000: 25). They allow emotions and feelings to be brought into centre stage, and can create a space for mutual learning, which I hope this research process has opened for the men at the Refractories, myself and others who are affected by this study.

**How Can Workers Be Heard?**

There are many ways to go about attending to the voices of those who are not normally heard or acknowledged. Each situation calls for a different approach. There is unlikely to be a best way. There are merely different ways. How such assignments are undertaken has far-reaching implications for the outcomes of the effort.

By building relationships with the men and listening to their stories, it felt possible for me to move into what Sheila McNamee (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) calls ‘transformative dialogue’ which affected all those involved within a conversational space, creating a ‘common space of connection’ (Jane Dutton, pers. comm., Feb., 2000). Different levels of dialogue occurred within this research process. There was the obvious dialogue between the men and myself, between the men themselves and with their managers. The transformations occurred at a personal, organisational and relationship level.

The men were able, in some instances, to see the connection between what I was doing in my research project and how it could benefit them. Vince, for example, talked of how my
work with him and his crew had impacted on his home life. He also talked of how he had become, over the time I had known him, a much more committed worker, staying out of trouble and "just getting on with my work." Chad moved from being aggressively angry at his supervisors to being able to talk with them about work issues. He even became involved in improving his own skills in reading and writing, at the suggestion of one of the supervisors. Other unusual situations occurred for the men through their visits to the University; first to attend my presentation to an academic and business audience about my work at the Refractories, and then to the launch of Eddie's Book. These men commented to me that they had never been to the University before. At each of these events they could see that their voices were indeed being presented, attended to and respected by people in a public forum, people whom they saw as having status in society. My research process created what Deetz (1992: 14, 69) refers to as a 'space for discussion' for the workers. In both the 'formal' setting of the interviews and the informal times of sharing their thoughts with me, they often spoke thoughtfully about events that were happening at work.

Much of the literature on organisational change management focuses on some seemingly encouraging examples of transformative dialogue and respect for employees. I am sceptical about the endurance of these changes, based on the personal experiences about which so many people have talked to me during the course of my thesis. In Semler's (1993) work, for example, he emphasises the 'democratisation' of his business. Yet he was the one, as the CEO of the business, who made the suggestions for how to involve workers and managers in the organisation, even when, in some instances, it went against what the workers wanted. I am not necessarily suggesting the introduction of 'flat' structures in business, particularly in organisations such as BHP Refractories, that are part of such a large multi-national corporation. That seems to me to be somewhat impractical. Nor am I saying that the chasm of which I have spoken should be abolished or denied. Workers and managers in organisations do have different roles and expectations of those roles. What I
am suggesting is that if workers were listened to and acknowledged for the valuable knowledge they do have about the business, beyond their immediate tasks, it would not only add to their quality of life, as is so heavily documented in the literature, it would also add to the value of the business.

There are attempts being made in parts of BHP aiming to move the company towards a more personalised way of working. In one section of the Port Kembla operation, one of the managers is working with a strong emphasis on worker-inclusion in change management at the plant. At a meeting I attended, however, it was noted by a supervisor from that section, that this approach was extremely rare in BHP. In fact, he said that out of the fifty or so divisions in Port Kembla, only three were moving to change their way of conducting the business. This is despite the continued efforts of the Steel Leadership program, which uses a very personal and radical approach to changing the way BHP managers direct their divisions. It was also obvious at that meeting that while worker-representatives were involved in some ways in decision making around change, old patterns seemed to slip back in some circumstances. When I asked the human relations manager who was present, if the workers were to be involved in designing changes to a process which needed some major alterations to make it internationally competitive, she replied quite comfortably: “No, that’s up to the engineers.”

In much of the popular and academic change management literature, methods recommended to improve management skills, including the skill of listening, are prolific. These often recommend training as the most effective method to achieve new styles of managing. Management training is seen in broad terms, including awareness for the need for change (Blumenthal et al., 1994), ways to deal with anger, conflict and behaviour problems

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20 Argyris (1999); Blumenthal & Haspeslagh (1994); Buchanan & Body (1992); Gilsdorf (1998); Hays (1999); Korukonda, Watson & Rajkumar (1999); Laabs et al., (1999).
(Laabs et. al, 1999), or to introduce appropriate speech in the workplace (Hays, 1999). It is also suggested that training is the best way managers can learn to give appropriate ‘performance feedback’ to their staff (Gilsdorf, 1998). It is also suggested by Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) that training is the most effective way to orient new employees to an organisation. At BHP, management training is given quite a high priority, but mostly in one-off courses, and only to the senior and middle management level. And even with these leadership courses, the workers said that they did not notice any difference in the way they were treated by those who had undergone this training. Perhaps this was related to the fact that the cultural atmosphere of power structures systematically prevents people from listening or from others feeling they can freely say what they want or need to say about management.

To add to what the men saw as ineffective training of managers, the workers themselves did not normally receive this sort of learning opportunity. Nor was the learning from the leadership courses supported on an ongoing basis in the workplace, as far as I could determine. The approach to training as the panacea to workplace problems is criticised by many organisational change management theorists.21 Concerns over the effectiveness of training are placed around issues, such as the contingencies of workforces (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1998). Thompson and McHugh (1990) demonstrate a wariness that training often places the blame for workplace problems at the feet of individuals rather than the structural level. When this is compounded by a lack of follow-through or support, Applebaum and Goransson (1997) note, training becomes ineffective. An even more sceptical look at training sees organisational training as reproducing what its senior managers want and a reinforcing of the status quo.22 The behaviour of managers or workers is not something that


22 Child & Bate (1987).
can be taught formally. Their behaviour is rather part of the social, cultural norms of the organisation.\textsuperscript{23}

**My Involvement in the Telling of This Story**

The entire research process has transformed and deepened the way that I assess and read situations. My views of those working in a heavy industrial setting has shifted. Instead of seeing them from the stereotypical view of industrial workers being only interested in their immediate tasks,\textsuperscript{24} and of being unable to express their feelings,\textsuperscript{25} I now have a earnest respect for their level of knowledge about business management.

Because I was able to devote quite some time to attending to the men’s accounts of their workplace, they had the chance to develop reflective thoughts more fully than was usually the case for them. In a previous organisational study for my Masters Thesis in 1996, conducted in a rather different organisational setting at a child care centre, I also found that the workers appreciated having time to reflect on their work and working relationships.

Workers at BHP Refractories, or in other workplaces I have observed, are not normally given this time and attention for reflection at or about work. One of the consequences of not continuing with the transformative dialogue, is that some of the earlier antagonistic behaviour I saw in the early stages of my field study returned when the opportunities for reflection were no longer available to the workers. Chad, for example, I was told by Don, had reverted to his abusive, anti-management behaviour since I had finished my work at the plant. Circumstances had changed. The two people with whom he could talk on a reflective level—his supervisor and myself—had left the company. This emphasises to me

\textsuperscript{23} Stenhouse (1983).
\textsuperscript{24} As mentioned in the Preface and Chapter Two.
\textsuperscript{25} As mentioned in Chapter Four.
the need to continue the process of transformative dialogue and creating conversational
spaces in which changes can take place. The concepts of inclusive management taught in
short-term training courses for either management or workers need to be built into the
way the company operates, and constantly be reinforced and supported throughout the
organisation.

I would like to think that my contribution to the literature on management could be
transformative on a theoretical basis. This could be achieved in part in the form of future
publications, which will add to the discussion on workers’ involvement in management.
The themes from this study can link with other studies to stimulate discussion on common
topics, such as how workers can be heard and acknowledged for the broad contribution they
can make to management theory. The recognition of the workers’ opinions can be achieved
through a storytelling type of approach to research.

In addressing the notion of my involvement and bias as a researcher, I acknowledge my
response-ability toward the men who were willing to share their knowledge and insights
with me. Their collective and individual stories create an image of their identity partly
through how I, as a person outside their world, interpreted their words. It was important
for me to question my personal assumptions, a position noted by Jean Paul Sartre (1965)
when he stated:

... reasonable hypotheses ... take the facts into account, but I am only too well aware
that they come from me, that they are simply a way of unifying my knowledge.
Slowly, lazily, the facts adapt themselves at a pinch to the order I give them, but even
so it remains outside of them.

26 Which were outlined in Chapter Four.
My approach to the study was affected by the sort of world I want to live in; one where people who are seldom acknowledged for their wisdom are given credence for their knowledge. Through my genuine interest in hearing what the workers had to say, and my aspiration to present their voices, I was able to gain many insights into the workers' "cultural frameworks and hidden meanings" (Gilligan, 1977: 17).

The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man [sic] has said. Geertz (1973: 30)

Restrictions on Storytelling in Academia

A restriction on telling other people's stories within the academic realm was pointed out to me by Bob Jackall (pers. comm., Feb., 2000) in discussing his research on crime gangs and police in New York. He lamented the fact that while using storytelling as an important part of his lecture format, it has been sanitised through the need to "burden the stories with disclaimers about impact. You can't tell a story without apologising in advance in a hundred different ways. By the time you finish, what's the point of telling the story?" He was referring to the need to be intensely watchful, in a legal-cum-ethical sense, of what and how he conveys the messages he wants to pass on, when the stories he tells are about other people. Yet it is vitally important to be aware of the rights and possible safety issues of those about whom stories are being told. I addressed these potentially sensitive issues through cross-checking with the workers throughout and beyond the field study that the images I presented were in line with what they wanted to be portrayed.

If we, as researchers can be aware of at least the possibilities of these [opportunities], then we can be part of the movement that can move beyond or around these dangers and gain what is meaningful out of the experiences and encounters.
David Cooperrider (pers. comm., Feb. 2000) also fears that the power of storytelling is being bypassed in organisational literature. He grieves the absence of narrative skills within the discipline which brings the “magic of story as it flies on silver wings, as it flies from mountain top to mountain top and empowers and compels.” He sees stories as the most powerful tool we have of learning about the societies in which we live. There is nothing”, he said, “more powerful than the right kind of story to alter the fabric of social relationships and make reality more permeable, opening it to alternatives and bringing more people together.” That power, he considers, is being lost in a theoretical maze as social research becomes “narrative thin as opposed to narrative rich.” And yet Plummer (1995: 23) does not see that storytelling has declined; rather it has changed channels.

Academics have separated themselves from storytellers, Gergen (1999f) notes, perhaps seeing themselves as superior through their analytical and supposedly objective way of seeing. It may be that techniques of understanding through stories are unfamiliar for academics, and so they stir a sense of resistance. Perhaps those involved in collecting stories are seen as putting themselves at “risk [of forming] relationships”, Taylor et al. (1995: 209) note, which may be seen as contaminating their ‘data’ and is hence undesirable in the realm of research. However, this mode of research is now taking on a sense of acceptability in qualitative research, as seen through such organisations as The Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, and its journal. Storytelling is “at the heart of our symbolic interactions” (Plummer, 1995: 20).

Implications From This Study. Where To From Here?
The issues raised by the workers produce a set of questions beyond the scope of this study. These further questions could have implications for workers as well as the organisation for whom they work, and could form the basis for further organisational studies.

It would be informative, for example, to study in some depth the impact on businesses where managers do seriously attend to workers' voices. Insights might be gained in hearing from workers in industrial settings about how they perceive differences in their working lives when the management style in which they work is transformed from a non-attentive to an attentive style. Does the recognition of their voices make a difference to how they feel about and how they approach their work? What do they see as the consequences for their relationships with management when initiatives are put in place to hear and act on their ideas? This might open up new avenues of understanding from a worker perspective. Even if the men were listened to, it is unlikely that a simple process of listening could be expected to provide answers to all the dilemmas they raised. Yet the overall view of the workers at the Refractories was that if it had been possible to overcome common practices of exclusion, then, they reasoned, some of the difficulties that arose during critical times may have been avoided.

Is it merely because of their social positioning that workers are not listened to or is it equally a matter of superiors not wanting to lose their sense of power and control? Do managers really feel that workers do not know, cannot understand or are unable to contribute beyond their defined functions? If so, is that partly because their language is seen by managers (and academics) as inadequate? Through understanding the dynamic of status/language in the process of attending, the reasons why workers think they are not heard could be clarified.
Searching for further insights into questions about identity from the workers’ perspectives would also be a useful addition to the understandings to be gained about organisational behaviour. For example, what do workers think is the driving force that creates the search for identity for individuals within work groups? Do they see identification as status, rank, solidarity or something altogether outside of this realm of thinking? The relationships that workers have with managers could also be approached from another perspective: Rather than focusing on the differences between workers and managers, the emphasis could be moved toward what they have in common, a point raised by Jack Mundy\textsuperscript{28} (pers. comm., 1998). A worker perspective on the meaning and place of identity and relationships would expand the insights in the current expansive academic literature on identity and identification. By working from an appreciative inquiry perspective, the research itself could contribute to the organisation in an action research study.

What do workers see as the means by which they could be encouraged to tell their stories? Do they see it as important and necessary for improving their workplaces? What would they think of using storytelling on a regular basis, as part of ongoing management practice? And, do they see it as a feasible tool of management? The perspective of workers on this method of managing could inform the current thinking that storytelling is useful in organisational management.

The cycle of research questions is continuous.\textsuperscript{29} Further questions arise as to how, within a hierarchical structure, workers’ stories and contributions to the running of the business in a broad sense can be legitimated in the eyes of their managers, and portrayed in the organisational management literature. How can their views be acknowledged, celebrated and utilised? Is there a way to institutionalise or systematise the process of attending to those

\textsuperscript{28} A politically active and influential Australian union leader of the 1970’s.

\textsuperscript{29} Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997: 131).
at the base of the hierarchical ladder? By building storytelling into the structure of organisational management, both workers and management might benefit, through changes to how workers see themselves and how they feel about their work.

One hopes that the search for responses to these questions can continue for some time. Nothing can ever be certain in an uncertain world. Management is “the game of business”, where complexity and uncertainty rule in a world of “management in [a] Wonderland of uncertainties”, note Lewin and Regine (2000: 47), referring to the uncertainties in Lewis Carol’s Alice in Wonderland. Despite this uncertainty,

By talking about what we are thinking, sensing, feeling, knowing, by clarifying our assumptions, and articulating the shape of our arguments, we come to understand more clearly what we understand in this moment, and have a new starting point and readiness for embracing a new set of questions, wonderings and concerns.

Brett and Collie (2000)

One Ending is Another Beginning

The exploration I have undertaken of BHP Refractories has been intended to add another dimension to understanding of the human condition. In researching the voices of workers in a heavy manufacturing setting, I have explored what Rosen (1991: 7) notes is “largely uncharted ground” in the field of organisational research. I have placed the workers’ voices in a position where they can be read, or as Geertz (1973: 30) says, placed: “in the consultable record of what man [sic] has said.”

There is more than one beginning or one ending to an ethnographic study such as this. It is part of a continuing story whose components represent multiple beginnings and endings, of understandings rather than attainment of knowledge. I have formed links in theoretical
perspectives for which Gergen and Thatchenkery (1997: 371) note postmodern social research is searching. I am now left with more questions to answer in the search for understanding the many intricacies that make up workplace cultures of non-listening and non-inclusion.

After the research project is well and truly 'put-to-bed', I will surely see things that were not obvious at the time. And perhaps, in parallel, others may see things anew because they have read this study. As Steier (1991: 191) points out, we may not notice things regularly present, until they are lost or altered.

All deep wells get their experience slowly: they have to wait long before they know what hath fallen to the bottom of them.

Nietzsche from *Thus Spake Zarathustra. A Book For All and None* (1896: 67)

My research at the Refractories came to an end because of time limitations and the need to set boundaries to complete this one particular study. The lives of the workers at the Refractories continue.

But overall, I believe—and I'm not a genius or nothing—but I believe there's a lot of scope for improvement here ... But you know I think it's about time—and I honestly mean it, and I don't know how you do it—that everyone sat down together as a group, like we used to, and discuss the problems in management and on the floor and try and solve them, because if we keep going like it is, it's gonna blow right apart here in one way or another, because that's the way it normally happens. (Chad)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shanti Path</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asato ma sadgamaya</td>
<td>From the unreal lead me to the real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya</td>
<td>From darkness lead me to the light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrityorma amritam gamaya</td>
<td>From death lead me to immortality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravesham svasti bhavatu</td>
<td>May all beings dwell in happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravesham shantir bhavatu</td>
<td>May all beings dwell in peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravesham purnam bhavatu</td>
<td>May all beings attain oneness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravesham mangalam bhavatu</td>
<td>May all beings attain auspiciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locak samastah sukhino</td>
<td>May happiness be unto the whole world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhavantu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om trayambakam yajamahe</td>
<td>May all be free from misery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugandim pushtivardhanam</td>
<td>May all be free from disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdvarukamiva bandhanat</td>
<td>May all experience bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrityourmukshiyamamritat</td>
<td>May none be unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om shanti shanti shanti hi</td>
<td>Peace, peace, peace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Appendix 1  Samples of testing writing styles and structure to find the best way to present the voices of the workers to give them primary emphasis

Sample One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication: The Bigger Picture</th>
<th>More than Words or Gestures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workers’ Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Academic Commentary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The basic issue is communication between workers and staff. Everyone here likes to avoid communicating. As far as communication goes, I get these messages on the box to relay to the fellas and its more bad news than good news generally (Tex)</td>
<td>Ray, in his statement about hidden aspects of relationships (the tip of the iceberg), recognised that communication was far more than this sheer communication (Gubrium &amp; Holstein, 2000: 101) of giving and receiving messages. Goffman (1963: 33) comments that all contacts between people involve some form of communication, even where silence is maintained. Every utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech (Morris, 1994: 5). A great deal of the literature on communication notes the sharing of information as the crux of human interaction (Genette, 1988; Kolb, 1994; Mauws &amp; Phillips, 1995).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication, that's a big part of everything how people feel. It's more than the fact that there's a lack of communication. That's just the tip of the iceberg. (Ray)

Sample Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication: The Big Picture More than Words or Gestures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The basic issue is communication between workers and staff. Everyone here likes to avoid communicating. As far as communication goes, I get these messages on the box to relay to the fellas and its more bad news than good news generally (Tex)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication, that's a big part of everything how people feel. It's more than the fact that there's a lack of communication. That's just the tip of the iceberg. (Ray)

(footnote) 1.
Ray, in his statement about hidden aspects of relationships (the tip of the iceberg), recognised that communication was far more than this sheer communication (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000: 101) of giving and receiving messages. Goffman (1963: 33) comments that all contacts between people involve some form of communication, even where silence is maintained. Every utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech (Morris, 1994: 5).
Appendix 1 (cont.)

Scenario 1

1. Introduction
   background, history of company and sale

2. Literature Review
   ethnography
   narrative
   communication
   dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity
   truth and lies (collective/independent views;)
   meaning search for
   power
   reflexivity
   yogic view
   social construction
   language
   identity/self; eastern and western views
   identification and change
   management theory

3. Methodology
   description ethnography, grounded theory (emergent, constructivist), narrative, case
   study
   ethics; pitfalls; key issues; process; influence of language; generalisability
   Method
   data collection process: how, what, when, where, with whom, for what purpose;
   achievements and difficulties; what was missed
   researcher's role, and effect on participants and researcher and research
   relationships
   perceptions

4. Findings
   My story
   What they said (generically)
   My analysis

5. Discussion
   Themes developed
   Individual, Group, Management (involvement, identity, management)

6. Conclusion
Appendix 1 (cont.)

Scenario 2
Introduction (blend literature into all topics)
- purpose, thesis, questions
- significance of narrative
- methodology (as in scenario 1)
- method (as in scenario 1)
- themes developed (as in scenario 1)

2. Themes
   compilation of their statements to describe themes

3. Conclusion
   impact on individuals and organisation
   possibilities
   what's missing
   what next?

********************************************************************

Scenario 3
1. (as Scenario 2)
2. Themes just their stories
3. Conclusion theirs (decided by me what to use)

********************************************************************

Scenario 4
Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Findings
   Eddie's story
   Themes
   My summary short with large sections of their statements to support my analysis
4. Discussion of the findings mine
5. Conclusion mine supported by their statements

********************************************************************

Scenario 5
Two separate Volumes:
1. Themes/text volume plus right hand column format where footnotes refer text to academic notes
2. Academic volume
   purpose, thesis, questions
   significance of narrative
   methodology (as in scenario 1)
   method (as in scenario 1)
   themes developed (as in scenario 1)

Conclusion mine

********************************************************************
Appendix 1 (cont.)

Scenario 6
1. Introduction
2. All following chapters (as in Scenario 1) with a different format: Text on left hand column and academic literature on the right hand column to complement the text as in the way Chaucer is often written (as described below). (p vii) The format is designed to place the text in close relation on the page with its main analysis. It is designed to set the text in the context of the processes of its creation. (p viii) It is designed to reveal something of its purposes. It provides a commentary on the text as the main focus. They are placed side by side as they have been in the author's mind. (Taken from: Windeatt, B.A. (1984) Geoffrey Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde, Longman, London.)
Appendix 3  Vision and Principles statement  
devised by managers of BHP Refractories at a workshop facilitated by David Napoli, an outside consultant

VISION AND PRINCIPLES

VISION

A workplace that encourages and supports achievement through involvement and continuous learning by all to achieve quality outcomes.

PRINCIPLES

1. Treat people with respect and fairness.
2. Be open and honest with communication.
3. Consult with and involve people in decisions that directly affect them.
4. Provide opportunities for all people to develop and learn.
5. Create the opportunity to work with pride by producing quality products and services.
7. Develop effective relationships at all levels.
8. Provide a safe and healthy workplace with a shared responsibility for its achievement.
9. Recognise individual differences and the benefits that can be gained from them.
10. Continuously challenge and improve all systems.

(Dated: 8.11.1996)
## Appendix 4  Working Conditions

Showing the differences between staff and worker entitlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff/Managers</th>
<th>Pay</th>
<th>Workers</th>
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<td>Salaried</td>
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<td>Waged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monthly or weekly salary</td>
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<td>Weekly pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>No overtime or meal allowance</td>
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<td>Overtime available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Meal allowances: various rates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Operators = $6.90 - $18.50</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance = $7.40 - $22.20</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly Staff = $6.90 - $18.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generally non-unionised</td>
<td>Unionisation</td>
<td>Unionised (FIMEE, MWU, ETU)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sick Leave</td>
<td>Three Single days per anniversary year</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unlimited with medical certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>if more than three days off in a row</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family leave - five days per anniversary leave</td>
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</table>
A working-class man
lost in an ivory tower

A quaint little book about an ordinary
Aussie brawler was released in Wollongong
last week.

It is nothing more than a collection of
anecdotes from the workmates of former BHP
refractories worker Eddie Barrett.

Eddie, who died of a heart attack on his way
home from work last October, was obviously
a knockabout bloke with a heart of gold.

But what began as a simple, quirky tribute
to a down-to-earth, dedicated worker has been
absorbed into the hallowed halls of academia.

If you thought that higher education’s
style was losing some of the stuffiness which
had alienated it from the real world, then think
again.

Eddie’s Book is the inspiration of Wollongong
University PhD student Cecily Boss, who was working for BHP as a management
consultant on a team building project when
Eddie died.

If one reference to “team building” is
even enough to put you off, then maybe you’d best
not continue.

According to a long and complex press
release from the unit: “She (Ms Boss) was
drawing a blank as far as part of her job when
Eddie Barrett died.

“She initially gathered a batch of stories
about Eddie and gave them to his wife last
Christmas and it was from this collection that
the book later took shape.”

The press release said the book represented
the voice of the workers “about which Ms
Boss’ PhD is intrinsically concerned”.

“In its simple style, it gives an insight into
the lives of workers, their feelings, values and
work practices - a viewpoint often overlooked,” Ms Boss said.

“Never knew he went to leaving standard
at school.

“Terry walked out with his hot pot and he was
holding it by the lid. The bottom came off and
it went all over the floor. He just scraped it up
and ate it.”

“He was the kind of bloke who'd help you
when no-one else would or wanted to.”

“I used to take the Mickey out of him, but
we were as close as anything.

“When I first started here, he showed me
everything.”

Obviously such a tribute would not be to
everyone’s liking but Eddie was a larrikin
and his family is tickled pink.

The astonishing thing is the way in which
this has been elevated to become some sort of
commentary on the proletariat.

The book is no more than a simple
summarisation of one man’s working life. No
more, no less.

Why do academics have to make
everything so complicated?

BHP Refractories funded the book - to the
tune of $15,000, according to the university
- and Ms Boss has just gained a $75,000
Federal Government grant over three years for
her PhD.

Her topic? According to the same press
release she will “undertake research examining
the workers’ perspective of management’s
approach to rapid organisational change”.

What a weird world.
Appendix 6

Scale of Satisfaction created at Napoli Workshop

The data in the following tables were achieved as a result of a complex two day workshop process for workers and supervisors, run by management consultant, David Napoli in 1998, as part of a change management program - which did not continue, for various reasons. The topics and dimensions were reached as a result of an exercise that took a full day. It involved the participants in an extensive process to assess key issues for them at the plant. They developed the dimensions and the levels, and then selected which items rated most highly. The numbers indicate how many dots were placed in the spaces marked from 1-9 for each topic.

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<th>7</th>
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Appendix 7  Possible Explanations for Sick Leave

Through my observations it seemed that there were several factors that could have been taken into account in making decisions about the sick leave:

1. Workers did more physical work in less healthy and more physically demanding conditions and so would have been more likely to be sick or hurt more often.
2. Workers did not feel the same commitment to the company as managers, and so did not feel the need to come to work even when they are sick.
3. Workers felt their jobs were less vital to the company.
4. Their work was less interesting and there were fewer challenges for workers in day-to-day work.
5. They had a sense of being treated as less important than staff and so felt as though the company was taking advantage of them, and they therefore wanted to get what they could out of the company.
6. They saw managers receiving privileges they did not and saw taking time off as one way they could gain some advantages.
7. They had not been given self-responsibility before, in any meaningful way, and so treated the new system as an unusual freedom, which may have been breached by some because they did not understand the implications.
8. Sometimes sickies were taken for legitimate family reasons that were not catered for in the normal working contract and conditions; hence the introduction in many workplaces of flexi-time to allow for some flexibility in the times that employees must be at work.
By GEOFF FAILES

A strike by 400 contractors' employees working on BHP’s $20 million hot strip mill repairs was the worst act of industrial bastardry he had seen, steelworks boss Lance Hockridge said yesterday.

"Any delay past the April 5 scheduled finish will seriously harm our business, our customers’ businesses, our employees and their families, and the Illawarra community," the flat products president said.

Last week, the State Industrial Relations Commission ordered unions not to take any industrial action at the hot strip mill while negotiations were continuing over BHP’s contentious outsourcing plans.

However, the company said employees of contractors working on the project downed tools yesterday morning and walked off the job.

They will meet again at 7.30am on Monday to discuss a return to work or further industrial action.

The company said the principal reason given for the stoppage was that "unionised employees of contractors are saying they will not work with non-union members".

"This is in direct conflict with freedom of association laws," the company said.

The unions involved were not identified.

Mr Hockridge said the commission orders highlighted the absolute importance of the repair project not being disrupted.

"This strike is a deliberate act of industrial bastardry, the like of which I have not seen before," he said.

"The unions have other avenues open to them to raise and resolve any issues including an open invitation from the commission.

"There is no need at all for this type of behaviour and we absolutely condemn this industrial action."

Mr Hockridge said in meetings with local politicians on Thursday, the company needed its concerns about the future of the steel industry in the region.

"We now call on those politicians and other leaders in the community to apply whatever influence they can to encourage a stop to this deliberate act of sabotage," Mr Hockridge said.

Australian Workers Union assistant secretary Andrew Whiley said no direct BHP employees were involved in the stoppage.

"But there are significant issues at stake," he said.

Asked to comment on Mr Hockridge’s "industrial bastardry" accusation, Mr Whiley said: "The union is not interested in swapping public insults with Lance Hockridge."

Former ACTU president Jennie George is expected to be endorsed tonight as Labor’s candidate for Throsby at the next federal election.

Ms George and Shellharbour branch stalwart Sharon Bird are the only runners in a selective preselection ballot of party officeholders.

Ms Bird is the rank outsider, rating her chance of success as "very slim", but nominated to protest the lack of a rank-and-file ballot.

Yesterday, members of the party’s ruling administrative committee cast their votes in Sydney.

Today members of the Throsby Federal Electorate Council will vote between 8am and 7pm at the West Dapto Neighbourhood Centre.

Those votes will be taken to Sydney and counted with the others at the party’s Sussex St headquarters.

A result will be known tonight.
These two tiny carollers are set for the region’s big Carols by Candlelight Christmas Spectacular at Lang Park, Wollongong tonight.
Riley Richardson, 6, of Kiama Downs is the

Christmas magic

BHP foundry workers urged to come forward

Deadly dust alert

By LISA CARTY

Thousands of Illawarra workers exposed to potentially deadly dust in a steelworks plant have been urged to seek urgent medical and legal advice.
Two unions and the South Coast Labour Council (SCLC) yesterday launched an unprecedented proactive campaign to encourage former and current BHP Steelworks Port Kembla foundry workers to come forward.
They want them to register with the SCLC and the Dust Diseases Board so they can be monitored and advised.
It follows the death of a 49-year-old foundry worker from mesothelioma six weeks ago and Freeman, who was at yesterday’s launch, said BHP had settled out of court with the mesothelioma victim.
The other two - one in his mid-50s suffering silicosis and one in his early 60s suffering asbestosis - were in the early stages of their leg: battle for compensation, he said. Each man had worked in the foundry for more than 20 years.
SCLC secretary Arthur Rorke, Illawarra Australian Workers’ Union branch secretary Andy Gillespie, and Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union state secretary Paul Bastian said early intervention was critical.
Medical intervention could ease suffering
Appendix 10

News Broadcast of Eddie’s Book Launch

Transcript of videotape (purchased from Channel Ten News after the launch of Eddie’s Book. Some of this tape went to air on the evening of the launch on the news broadcast. News items about the book were also presented on local radio over several hourly in news broadcasts).

Professor Richard Badham:

Cecily asked me to say a few words to introduce people. So that’s what I will be doing. Jerry Platt will be saying a few words and then Gerard Sutton will follow.

Jerry Platt: Group General Manager, Primary Operation, BHP, Port Kembla

Let me begin by saying that I never knew Eddie so I can’t talk from knowing him personally. But we know he must have been special; otherwise we would not be here today would we? When you read the book you can see just how special the people who worked with him thought he was, and I think in this day and age there’s a lot of depressing news of just how industry is going, how business is going and that sort of thing, it would be very easy to get depressed.

In the old days, people used to come to work and be told what to do and do what they were told. You just left your brain at the gate when you came to work and picked it up on the way home. If we’re going to survive the way business is going at the moment, and we’ve always survived these hard times, and I’m quite sure we will again. And it’s only through people like Eddie and Eddie didn’t leave his brain at the door. He came to work with them and used them all the time. And actually, there are a lot of people like Eddie at the workplace. Some of them have the strength of character to stand up and do unusual things that Eddie did at work. He didn’t mind what people thought of him, obviously. And, if he thought something was the right thing to do he just went and did it. And a lot of other people and the sort of work that [the plant manager] is doing in the workplace he was proud of Eddie, like any boss.

So I think I’d like to thank Cecily for going to the trouble of putting the book together, and there are obviously a number of others here today who contributed to the book [indicating workers who were present]. And I think Eddie’s family should be really proud of this. Congratulations. Thank you.

Gerard Sutton, Vice Chancellor, University of Wollongong:

I did not have the pleasure of meeting Eddie personally. But I have read the book in its email form and I read all of it and I thought that each comment said something about the person and at the end of it I knew the person and that person was a very, very fine person. It’s appropriate that we acknowledge Eddie and his contribution. I would also say to Cecily that the whole concept that you are approaching this from — I mean, I started to read it and I thought well just collecting together little bits of information and quotes from other people, I thought what are we going to get out of this? Well, what we got out of
Appendix 10 (cont.)
this is a perspective which is important and going to be more important to many workplaces in this country. Because any institution, the university or BHP, is what the people work for it make it. So it is the perspective of the workers that we must, we must access more than we have in the past. So, it's a good start. And just to say to George Edgar, the head of BHP, who is with us today. This is another good example of the university and BHP working together in an area, in an area that really is taking us into the new world. We have worked together on the technical side in the past. We are now working on impacts on the workers and the workers perspective on the workplace. So this in a sense is all started by Eddie, so well done Betty.

This, in a sense was all started by Eddie. So, well done Betty.

Plant Manager

Eddie was a highly respected worker at BHP Refractories. He was not only a hard working and conscientious worker; he was also a good friend of many people who he had worked with at BHP Refractories over the years. Why was this man so important? What did his dying mean to people? And, what has come out of it?

He was just a worker. But, he was not just a worker. Because it was what Eddie was and what he meant to people that made him important. He was obviously an exceptional human being, and he shared his strength with all those who he worked with. As Nelson Mandella said in his inaugural address in 1994: As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. That's why his story is being told. If it was just another story, it would have just fallen silent. These words are not just repetitions or echoes of the same old story. This one is different. Bev, his wife is here. Eddie's death was of course a greater loss to her than anyone else. However, she can be assured through the publication of this book, that her husband was truly appreciated. Her daughter, Irene, and her family also miss him dearly and have very fond memories of him as a father and loving grandfather.

Professor Richard Badham:

I thank you all for being here. And just a round of applause to thank you very much to Cecily. For workers of BHP you get free copies of the book. For everybody else, I'm afraid, there's a small charge of ten dollars. We're expecting to lose a couple. [applause]

Cecily Boas

R: Cecily, what inspired your work?

C: Eddie was a worker, one of the operators down at BHP Refractories and he died on his way home from work. He had a heart attack. And I was asked to go in and do some grief debriefing. I'd been working there over the last couple of years. So I went in and started to hear these amazing stories about this quite amazing guy. So I said at one of the sessions,
Appendix 10 (cont.)

it's a pity I haven't written a book about this guy. So I went home that night, and the thought came: Why not write a book? So I went around and gathered the stories from all the guys on the floor and in the crib room and canteen and so on, and outside and put them together into what's now this book. And that's quite a simple story, but with a, with a very deep meaning to it.

R: What is the meaning?

C: It's about - what the book's about. It's about a very special person. It has to be a very special person because the book actually happened. He was thought of very highly by the people he worked with. He helped everyone. There's a lot of stories in there about how everybody who came in to start he helped them in their job. He knew everything about the plant. He worked overtime all the time, sometimes even not, wanting to be paid. He worked, which really got some of the guys, even when they were on strike, he'd say: Hang on I've just got to finish this job, and off he'd go and he'd finish it. He was a really dedicated person, and more than that, he gave the light that and the energy that he had to other people, and I think that's really important. That's a really important part of Eddie. And I think that's why he's still shining now.

R: So, a good bloke.

C: Basically, a good bloke.

Bev (Eddie's Wife)

R: Can I call you, Bev.

B: Yes.

R: And your grandson's name again?

B: Jessie.

R: Jessie. Well, Bev, I see that you've got a smile on your face today. It must be nice to see what people really did think about your hubby.

B: Yes, He was pretty good. He liked all of his work mates [looking over to the workers]. That was alright.

R: And so how do you feel today when you see this book?

B: [laughing lightly] A bit nervous.

R: It'll be nice to keep.
Appendix 10 (cont.)

B: It'll be good to keep his memory going.

R: Did you expect that you'd have the head of BHP down here, the head of the University?

B: No.

R: You seem pretty proud.

B: Oh, yes, I am proud of him, very proud.

R: I suppose, in the future, what would you like to do most? You've got two little grandchildren.

B: Stay with my grandkids and my daughter.

R: And I suppose it will be nice to show him the book. Will you show him?

B: Yes. I'll keep one for him. For him, for when he grows up and he'll have a book of his grandfather then.

R: It will be nice for him to know who his granddad was.

B: Yes. He'll know it.

Irene (Eddie's daughter)

Reporter: How do you feel when you see your dad's book?

I: Surprised. Yes, really surprised. It was a big shock. I never thought they'd write anything about it. It was a chance to write it and get it published. So, it was good.

R: And down the track what will it mean to little Hunter do you think?

I: It'll open a whole new door to his past, about what his grandfather was like, and so at least he'll know what he was like and what he did and the people that loved him the most. So, yeah.

R: So, are you going to keep a copy?

I: Oh, yes. For sure, yeah.

R: Do you remember any of the stories that you would have read in here? Did he come home telling you these stories?

I: Oh, yes, plenty of them. Jokes, stories. Oh, everything. They were good times them days.
Appendix 11  Psuedonyms of workers, years working at the Refractories and position held along with time spent in interviews.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<td>38</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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total number of quotations used in the dissertation = 272

Average number of years the men had worked at the Refractories = 8.6
Appendix 12 Prompt Sheet.
Questions used by me at interviews when necessary

SENSE OF POWER/BEING VALUED
How much do managers/supervisors take notice of what you do or suggest?

Do you get recognition for any extra efforts you put into your job?

Do you want to be given the chance to have more say in how things are managed?

How secure do you feel in your job?

SUPPORT
How much support do you get from your workmates, supervisors, managers?

Do management and the company know what is best for workers?

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES
How much are managers’ decisions dictated by outside forces, i.e. those higher up the ladder, BHP as a whole, economic forces, share market, government policies, overseas interests?

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMPANY AND COMMUNITY
Do you think about what is good for company and/or your workmates at work?

What are some of the main issues you face in working across boundaries of the three sections of the plant?

SELF-WORTH
Do you consider your own wellbeing as you work?

How much acceptance is there of your work from others in the plant who are not on your team?

Are you encouraged to reflect on your work roles?

Do you think you get enough opportunities for training or would you like more, what type and for what reasons?

CHANGE
How well do you think the change processes are being handled now?

What and how else would you like to see things being done?

Do you or other workers at your level get a chance to have a say in how the changes are taking place?

What will you remember about this job later in life?
### Appendix 13

**Samples of my manual analysis of interviews**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>I've been here since I left school. It's the first real job I've had, so I basically know all the guys and get along well with them.</td>
<td>Has only had experience in this company as a worker. Values the contact with other workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
<td>It's a bit different now because the place looks like reducing the opportunities. There are always options and room to grow in BHP, because it's a big company. If it was a small company, there is a likelihood of further retrenchments. In BHP there's always something going. It would be easy because I'm already in BHP. It's only a matter of getting a transfer. People have done it in the past; gone across the road.</td>
<td>Feeling unsure about the future of the company although encouraged because it is part of a bigger company where there will be likely to be other opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future</strong></td>
<td>A negative outlook on things won't change anything. You have to remain positive. A lot of others have debts and mortgages and things.</td>
<td>Trying to remain positive and sees own position as such due to his personal circumstances of having no other financial responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sale</strong></td>
<td>I'm still young. They have families to worry about and things like that. It's just the circumstances you're in that affects your position and feelings.</td>
<td>Uncertainty around sale is affecting how people work. [Is different from before the sale?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td>Question: Has it (sale) affected others' work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work-Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong> To a certain extent. I think morale has suffered too, because the future looks uncertain for a lot of people. You don't have the motivation to go above and beyond the call of duty. People are not willing to do that extra bit. It's just the uncertainty in the place.</td>
<td>Sees that they look after each other and this indicates that they see themselves as different from the others on the floor and from management. They will tell each other things, so there is no use telling anything in secret. (I have experienced this with my work as people knew about me and my work before I had told them - even to union organisers and others not even involved.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>[Our crew] is a tight knit group and get on well with one another. Some [management] forget that even though we're in a tight knit group people will tell others things they are told.</td>
<td>Clear division, which makes communication more difficult. Seemed to be saying it comes from the workers rather than from management. Indicating that management are up at another level and are not interested in workers and deliberately ignore them. Certainly no sense of equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division</strong></td>
<td>Management know what the blokes feel in some things but its bringing them down to your level. They don't want to listen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dealing with feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

352
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>TRANSCRIPT</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition and acknowledgement</td>
<td>We get asked to put up suggestions and then <em>nothing happens</em>; or twelve months down the track it happens but it's been their suggestions. We used to sit around this table with the engineers but <em>we were just a piece of shit</em> - it was just a <em>token gesture</em>.</td>
<td>Put downs by management who take no notice of workers or if they do <em>don't</em> acknowledge them. Sees that others <em>don't</em> want to listen to what they have to say, even though they say they do. Recognition goes to the wrong people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions of power and information</td>
<td>The Manager doesn't get told everything either. The engineers and production are a world apart. Engineers keep everything under their belt.</td>
<td>Recognition that management don't know everything and that there are other forces at work. There are several divisions in the plant in different areas and communication of facts are kept in their separate areas - silos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>We're all working to better our own. It's a look-after-yourself mentality. We make some decisions, but it's more minor than the engineers.</td>
<td>The so-called team that many talked about later may only be a team in name and the type of work they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td>Indicating, I think, that there is not a heart and soul approach or feeling to the work he does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to work</td>
<td>You'll do anything to make your life easier.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td><em>Question:</em> What will you <em>remember</em> when you leave the company? <em>Answer:</em> The blokes; people mainly. I'll go away from here and think of some things that I could have said.</td>
<td>The people are seen as of most importance at work, not the work itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview situation is not the best way to get a picture of what is happening because it is false and contrived even when not lead by questions. Better to be with them on a regular basis nearly impossible with this crew at this time for me, because they seem suspicious of me and are not in one particular place to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 13</td>
<td>(cont.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervision</strong></td>
<td>They should look after the blokes. That's the best way to get the work done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervision, longevity</strong></td>
<td>People on the floor stay here and supervisors come and go. Things have changed. We still need some direction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meetings/communication</strong></td>
<td>Communications meetings are held once a month, maybe. Nothing's communicated at the meetings. I think he's scared of us or something. There are some very strong personalities in [our crew].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personalities</strong></td>
<td>If we are looked after we will work harder approach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is much more movement among management than workers who tend to stay at their jobs for longer. Not sure best way to cope with changes. I don't see that they have much opportunity to officially make decisions and solve problems in the same way that management does and this may lead to them not thinking that they can control their own work paths and make decisions about the changes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These meetings are supposed to be regular. (Since [supervisor] left there have been none!) Trying to analyse why manager/super behaves as he does. Acknowledges that some of the crew are very outspoken and may be intimidating if one is on the wrong side of them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale</td>
<td>The meeting [scheduled for later this morning about the future of the company] and the sale has given a lot of heartache for a lot of people for two or three months; the blokes on the floor as well. They worry about it the closer it gets. The ramifications. We have earned good money for a long time. I send my kids to good school. We're going to be badly affected. Will they treat us the same as the staff? It's not the case with us. When the staff leave they're given different treatment to workers. Discrimination is still rife in BHP; even simple things like staff get a Shell card. Why can't everyone get a Shell card? We've had big changes to our super, because it was so big to bring us in line.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity and Fair Treatment</td>
<td>Lot of fear over the proposed sale, although nothing much is known about it yet. Maybe that is just why there is fear of the unknown. Security of employment is already showing as the main concern and the fact that they earn good money now and maybe the new company won't pay as well. Different ways of treating staff and workers in redundancies. Staff get three months notice when not voluntary and sent to courses. It seems that workers don't get this. I have seen these differences in the recognition given to staff by management in organising formal, high class dinners and fancy farewells and presents. These have not all been compulsory redundancies. There are perceptions of differences in treatment between staff and workers. I see this in many ways-dress codes, office set ups, access to various services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
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## Appendix 14  Analysis of interviews of workers, June 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLAIMS</th>
<th>ISSUES</th>
<th>CONCERNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROFESSIONALISM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. We want to do a good job</td>
<td>Many things get in our way</td>
<td>We don’t get satisfaction from our work that we could or used to get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. There is puzzlement about how management make their decisions</td>
<td>We don’t know what’s going on or how decisions are made</td>
<td>We know what’s happening on the floor but don’t get asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Staff have more education than workers</td>
<td>They should know how to run the business</td>
<td>We are not able to contribute to management decisions because we don’t know enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. People want to work</td>
<td>There may be no work</td>
<td>Without work people have less identity and are financially in trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Workers are seen as having less intelligence than staff</td>
<td>We want to contribute more</td>
<td>We’re seen as not being able to contribute to the company in many ways that we could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Engineers are given the task of designing machinery etc.</td>
<td>We are asked for our opinions in these projects but they don’t really listen to our ideas</td>
<td>Many of the projects that engineers create don’t work and we have to then work with those machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Training budget has been cut.</td>
<td>We’re not getting professional development as we used to</td>
<td>Our level of professionalism is falling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Supervision has deteriorated</td>
<td>We need direction</td>
<td>We are not listened to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| COMMUNICATION | | |
| 1. Communication is lacking | We are not listened to | Our input is not valued |
| 2. We’re not being told the whole truth | Workers are uncertain about their future | There is a lot of gossip about our future |
| 3. Rumours are circulating at an amazing rate | Rumours usually turn out to be true | We can’t trust management |

| CHANGE | | |
| 1. There is general concern about the future | Some workers are particularly worried | We don’t know the best way to handle our personal worries |
| 2. The change is affecting people’s work and personal lives | Family life is being affected | Worries are affecting our personal relationships |
| 3. People identify with BHP | There will be a change of company and management | How will the new company treat us? |
| 4. There have already been cutbacks | We can’t do our work adequately without the resources | It’s more difficult for us to do the job well |

| RELATIONSHIPS | | |
| 1. Support varies between workers | Some are favoured above others | This sets up some underground swells of discontent among the team |
| 2. Trust and respect are important issues | You can trust most of the workers | There is trust between workers but not with staff |
| 3. Most workers get on well together in maintenance (and with operators) | It is good a team to work with | Some will have to go in the redundancies and they’re our mates and it’s hard to see them hurt and worried |
| 4. There is a definite barrier between workers and staff | They get treated differently to workers and see themselves as different | Unnecessary divisions are caused by the differences |
### FEELINGS, RECOGNITION, VALUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEELINGS</th>
<th>RECOGNITION</th>
<th>VALUES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cecily is here to do a job on us</td>
<td>We are being labelled as causing trouble</td>
<td>We are now being seen as the bad boys of the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Staff get benefits that workers don’t have</td>
<td>Discrimination is rife in BHP</td>
<td>We are treated as less important and valuable than staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There is little recognition for work well done</td>
<td>A pat on the back is not expected</td>
<td>It’s not easy to develop pride in work when it is not recognised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We are left in the dark about what is happening</td>
<td>No one knows what will happen to us</td>
<td>People are out for themselves rather than for each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. All levels of employees have their place</td>
<td>It is unclear where the boundaries are</td>
<td>It creates a low morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Management are here to make money</td>
<td>They say they care but they don’t</td>
<td>We are not valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Management don’t listen to men’s feelings</td>
<td>They don’t know what is really going on</td>
<td>Our needs and concerns are not addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Supervisors show no care for workers</td>
<td>Supervisors do not have our best interests at heart</td>
<td>We feel divided and alienated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. There is a lot of uncertainty about the decisions the company will make that will affect us</td>
<td>We need to be told what will happen to us</td>
<td>We don’t know what our future holds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Our future is uncertain</td>
<td>We’re afraid for our future</td>
<td>We’ll have no work and not enough money to meet our commitments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WORK PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORK PRACTICES</th>
<th>FEELINGS</th>
<th>VALUES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contractors are being brought in over us</td>
<td>We could do the work as well, if not better</td>
<td>We’re missing out on overtime and the work is not done as well as we would do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The company has rules to follow</td>
<td>Some workers don’t want to follow the rules</td>
<td>This causes chaos and discontent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Machinery is old</td>
<td>It’s difficult to keep it working</td>
<td>It makes it very hard for us and the other crews to keep things working well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 15

**Claims, issues and concerns**

Rated by workers, at a workshop I facilitated, from most important (1) to least important (12)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a.</td>
<td>Workers are seen as having less intelligence than staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b.</td>
<td>Cecily is here to do a job on us. We're being labelled as causing trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c.</td>
<td>We can't do our work adequately without the resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d.</td>
<td>We're not listened to by management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>We can do the work as well, if not better than contractors who are brought in over us, and we're missing out on overtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a.</td>
<td>People are out for themselves rather than for each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b.</td>
<td>We feel divided and alienated [from management].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Workers are uncertain and afraid about their future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b.</td>
<td>Rumours are circulating at an amazing rate, and they usually turn out to be true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a.</td>
<td>There is a definite barrier between workers and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b.</td>
<td>Discrimination is rife in BHP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c.</td>
<td>We're treated as less important and valuable than staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a.</td>
<td>Support varies between workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b.</td>
<td>There's trust between workers but not with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>We don't know what's going on or how decisions are made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>We aren't able to contribute to management decisions because we don't know enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a.</td>
<td>We're not getting professional development as we used to; our level of professionalism is falling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b.</td>
<td>There's little recognition for work well done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9c.</td>
<td>Management say they care, but they don't. They only care about money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>We're seen as not being able to contribute to the company in many ways that we could.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Some will have to go in the redundancies; they're our mates and it's hard to see them hurt and worried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a.</td>
<td>We want to do a good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b.</td>
<td>People gain their identity through their work. People identify with BHP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 16  Statements I gave to workers in second round interviews

Taken from my analysis of interviews

### Decision Making

Management don't consult workers about issues around change, because the company does not see this as appropriate or workable. Management don't expect workers to have serious input. Decisions are the responsibility of managers.

Decisions around change are determined by management in relation to what is needed, rather than consideration of workers' needs or concerns, even though there may be some talk in this direction. Workers feel that they are brought into the picture well down the track. They are invited to meetings with management and unions, but they see little impact from what they have to say.

### Divisions

There is a strong division between workers and managers. Workers are treated differently from managers, sometimes in small ways and sometimes in bigger ways. Merely using the terms workers and managers creates an immediate division. Certain images are invoked (and intended).

Managers are identified as blue shirts. Workers choose not to wear this colour uniform because they would be seen as being aligned with managers. There appears to be a sense of pride, belonging and identity in wearing dark blue shirts.

Staff and workers see themselves as belonging to different sides. They sometimes appear to be at war. Managers are scorned by workers. Workers sometimes appear to deliberately set out to jeopardise the work of management. Perhaps they do this as a form of revenge against what they see as overall unfair treatment, or in response to the disregard that is shown to them. The workers use strikes as an attempt to be heard, to have their point of view noticed.

It seems that it is almost impossible to break out of this state of affairs. This environment appears to have built up over many years, not just within this company, but brought into the company from the history of work experiences of both workers and managers.

Management see it differently. They see that they are dealing with a hostile group of people who do not want to hear what they have to say and will confront them on the slightest pretext.

### Identity

People have a sense of meaning around whichever side they identify with.

### Communication

There is a perceived lack of communication between workers and managers.

Perceptions of truth (and lying); knowledge, communication and power are often questioned.

### Reflecting

Having the opportunity to seriously talk about workplace issues in a formal group helps to clarify what is happening.
## Appendix 17

### Names and universities of academics visited in the USA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Position and Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bateson, Mary</td>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>Robinson Professor of Anthropology and English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blehman, Frank</td>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>Clinical Associate Professor, Institute of Conflict Resolution and Analysis (ICAR).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperrider, David</td>
<td>Case Western University</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Organizational Behaviour, Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunliffe, Ann</td>
<td>University of New Hampshire</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Communication Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutton, Jane</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Psychology Department and Professor of the School of Business Administration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eisenberg, Eric</td>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Communications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank, Arthur, W.</td>
<td>University of Calgary</td>
<td>Professor of Sociology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gergen, Mary</td>
<td>Pennsylvania State University</td>
<td>Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gergen, Kenneth</td>
<td>Swarthmore College</td>
<td>Gil and Frank Mustin Professor of Psychology Department of Psychology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodall, Hal</td>
<td>University of North Carolina</td>
<td>Professor and Head, Department of Communication Studies.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gusterson, Hugh</td>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Professor of Anthropology and Associate Professor of Social Studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackall, Robert</td>
<td>Williams College, Williamstown</td>
<td>Professor of Sociology and Social Thought.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Joyner, Laurie</td>
<td>Loyola University, New Orleans</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Sociology.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludema, James</td>
<td>Benedictine University, Detroit</td>
<td>Associate professor of Organisational Development at the College of Business Technology and Professional Preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mcnamee, Sheila</td>
<td>University of New Hampshire</td>
<td>Professor in Communication Studies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paltrow, Leslie</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Sociology.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose, Dan</td>
<td>University of Philadelphia</td>
<td>Visiting Professor in Anthropology and American Studies at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandelands, Lance</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Professor of Psychology and Professor, School of “Business Administration.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shotter, John</td>
<td>University of New Hampshire</td>
<td>Professor and Chairperson of Communication Studies.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Steier, Fred</td>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td>Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Communication.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thatchenkery, Tojo</td>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>Associate Professor in the Program on Social and Organizational Learning.</td>
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<td>Torbert, William</td>
<td>Boston College</td>
<td>Professor of Organizational Studies Department.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Maanan, John</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Erwin H. Schell Professor of Organizational Studies.</td>
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There are NO pp. 360-362 in original thesis
Appendix 18 Weaving: My Process of thinking in a different creative way about the thesis

I decided to create a weaving related to my thesis, because I had been writing of weaving the thesis together, and thought that physically being involved in a creative activity could give me some insight into the process from another perspective, rather than using only the left side of my brain.

I based the setting up of the loom on my previous experience with weaving (as was the case with setting up the process for the thesis). The first task was to make a decision about what warp to use. I decided to used rough, natural string as the base, (because it represented the roughness of my field work site). Then it was time to decide upon the length of the warp (just as I had to decide on an various points to move onto my study and my writing). The two end pieces needed to be round to hold the warp smoothly and evenly as the threads were tied around them. How long was it to be? I decided on the length because of practicalities of the height I could reach, and the place available on which it could be attached. (In the thesis I was aware of my own limitations, and the limitations placed on the study because of the requirements of a dissertation, and the involvement of the other participants.) How wide would it be? That was eventually decided upon by the length of the end pieces. (The size of the thesis is also constrained by requirements of the University.) When the warp seemed to be dense enough, based on intuition and guess work, I stood back to look at it to get a view of the whole set up (just as I had with the material I gathered from the men, making a judgement about its density for a thesis.) A lot of time was put into getting the warp evenly tensioned (as was my analysis and writing.) As some pieces stretched tight, others became loose, and it took quite some moving and tying, untying and tying again to
Appendix 18 (cont.)

get it to be relatively even (just as the process of fine-tuning the writing of the dissertation.) This part of the process took time and patience (as did the writing.) If the warp was not set up carefully, the rest would have been much more difficult to achieve. (Just as in the early stages of the study, setting the foundation with the men at the Refractories was essential in order to gather the amount of information I needed to make some sense out of what I was observing at the plant.) It never reached a state of perfect tension (nor did the study.) When it seemed to me to have reached a relatively sound base, it was time to start thinking about what would or could be used for the weft (as in the study, I could move from my earlier thoughts into new territory once I felt comfortable with the basis of the thesis.)

I found the first piece to weave just near where I was standing in the workshop at home (just I had found my participants at the works.) I wasn't sure why it was so appropriate. It was just the right width and seemed leathery (like the workers, because of their hard physical labour.) I thought of using bark from the garden, but because it had been raining this would have been too wet to use at that particular time (similar to selecting what was appropriate or not to use in my dissertation). I chose instead a branch with leaves from a dried arrangement inside the house. As the other pieces began to emerge, I kept checking from a distance to see how they looked and fitted together (as in assessing the topics of the thesis.) Each piece woven in was checked for its fit with the other pieces. Uneven pieces of material were used. Some needed straightening up and moving closer to others. Some were woven in horizontally and others on the oblique, sometimes depending on the material itself and at other times because it seemed appropriate to put them on an angle. Some materials were used and then taken out because they did not seem to be suitable. Various shaped pieces were fitted together to make the whole, and the final piece was irregular (as was the picture I got of life at the plant. All of this moving things around and selecting what to put where correlated with the moving of parts of the thesis around until it seemed to fit and mould together.)

The process called for a lot of standing back and reflecting on what was emerging. Was a particular piece in the right place? Did it complement the piece next to it? Was it too overdone? Or would it benefit from more of a certain material? Or maybe less? (just as I spent time reflecting on the various stages of the thesis.) The search for materials continued throughout the weaving and afterwards. It was never finished as such.
When I moved it into my office, from the workshop, over time, pieces fell out and I replaced them with other pieces and still today I think of things I could add, as it still hangs there (just as the study could never be a finite story with a definite end.) Photographs were taken along the way and the process written down in a journal as it proceeded (aligning with the process of the study.) The weaving did not start from the bottom and work its way up to the top in a sequenced pattern (nor did the study proceed in a linear progression.) Suddenly, I saw that one piece of string could be used up and through the whole, as a cross piece of warp, linking all the parts together, moving like a snake up and across the warp, or like a thin wisp of smoke (representing, to me, the smoke at BHP.) This was then used as a path to follow throughout the entire weaving, and was left to its own path as much as possible (which is how I wanted the voices of the men to act in telling the story of life at the Refractories.)

I was having fun! (as I did in my study!) I had no idea what the whole would end up looking like (just as I initially had no idea how the study would look.) At times I found it hard to leave alone, even late at night (so too the thesis.) Then I would leave it and go back to it to add some more material (as I did with various parts of my thesis.) I kept finding more interesting materials to use, mostly from the workshop (this too happened with the study as events happened at the plant and the men kept telling me more interesting things.) Some did not seem to fit at all, and were even out of place in comparison to others (the same anomalies which I found with material I gathered from the men.)

Eventually the intensity of the weaving process changed more to reflection, with only the occasional piece of new material added (as I came close to the end of my study.) Some of the materials were natural and others false-looking (as I found when reading what I had written in the dissertation.) These anomalous pieces were discarded (as they were in the thesis.) There were gaps left in the warp and I was not sure whether they would ever be filled in or whether they were best left as spaces (the same dilemma I had in the dissertation.) There was, what looked like to one of my friends, a hierarchy of stratification and sedimentation (like the build up of information I gathered, layer upon layer.)
Appendix 18 (cont.)

Some of the edges of what was developing into a woven sculpture were rather fragile and could have been strengthened in some way, if the cloth was to be moved to another position. How this could be done would not be an easy task to achieve (as I found in writing the dissertation, trying to make sure that it was rounded off and secure in its arguments.)

The weaving (like BHP Refractories) is full of different and interesting textures, colours (including the blue of the roofs of the plant) and images. It is not regular or linear and yet (like the thesis) forms patterns out of the chaos. Each part plays a role in the whole, and yet the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

And so, the weaving hangs on the wall in my office, a constant reminder of my study process.
Appendix 19

**PERSONAL IDENTITY**

(1)
/personal identity/self

(1 1)
/personal identity/self/personal development

(1 1 1)
/personal identity/self/personal development/personality

(1 1 2)
/personal identity/self/self perception

(1 2)
/personal identity/self/emotions

(1 2 1)
/personal identity/self/emotions/trust

(1 2 2)
/personal identity/self/emotions/morale

(1 2 3)
/personal identity/self/emotions/self esteem

(1 2 4)
/personal identity/self/emotions/uncertainty

(1 2 5)
/personal identity/self/emotions/frustration

(1 2 6)
/personal identity/self/emotions/hurt

(1 2 7)
/personal identity/self/emotions/acceptance

(1 2 8)
/personal identity/self/emotions/fear

(1 2 9)
/personal identity/self/emotions/dislike

(1 2 10)
/personal identity/self/emotions/empathy

(1 2 11)
/personal identity/self/emotions/detachment

(1 3)
/personal identity/self/status standing

(1 3 1)
/personal identity/self/status standing/recognition

(1 3 2)
/personal identity/self/status standing/listening-hearing

(1 3 3)
/personal identity/self/status standing/qualifications

(1 3 4)
/personal identity/self/status standing

(1 3 5)
/personal identity/self/status standing/manipulation

(1 3 6)
/personal identity/self/status standing/personal power

(1 3 7)
/personal identity/self/status standing/power

(1 3 8)
/personal identity/self/status standing/personal history

(1 4)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy

(1 4 1)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs

(1 4 1 1)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/home

(1 4 1 2)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/integrity

(1 4 1 3)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/honesty

(1 4 1 4)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/making mistakes

(1 4 1 5)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/job satisfaction

(1 4 1 6)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/values beliefs/professionalism

(1 4 2)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/commitment

(1 4 3)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/work practice

(1 4 4)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/perception

(1 4 5)
/personal identity/self/personal philosophy/change

(2)
/personal identity/management

(2 1)
/personal identity/management/communication

(2 2)
/personal identity/management/support

(2 3)
/personal identity/management/relationships

(2 4)
/personal identity/management/labeling

(2 4 1)
/personal identity/management/labeling/put downs

(2 5)
/personal identity/management/workers' perceptions of

(2 5 1)
/personal identity/management/workers' perceptions of/betrayal

(2 5 2)
/personal identity/management/workers' perceptions of/honesty

(2 5 3)
/personal identity/management/workers perceptions of/manipulation

(2 5 4)
/personal identity/management/workers' perceptions of/promises

(2 5 5)
/personal identity/workers' perceptions of/blaming
Appendix 19 (continued: 2)

(2) /INVolvement

/Involvement/self

/Involvement/self/decision making

/Involvement/self/professionalism

/Involvement/self/professionalism/responsibility

/Involvement/self/professionalism/expertise

/Involvement/self/skills

/Involvement/self/employment

/Involvement/self/employment/job satisfaction

/Involvement/self/employment/career

/Involvement/self/employment/future

/Involvement/self/employment/security

/Involvement/self/employment/selfprotection

/Involvement/self/employment/workhistory

/Involvement/self/organisation

/Involvement/management

/Involvement/management/management practices

/Involvement/management/management practices/decisionmaking

/Involvement/management/management practices/responsibility

/Involvement/management/management practices/obligation

/Involvement/management/management practices/information

/Involvement/management/management practices/listening

/Involvement/management/management practices/truth-omission

/Involvement/management/management practices/contractlabour

/Involvement/management/management practices/consultation

/Involvement/management/management practices/change

/Involvement/management/management practices/roles

/Involvement/management/management practices/shifts-rosters
Appendix 19 (continued)

3) /INTERNAL INFLUENCES

(3 1) /internal influences/self
(3 1 1) /internal influences/self/financial
(3 1 2) /internal influences/self/them and us
(3 1 2 1) /internal influences/self/them and us/power
(3 1 2 2) /internal influences/self/them and us/conflict
(3 1 2 3) /internal influences/self/them and us/industrial issues
(3 2) /internal influences/management
(3 2 1) /internal influences/management/organisation
(3 2 1 1) /internal influences/management/organisation/change
(3 2 1 2) /internal influences/management/organisation/industrial relations
(3 2 1 3) /internal influences/management/organisation/overtime
(3 2 1 4) /internal influences/management/organisation/sale
(3 2 1 5) /internal influences/management/organisation/finances
(3 2 1 6) /internal influences/management/organisation/history
(3 2 2) /internal influences/management/management style
(3 2 2 1) /internal influences/management/management style/them and us
(3 2 2 2) /internal influences/management/management style/change management
(3 2 2 3) /internal influences/management/management style/discrimination
(3 2 2 4) /internal influences/management/management style/fairness
(3 2 2 5) /internal influences/management/management style/work practices
(3 2 2 6 1) /internal influences/management/management style/communication/style
(3 2 2 7) /internal influences/management/management style/supervision
(3 3) /internal influences/group
(3 3 1) /internal influences/group/culture
(3 3 2) /internal influences/group/them and us

4) /EXTERNAL VARIABLES

(4 1) /external variables/self
(4 1 1) /external variables/self/home-work
(4 1 2) /external variables/self/image
(4 2) /external variables/management
(4 2 1) /external variables/management/industrial climate
(4 2 2) /external variables/management/industrial law
(4 2 3) /external variables/management/employment levels
(4 3) /external variables/group
(4 3) /external variables/group/union
(4 4) /external variables/research
(F 4) Free Nodes/metaphor
(F 6) Free Nodes/metaphors
### Time line of the research process including some key incidents that affected the project

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<th>Nov. '95</th>
<th>1996</th>
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<th>May '97</th>
<th>July '97</th>
<th>Sept. '97</th>
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<td>consulting including interviews, reviews, workshops</td>
<td>BHP Sales - A$18 million with assets of A$30 million, 1.6 billion shares</td>
<td>60% reduction in profits from a peak in 1992.</td>
<td>begin fieldstudy</td>
<td>work with new first interviews</td>
<td>first PhD analysis feedback session with the men</td>
<td>interviews analysed through NUD*IST and Inspiration</td>
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<td>Security of employment strike</td>
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<td>grief debriefing sessions</td>
<td>sale finalised to a Japanese-British consortium</td>
<td>last interview farewell function for sale of company</td>
<td>final data collection</td>
<td>closing of BHP steel operations in Newcastle</td>
<td>book launch</td>
<td>considerable instability and serious financial strain&quot;. Uncertainty surrounding the industry.</td>
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<td>130 workers employed at Refractories</td>
<td>Other subsidiaries of BHP being sold off</td>
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