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Living in the Blender of Change: The Carnival of Control in a Culture of Culture

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Keywords

organisational change, emotions, irony, meetings

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‘Living in the Blender of Change’: The Carnival of Control in a Culture of Culture

Richard Badham and Karin Garrety

Abstract

Traditional structural-functional approaches to organisational change, as well as critics of those approaches, usually offer overly structured and rationalised views of how change occurs. This paper attempts to build upon processual studies of change and critiques of overly hegemonic views of managerial control by seeking to capture the complex, emotive and fluid character of organisational ‘changing’. In pursuit of this aim, the paper documents these characteristics of change through a personalised ethnography of a micro-incident – a critical change meeting – in an Australian steelmaking plant undergoing cultural change. In conclusion, it is argued that even the more sophisticated studies of the emergent process-like character of organisational change fail to fully capture the ambiguous, ironic, emotional, and uncertain character of events in the ‘blender’ of change.

1. Introduction: The Setting and Purpose

We are living in the blender of change at the moment, we identify the next lego blocks that we can handle, but it is a bit hard to structure it. We don’t feel empowered, we are in the water trying to achieve change, but someone left 6 sharks in the water - we are in the chaos theory situation. Dennis, Supervisor, Cokemaking Oz.¹

Postmodernism has invited us to mistrust many of the revered categories of the human sciences, including ‘self,’ ‘body,’ ‘society,’ ‘family,’ ‘organization,’ and ‘choice,’ revealing them to be linguistic mirages or constructs of convenience, indeed ‘stories.’ Is it not time that we sought to deconstruct the concept of control itself? (Gabriel, 1999: 198)

Apart from a few short visits in the previous fortnight, I¹ had been away from the 400 person cokemaking plant for about two months. The people in the plant let me know they had noticed that I had been gone, and in their way welcomed me back. ‘I thought you had fallen off the edge’, ‘Hullo stranger’. ‘So what’s your name then?’ ‘Sorry about your desk....!’ But now I was back, ‘phase 2’ of a work redesign was being planned, and an introductory meeting was arranged for today in the main training room (‘the blue rooms’). The chairs were in a circle, I was five minutes late, but there were only two people there - Tom, a Scottish superintendent, who had called the meeting, and Joe, an English electrician who I had taken out to dinner a few nights before to catch up, meet his girlfriend, and talk about an illness that he had. They knew each other well, in fact we all knew each other well, as we were all involved strongly in the earlier ‘phase 1’ of the work redesign. Gradually, a few more people turned up, and the numbers grew to eleven: four middle managers, two technicians, four skilled electricians and heating controllers, and one machine operator. When one Lebanese electrician came in, Joe said to me ‘Richard, this is the Arab, I always told you about’. The ‘Arab’ said something about doing Joe’s work. I joked, ‘I heard Joe kept looking after you, that is what he told me’. Joe smiled and quickly remarked to all of us, ‘I do look after him, so long as he does what he is told!’

¹ The first person narrative in the paper is written from the viewpoint of the first author.

What followed was an all morning meeting, the *Phase 2 Kick Off meeting*, in which those present discussed the nature of the next phase of change, their interests and concerns, and what they felt should be done. This paper uses an account of this *Kick Off meeting*, the launch of Phase 2 at Cokemaking Oz to probe the nature of the 'control' that is supposed to be associated with organizational change. While the major focus is on the *Kick Off meeting*, the paper also draws data from an earlier *Phase 2 Planning meeting* (held by senior supervisors a few weeks before the *Kick Off*), and from interviews and observations gathered in a longer term study of the plant. The aim is to provide a less sanitised and less purist window on the processes of corporate culture change than is normally encountered in the research literature.

As Kunda (1993) has observed, many studies of change focus on the rhetoric of the 'culture merchants', 'managerial anthropologists' or managers and groups involved in culture change programs ('the culture of culture'), to the exclusion of direct observation and analysis of the rhetoric and actions of those most closely involved. Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) agree, arguing that a messier, yet possibly more accurate, picture of new corporate cultures may be obtained by detailing events in companies undergoing major change initiatives rather than after-the-event visits to companies that have 'successfully' introduced such changes. This paper draws on data collected from a company undergoing major change. The Cokemaking Oz research project is a multi-level 5 year ethnographic project. It has involved between 1 and 5 researchers at all times during the 5 years, each spending an average of 1-2 days per week in the plant. While the basic research undertaken by the team is not influenced or funded by the plant, we do provide feedback in the form of questionnaire results, co-authored videos, copies of conference papers and articles, the co-organisation of a number of 'learning forums', some formal presentations, as well as more or less informal 'chats' with managers and employees in the plant. The close relationship that has been established has enabled us to get access to meetings, events and situations that are not normally allowed. The dangers of too 'close' a relationship are, therefore, clearly ever present, but is partially guarded against by regular visits to the plant by established 'external' researchers to examine the 'state of the nation' – in terms of both cultural change in the plant as well as the success and viability of the research project.

Cokemaking Oz is part of a traditional hierarchical and paternalistic steel company in Australia. Under pressures from an increasingly competitive international steel industry, and a need to improve 'return on capital', the company has sought over the last 7 years to remove some of the rigidities, secrecy, game playing and macho-management style that has dominated the culture in the past. If the pronouncements of the Organizational Development (OD) publicity were believed, the plant has undergone a significant cultural transformation. Even a brief set of visits to different sections of the plant are, however, enough to give a somewhat different impression – one of a traditional culture successfully resisting and undermining many of these OD initiatives – an impression that was itself communicated to members of the research team by some of the OD personnel in their more pessimistic moments. Cokemaking Oz is, however, an interesting and important area within the plant. In comparison with other managers, Garry, the manager of the Cokemaking division, is a strongly committed and highly successful initiator of cultural change programs. The 'cultural change' initiative that he champions is a multi-level activity involving changes in work design, technology, organisational structure, and recruitment and reward systems. He has replaced some managers, and transformed the ways others identify themselves, communicate, hold meetings and manage their subordinates. The data presented here are derived, therefore, from a serious and committed attempt at cultural change within a paternalistic and hierarchical organization that is traditionally highly resistant to such initiatives.

In order to help capture a messier, and hopefully more accurate, picture of change than is usually presented in the literature, the paper focuses in on activities and themes in a couple of key meetings in the plant. It seeks to show how participants in the *Planning* and *Kick Off* meetings grappled with the standard questions of organizational change and control, namely, 'what do we want?' and 'how do we get there?' We will show how in Cokemaking Oz, employees explored these questions through a number of interweaving, and sometimes contradictory discourses in which 'what we want' was closely tied in with talk about 'who should be involved, and how' and 'who is responsible'. By illustrating the uncertainties, contradictions, drama, jokes and games surrounding such cultural change issues, the paper seeks to extend the insights of 'processual' views of change (Pettigrew, 1997) beyond the rather traditional 'realist' case study narratives presented by many processual writers. As will be outlined in the overview of academic literature on change and control, presented prior to the case description, the paper also aims to incorporate the critical sociological dimensions of 'control-resistance-identity' discourses on organisational control (Gabriel, 1999) while avoiding the unidimensional and totalising views of control that permeate the work of many participants in those discourses. Many analyses in this area provide, as Gabriel (1999: 183) comments, 'a safe haven within academic discourses where all is turbulence and even chaos. The scholar who ploughs this furrow has a reassuring feeling of 'understanding' what is being argued, of being part of a sensical discourse, where positions are clearly defensible and contestable.' The purpose of this paper is to reveal enough of the turbulence of corporate culture change, what it is like to 'live in the blender', in order to make those ploughing such furrows a little less secure and complacent in their positions.

2. Mudanças²: A Process of Control?

'Have a look at your position description – you have responsibility for change in your area. There are 5 areas – this team needs to pull them all together... Its about doing phase 2 as a collective group – not individual areas. Who's going to be responsible for pulling it together?' (HR Officer, *Phase 2 Planning meeting*)

Despite a growth in critical literature on cultural change in organizations, the dominant view continues to be one strongly influenced by systems based or structural-functional assumptions. The initial identification of 'change' as a phenomenon separate from 'order' is itself something that derives from structural-functional contrasts between 'statics' and 'dynamics' (Stzompka, 1999). The use of 'transition' imagery, with change viewed as movement from one type of order or stable state to another, reinforces this view of comparative statics. Although Lewin (1951) is often attributed with developing this approach (in his 'ice cube' model of change as 'unfreezing', 'movement' and 'refreezing'), this 'transition' imagery is far more deeply rooted in Western social thought about progress and change (Badham, 1986). The ensuing study of the patterns and drivers of change, its consequences and controls, operates within a set of assumptions that result in a view of change as an identifiable external object that can be planned and managed.

This general view of change has a number of affinities with what Gabriel (1999) has described as the 'control-resistance-identity' problematic in studies of organisational culture and control. In his review of the writings of corporate culture critics such as Casey (1995), Kunda (1992) and Schwartz (1999), Gabriel questions the unitary views of control adopted by many of these writers, and argues for a more multi-dimensional, and less 'controlling', view of the way control is exercised over employees in the new corporate cultures. In its critique of one dimensional totalising views of control, Gabriel's argument extends the more traditional critiques made against the rationalistic (Grint, 1995) and

² Portuguese for 'changing'.

structural-functional (Thompson and McHugh, 2002) assumptions embedded in Braverman style radical critiques of management control.

These two discourses, on change management and on cultural change as a form of management control, are informed more or less implicitly by structural-functional assumptions (even if functionalist approaches are explicitly disavowed). They come together in more or less totalising views of corporate culture change. Whether or not the new forms of culture are perceived as liberating or repressive, the assumptions underlying the analysis of the dynamics of cultural change and the nature of the new cultural orders that are introduced are the same: *the change process is one that is strongly directed and controlled by management, and the culture is one that strongly directs and controls its members in the interests of management*. Such assumptions underlie a variety of writers who, at one and the same time, also condemn many traditional images of control. The 'strong culture' writings of Peters and others, for example, explicitly contrast leadership and the management of 'meaning' with traditional command and control views of management, and represent the new culture as an 'empowered' workplace rather than a Tayloristic iron cage. The radical critics of corporate culture, recognise the complex nature of power relations that construct and constrain management as well as employees, and focus a degree of attention on employee 'ambivalence' in regard to the new cultures, and the ever-present 'resistance' to change. Yet despite the presence, and major importance, of such qualifications, the imagery of a relatively strongly controlled view of cultural change and control often lurks not far below the surface. Empowerment and autonomy are seen to exist within the framework of a 'strong' centralised set of values and beliefs. Ambivalence is towards an assumedly dominant and clearly identifiable corporate culture, with resistance often appearing more as guerrilla warfare against a powerful managerial push than potentially effective transformational activity in its own right.

In contrast to such analyses, this paper aims to capture more of the uncertain process-like fluidity of cultural change, and the complex multidimensional nature of the controls and counter-controls that are employed and emerge during this process. Organisations are viewed as continuously changing entities, a series of processes or events of continuous organising or reorganising, in which there is no absolute distinction between structure and dynamics, order and change (Gabriel, Fineman and Sims, 2000; Sztompka, 1999). From such a viewpoint, the idea of studying the 'structures' of an organization, as if they were some kind of hardwired systems, whether they be in equilibrium or disequilibrium, liberating or oppressive, is at best an abstraction and, at worst, a misleading characterisation of the nature of the thing being studied. Change, in this view, is not the exception but the rule, it is not something that happens to an organization, it is a central feature of the ongoing process of 'organizing'. The focus is on 'mudanças' – 'changing'. This represents both a 'processual' view of change, but also a critique of some of the ways in which processual views have been expounded or interpreted. This paper adopts a more personalised approach, including more of the emotive give-and-take between researcher and researched than is normally the case, and seeks to communicate more of the lived uncertainty of complex change processes that include the author as one of the many shifting and uncertain facets in the kaleidoscope of change. In short, it seeks to 'report back' theoretically relevant data in a form that gives a sense of immediacy and interest and captures a level of process that is often missed in academic case studies published as 'realist' tales summarising major plant or corporate changes in 6-10,000 word papers or 15-45 minute conference presentations. The focus adopted to help achieve this end is on an abstracted group of events (in this case, two meetings and some of the activities around them), rather than a hypothesised structure (the plant organization), in order to better capture some aspects of the fluid and process-like character of organizing and reorganising. Unlike the 'critical incident' technique employed in interviewing, however, the events, or the sub-events within them, are not claimed to be 'really critical' for the change process. They are, rather, selected for

interpretation and analysis because the issues that they raise are seen as 'critically' significant for academic theories of organisational change.

This unpacking also seeks to capture, yet extend, the critical views of corporate culture change provided by analysts of what Gabriel (1999) calls the 'control-resistance-identity' problematic. As outlined in Jermier (1998), this problematic is popularly presented as either a smoothly repressive 'brave new world' or a crudely repressive '1984' form of control (see, also, Badham, 1985). As an example of the former, Casey (1991: 161/2) recounts the following narrative of corporate culture change at the Hephaestus corporation,

'I commonly heard views about the company expressed by many, including senior and middle managers and technologies, low-ranking employees such as 'When you think of what this company has done, and where it has come from, it's just amazing. We've always been a great company, but now we're a Team, we are really going someplace....' Similarly, employees invoke the new company slogans and problem solving procedures in meetings, in cubicle conversations, and in interviews. They freely wear its slogan-bearing sweatshirt, baseball cap, and lapel badge. Many reported that the team has 'really brought us together.'.....'We're all in it together, and we go up or down together...So it's like, we care about each other...and....go the extra mile.'

For Casey, however, this was an ambivalent and anxiety ridden experience for employees as the following quotation from one employee (Angie) is used to illustrate,

'I have the golden handcuff sensation, that I'd like to leave but the security and benefits are such that I'm not sure I could adjust my lifestyle. But I'm continually re-evaluating my position with Hephaestus...I used to be more like the typical Hephaestus person...task-oriented, judgmental, aggressive...but now I'm not like that...I don't want to be too negative. But it's hard for me...I get headaches, like, from this place. Sometimes I think this place is trying to kill me.' (Casey, 1991: 167, cited in Gabriel, 1999:180)

In contrast, Ezzamell, Willmott and Worthington's (2001) study of 'Northern Plant' provides an exemplary model of the alternative '1984' imagery. The factory is far more traditional in its cynical working class rhetoric and in the ability of the shopfloor to resist managerial initiatives. For the human resource manager,

'Coming here has been a nightmare and a fuckin' career disaster....Everyone talks about union problems at [Northern Plant], that it's militant...but militancy is normally associated with formal activities isn't it?...Well, it doesn't mean that here...*this* is one of the most *militant* shops I've ever seen but *none of it's union activity*... (our emphasis). (Ezzamell et.al. 2001: 1053)

The Training Manager provides a different variant of the same theme,

'We're a premier company, we're preferred supplier and even single source supplier status with a string of companies, and this lot [plant workers] won't talk to us without all kinds of guarantees...it's unheard of anywhere else. What annoys *me* is that we have some really good people who are being held back by the 'they're out to screw us brigade', the

cynics, who know what they're doing, who know how to whip up the rest of the skilled men about this kind of thing.' (Ezzamell et.al., 2001: 1075)

Ezzamell, Willmott and Worthington (2001) continue by providing an analysis of how employees systematically distanced themselves from managerial culture change initiatives, and the effectiveness of the tactics they employed to retain their sub-culture.

This paper also draws on direct reflections of participants, and observations of meetings, to capture the lived experience of change - the uncertain, emotive, shifting and contradictory nature of managerial intentions and forms of employee involvement. The analysis is informed by insights drawn from a longer term 4 year ethnographic study of the plant (Cokemaking Oz.). In seeking to capture the complexity of change, the argument being made here is *not* that the workforce is more involved in establishing directions for change than Casey and Ezzamell et.al. recognise (although this is arguably the case) but, rather, that there is less certainty and clarity surrounding processes of organisational control than their different versions of the 'control-resistance-identity' problematic allows. The process, as it appeared to us, was more akin to the 'buffoonery of the social spectacle' described in Berger (1991: 187). Control, in this view, and as illustrated in this paper, is a multifaceted phenomenon (Badham, 1999), an ongoing theme in organisational relations, but one that is enacted, played with, rhetorically presented, imagined and faked – an amusing and fun, yet also hurtful and wounding, carnival not easily reducible to an underlying 'real' control dynamic.

3. The Phase 2 Kick Off: A Critical Meeting?

I am surprised more people aren't here, given the email war - management is fucked, couldn't organise a piss up in a brewery and so on. (Trevor, senior supervisor)

Despite an 'email war' between Tom and sceptical employees following Tom's email invitation for all operators to attend the Phase 2 Kick Off meeting (as Trevor put it, there were e-mails asking 'why aren't you bastards doing something?'), only 11 people turned up out of a workforce of around 400. The meeting was in every way a 'weaker' version of the meeting designed to 'kick start' the initial work redesign two years earlier (phase 1). Whereas 50 people had attended the earlier meeting, only 11 attended this one. Rather than a two day meeting, this meeting was for only half a day. It took place in the on-site training rooms not off site. The meeting was led by two operational managers, without the HR and consultancy support provided for the first meeting. The plant manager did not turn up ('he might come in....between meetings!'), and there was no discussion about who should be involved in running the next phase. Tom, and Peter, an engineer who had taken over a number of HR training and development activities, appeared to have assumed control of the implementation.

The outcome of the initial redesign, involving an 18 month process of work redesign by a participatory cross-functional multi-level 'working party', was a 120 page report – *The Coke Guide*. This report documented the initial changes to be brought about in Phase 1 (12 hour shifts, annualised salaries, some changes in working practices, initial training program) and Phase 2 (refining new job classifications for team members, restructuring the role of supervisors as team leaders, finalising the concept of 'manufacturing teams', and providing training for these changes). The report was communicated in mass meetings, followed by one-on-one information sessions with the whole workforce, culminating in a vote on the report's recommendations. Following a majority vote by the workforce in favour of the change, Phase 1 was seen as having been introduced (although there was

considerable emphasis on the fact that it had not yet been effectively implemented), and there was now a perceived need to begin Phase 2 to ‘realise the full benefits’.

After the initial introductions with everyone stating who they were and their intentions for coming, the meeting was loosely structured into three parts: (1) an examination of ‘where we are’, involving breaking into two groups to list down what had been done well and what had not been done well in phase 1; joint discussion by the whole group of ‘what is still sitting there that we still need to pursue’ (Peter), and then a financial overview of the change by Tom; (2) a discussion of ‘what to do’ – addressing the objectives for change, and the main tasks that have to be completed; and (3) a discussion of ‘how to get there’, under the heading of ‘how to move forward’. In this form, the meeting represented a rough and ready microcosm of traditional change management planning – addressing ‘where we are’, ‘where we want to go to’, and ‘how to get there’, while formally recognising the importance of participant’s identities, interests and concerns in addressing these issues.

The initial introductions, as well as the analysis of ‘where we are’, was a complex affair. Technical descriptions of positions and interests were interwoven with more emotive statements about people being uncertain about who they were, being ‘difficult people’, being there ‘to keep others honest’, about Joe having ‘stacked’ the meeting with electricians and so on. Evaluations of ‘where we are’ were presented in ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ lists by the two groups, but the different issues focused on, the proffering of alternative explanations for problems, and concerns and recriminations about implicit ‘blame’ being attached, were all influenced by the personalities, positions and interests of those present.

For the purposes of the present paper, however, our focus will be predominantly on the second and third aspects of change discussed at the meeting. These reflect phases of change and mechanisms of control that appear in various guises in the change management literature. In his classic statement, Stewart (1999: 6) identified ‘deciding what should be done then getting other people to do it’ as key management activities. While restricted views of change management may focus only on the latter of these activities, the most celebrated ‘guru’ on leading change, John Kotter, provided a broader picture, involving three phases. To the above-mentioned direction setting (‘developing a vision and strategy’), he added ‘establishing a sense of urgency’ and ‘creating the guiding coalition’ (Kotter, 1996). The paper will illustrate the way in which conflicting discourses, managerial doublespeak and games with shifting rules were embedded in the way in which the participants talked and acted out these activities as they planned Phase 2 of cultural change at Cokemaking Oz.

4. Deciding What Should Be Done Part 1: ‘Shoring up the Shit’ or ‘Going for the Big Bang?’

Peter In Tom’s eyes Trev and myself are the drivers

Trevor I don’t know where Garry’s at

HR You’re the leadership team – show some leadership. Garry would be impressed if you showed some leadership

To comprehend the discussion about ‘what should be done’ that occurred during the *Phase 2 Kick Off meeting*, it is helpful to travel back in time to Phase 1 and the *Phase 2 Planning meeting* that was held a few weeks prior to the *Kick Off*. While the *Kick Off meeting* was an overt invitation to the workforce to become involved, the *Planning meeting* was confined to invited managers and HR personnel. The authors nearly missed the meeting, only having heard of it in a conversation at the

plant the previous day. Even when turning up at the location, it was difficult to find the team. They were huddled together in an offshoot to the main building of the local research laboratories. This was no open participative meeting. As the first author remarked after bursting in 10 minutes late, ‘You may run, you may hide, but I will always find you in the end.’ A knowledge of the discussions held in that meeting proved to be invaluable background to any understanding of the *Kick Off meeting* and the nature of Phase2 as a whole, mainly by illustrating the heterogeneity and ambiguity of managerial intentions and efforts at control.

Uncertainties about the direction and nature of change can be traced back to Phase 1. During that phase, there had been many discussions among workers about the ‘hidden agenda’ of management (‘They couldn’t really be this incompetent and confused?’). Against a general backdrop of ‘Garry’s vision’ (the plant manager) of ‘world class people producing world class coke’, Tom often stated his ‘secret’ agenda in technical terms as ‘to fill the ovens and push them on time’. This formulation also served to differentiate plant management from the corporate ‘capitalist pig dogs on the hill’ (top management) by emphasizing the desire of plant managers to maintain the viability of the business and the security of employees. Tom was, however, at times quite reflective about the general lack of certainty in the objectives that he had to follow. As he put it, ‘in the past we were told to take out so many people, and we went out and did it. We knew where we were. Now it is not so clear.’

The discussion that occurred during Phase 2 Planning meeting gives an insight into the complexities of managerial agenda-setting. This meeting was attended by seven senior supervisors from different parts of the plant and two HR people. In this discussion, several discourses were invoked in the attempt to set or clarify what the goals of the change were or should be. Two of these, which to some extent contradicted each other, concerned the overall nature of the change – should it be concerned with ‘nuts and bolts’, or should it be more ‘visionary’? Another three overlapping discourses were concerned, in various ways, with degrees of involvement and responsibility. Considerations of *what* to do were closely tied in with debates about *who should be* (but often wasn’t) doing it.

The ‘*nuts and bolts*’ discourse was aimed at outlining a relatively modest and practical course of action. In the prior week’s regular senior supervisor’s meeting, one member deliberately wrote down ‘Phase *To*’ (not ‘Phase 2’), emphasizing the need to deliver concrete outcomes from the 12 hour shift system and some new work arrangements before getting into more speculative areas such as the design and training of multi-skilled self-managing teams. As one senior supervisor, Dennis, put it, the focus should be on

shoring up the shit – consolidation, not a great vision, to stop people from imploding – a lego block approach, clearly saying what I and others are responsible for, because a lot of us are feeling that we are not getting production out, and are not feeling as good as we used to, so we should get back to a prior stage first, and knock all the pegs into the board.

Arguing for this view, Dennis remarked

in a small section like mine, you live and die by the personality and ownership of the individuals, and OD zoom in with a grand vision, and say ‘we will call you an equipment specialist and link you to x’, and you worry if it will not take you backwards.

This feeling was affirmed by Tom, who said that there were no ‘resources or energy’ for a ‘big swoop’. Phase 2 was to be a ‘bedding down’ of Phase 1, creating conditions for a more radical Phase 3. In line

with this idea, Tom had arranged, prior to the Planning meeting, that Peter (a task focused engineer) would manage the project.

Secondly, there was a more 'visionary' discourse. The Coke Guide had outlined a major restructuring vision for Phases 1 and 2, and some senior supervisors criticized the shift away from the vision driven change rhetoric. Dennis, with some nostalgia, and contradicting his previous 'nuts and bolts' approach, observed

there were visions here about pulling in the others, and how to reel in the maintenance monster...going to blur the operator/maintenance lines...going to get them to cuddle the machines, with equipment specialists and things....

Trevor also emphasized that he wanted something more 'cloudlike' and 'fluffy'. A 'vision', he remarked with a smile, 'is something you have when you have had too much to drink, and a mission is something you have when you are in the army.' Dennis contrasted the 'nuts and bolts' and 'visionary' discourses as alternative change strategies: 'HR is for the big bang, and Tom is for the evolutionary incremental thing, where people know the end game and the principles, and things evolve'.

Interwoven with these discourses were a tangle of considerations to do with inclusion and exclusion, commitment and responsibilities that, while less overtly concerned with the *what to do* of Phase 2, nevertheless had important implications for the way organizational change and control were perceived and managed. Firstly, there was a discourse of 'exclusion' arising from Phase 1. According to Tom, who was the only member of the Phase 1 working party to attend the Phase 2 Planning meeting, the direction set by Phase 1 was clearly documented in *The Coke Guide*. For him, the problem was implementation, not direction. The others disagreed. People, they argued, had not read *The Coke Guide*. It was short on detail and did not have their 'buy in'. As Dennis expressed it, 'people who get enthusiastic about hatching the egg, don't have the resources or whatever to get it institutionalized'. In addition, many supervisors and senior supervisors had avoided the working party 'like the plague' (as Trevor put it), because it was dominated by what they called the 'three headed monster' – a triumvirate of Tom and two other superintendents. Tom counteracted complaints about the lack of inclusion by asserting that the complainants were actually playing a game in which exclusion provided an excuse for lack of commitment. People were saying 'if I wasn't involved, I don't buy in. I wasn't involved, so I have right of refusal.'

The failure of people to 'buy in' extended to line supervisors as well. Recalcitrant supervisors were the subject of a '*lost managers*' discourse, that identified the main change problem as being one of getting their commitment:

The problem is that management gets excited about the change, and then go out to find people who are excited, but they don't find anyone. People agreed to 12 hour shifts, a big pay package, but there was no real buy in. Why would a supervisor want to be involved?'

Albert, a senior supervisor, said that some people in his team were insecure in their new roles, and had problems supervising others. Not everyone who had felt unable to change had taken the voluntary redundancy package that was offered. Senior supervisors needed to stimulate a 'tension around we need to change' in the people they manage:

We have done a bit of storytelling. In the good old days if you didn't push, you would have to see the superintendent in the morning, but now, people say 'Bugger it, I am only here 3 days a

week, bugger it, and I am off on roster next week'. I don't think we have the tension, goals, commitment to performance management out there.

In a move that reflected the dual discourses of 'nuts and bolts' versus 'visionary' change, the proffered solution moved away from trying to induce 'excitement' and 'vision', to establishing 'clear goals and accountabilities'. According to Dennis, 'we have become a new age group...what we need now is to remove optionality from the standards, we need some carrot and stick stuff. This is the direction the business is going in'³

Another discourse involving inclusion, exclusion, commitment and responsibility revolved around the *ambiguous 'roles and responsibilities'* of Tom and the senior supervisor team. The uncertainty surrounding the overall 'vision' for the plant change extended to the vision of the group itself:

So what is our vision? We have operations, coal handling, utilities etc, so where is our common vision? We don't know what that is and what we are working towards.

Dennis talked of the individual members' 'silo visions'. Tom made the point that there was a common concept of 'manufacturing teams', and the new approach to standardising production ('filling the ovens and pushing them on time'). However 'while the shared image is there, the shared energy isn't.'

Following on from this, there was also uncertainty about the role of the senior supervisor team in the Phase 2 project - whether it was a steering committee or not, what the role of the 'kick off' meeting was and so on. In the earlier weekly meeting, the team was unclear about whether there was a champion for the project, and concern was raised about the fact that phase 2 was not in the 'must do' list in the business plan. Peter attributed this to the fact that no-one had a clear view of Phase 2 when the business plan was being created. They planned to raise it at the next plant management meeting, although they realised that this meeting was to be taken up with another management activity.

Against the background of this lack of clarity, Tom argued that the *Phase 2 Kick Off meeting* was a 'litmus test' to see how people felt, and whether they were interested in getting things done. He also made it clear that he had talked to Peter prior to the meeting, and was at least suggesting that he manage the project. In a variation of the 'I wasn't involved' game, Dennis responded critically by saying

I am not making the comment in a game stopper sense, but this process is illegitimate, in an accountability sense. Some people with vision have the idea and the accountability, and we are only being asked to list out a few things to round things out.

Dennis raised the issue of whether Tom was in charge of the activities of the group, and therefore this project, saying that Garry, the plant manager, had a different idea of Tom's role, and that maybe the issue should be discussed at the next middle manager's meeting with Garry. Dennis emphasised that his argument for involvement by the team was not based on distrust but more a clearer idea of what their role was. As he put it,

³ A reference to a new 'Proudfoot' consultancy approach to management restructuring that was being introduced into Cokemaking Oz. that was still undertaking a more transformational cultural approach to change.

our culture now says you don't trust, so you want to be involved in 200 meetings. That is not what I am saying, I just want to have an idea of the notes you are scribbling on the back of an envelope over 20 months. How can I help, what is my role?"

At the end of the meeting, the group attempted a compromise that integrated elements of all these different discourses. The first author observed that the group had really been addressing two sets of issues, one a more visionary 'Phase 2' set of issues (including the changing role of the management teams, involvement and morale, supervisors leading the change etc.) and the second a more nuts and bolts 'Phase To' list (including refining the role of the shift manager, integrating new contractors and maintenance structures into production etc.). The group then used this distinction as a basis for drawing up two interlinked project lists, the 'Phase 2' and 'Phase To' lists. When Trevor described these as wish lists, Peter responded by remarking that they were action plans!

5. Deciding What Should Be Done Part 2: The Vision and the 'Blob in Between'?

In the *Phase 2 Kick Off meeting*, the compromise of having two lists was ignored. There was no reference by Peter and Tom to the 'Phase 2' wish list/action plan, and Peter presented only the 'nuts and bolts' discourse in his introduction. The dominant tenor of the ensuing discussion of 'what to do' was a more restricted exercise than that embodied in the 'visionary' discourse. Repeated attempts by Joe, in particular, to intrude the 'lost managers' and 'exclusion' discourses so that attention could be focussed onto the key role/problem of the foremen were ignored by Peter and not significantly taken up by the others (Peter, at one time, apologising to Joe for not responding to his comments or writing them up on butcher pad notes, saying 'I was concerned with my own thing, so I wasn't learning'). In addition, the ambiguous roles and responsibilities concerning the management of the project were not directly addressed. As a result, Tom and Peter seemed to successfully restrict the general tenor of the talk about the overall goals and objectives of Phase 2.

In later discussions with another middle manager, and in a follow-up debriefing with Joe, it was suggested that the reason that the more visionary/participative approach of Phase 1 was not being adopted again was that Tom, in particular, 'did not want to go there again' – realizing the emotive, traumatic, time consuming, and in many ways, frustrating, experience of participation. With the help of Peter, the discussion in the *Kick Off meeting* was deliberately cut off and confined largely to the 'nuts and bolts' task focused set of activities. However, this did not remove uncertainty and ambiguity. The competing and contradictory discourses about what to do, and an array of issues to do with inclusion, exclusion, commitment and responsibility – discourses that were evident in the Planning meeting – surfaced once again, albeit in a different form

Lingering uncertainties regarding *The Coke Guide* and Phase 1 affected the discussion. Steve, a controller, asked:

Is *The Coke Guide* the bible, the starting point, the be all and end all? Some say this is what I signed up for. Others say it is the beginning and we can move on.'

Joe responded that *The Coke Guide* was intended as starting point, as 'things will change'. But Steve replied that the document was only being 'loosely applied'. In other words, its status was quite unclear. The lack of clarity over the status of *The Coke Guide* was embedded within a general confusion about the overall vision for cultural change within the plant. As Steve, again, commented,

We have our plant goals, and then there are the crews, and there is a blob in between – and the vision comes out of the blob, but it feels as if there is not much there to help, and the crews do their own thing. One does team building, another pursues production targets, whereas above all this there is a whole series of business objectives.

In this comment, we see the complexities of change and control. There are different goals emanating from different layers of the organization. Middle management is a ‘blob’, and as we saw above, the senior supervisors were indeed struggling with competing interpretations and demands. As if to highlight the disjointed nature of managerial goals and objectives, Tom’s presentation of the financial statistics at the start of Phase 2 informed those present that the wage costs incurred in Phase 1 had not been accompanied by compensatory gains in productivity. He also stressed there was now a new emphasis on dramatically improving environmental performance as a key objective. However, in the subsequent discussion of ‘relevant’ training, it emerged that many of the operators failed to see ‘environment issues’ as a genuine concern or part of their job. The degree of real financial pressure also remained unclear as ‘the goalposts continued to shift’ in regard to the competitive viability of Cokemaking Oz’s cost structures.

6. Getting Other People To Do It – Sense of Urgency and Involvement

My guys are sick of change, they don’t want any more.

(Albert, senior supervisor, Phase 2 Planning meeting)

6.1 Urgency – a ‘Potential Difference’?

The discussions about urgency and involvement outlined in the next two sections mirror the discourses of inclusion, exclusion, commitment and responsibility that were invoked in the Planning meeting. Peter, the facilitator of the Kick Off meeting, introduced the issues of involvement when he suggested that the detailed action plan be accompanied by a ‘how to – engagement’ strategy. Trevor, a senior supervisor, started the discussion with an emphasis on the importance of creating a sense of urgency in the workforce. In response to an engineer asking what urgency and resistance meant, Tom replied with a mechanical metaphor,

if you have resistance, you need enough potential difference to build up, to create the energy to drive the thing through. If there is no energy people will not take it up.

In answer to a question about how to create a feeling of urgency, Trevor semi-jokingly replied ‘smack them around’. Joe the electrician responded semi-jokingly with ‘now you are coming round to my way of thinking’. Joe consistently throughout the meeting emphasised the ‘harder’ edge of creating a sense of urgency. This came through in a number of ways. Firstly, in his stress on new performance measures about ‘pushing on time’ being broken down by crews so that the ‘problem’ crew supervisors and their teams could be identified. As Joe smilingly put it, ‘I know we are into a no blame culture, but we have to find who is to blame’. To which Tom smilingly responded ‘I don’t want to know who is to blame, I want to know who is responsible’. Secondly, in regard to punishments and sanctions, he commented on the fact that a supervisor who had recently failed to fill in an environmental exceedance report properly, something that management was stressing as a key task, was ‘punished’ by sending him home for a week. As Joe remarked ‘that is not a punishment, being ordered to take a week off and think about it, that is wrong.’

The conversation continued with Tom saying that urgency will come when people are changing their habits and behaviours. In response to a comment about natural resistance to change, Tom responded that the ‘majority don’t mind change, like buying a new car.’ The Arab stressed that people were creatures of habit, and until something was dumped on them and became a new habit, they would resist, unless it was brought in bit by bit, allowing them to get used to it. Trevor agreed, talking about ‘carving off ‘bit size small chunks, and giving them a good experience with their introduction’. Joe, continuing his ‘harder’ theme, picked up on the ‘dumping’ remark, commenting that ‘the majority don’t like change’ and ‘everyone is now on 12 hour shifts because it was dumped on them, so why don’t you dump this new change on them?’

Later on, when Joe and others emphasised the importance of Tom creating new ‘loss analysis’ performance measures that identified the performance of the different crews, he commented that he would get round to it in a few months. Joe, teasingly, replied, ‘Do you have a sense of urgency or not?’ Tom laughingly replied ‘Who invited you?’ Joe quickly responded ‘You did, and you have to suffer the consequences.’

In all of this discussion, the idea that the workforce did not perceive their need to change as sufficiently urgent was not questioned, nor was the importance of management undertaking initiatives to increase their sense of urgency. What remained more ubiquitous was how to do it, as well as management’s commitment to bringing it about. Tom, and others, emphasised ‘buy in’, ‘energy’, ‘involvement’ and so on, while the comments of Joe (and Trevor, in this instance) reflected a more coercive and punishment centred approach. Similar differences existed concerning whether gradual incremental or more radical approaches worked best – one operator emphasising ‘Changing practices here and there, they will accept it quicker’, while another expressed a more ‘punctuated equilibrium’ view that employees ‘want peace and quiet. They are always having changes. People would prefer a rest, and then change, and then rest.’ Overlaying such prescriptive differences, however, were direct references to the corporate ‘doublespeak’ often associated with such cultural changes – for example, Joe’s reference to the promotion of a ‘no blame’ culture yet the need to find someone to ‘blame’, and Tom’s self-critical claim to be distinguishing between ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’, as well as Joe’s critique of whether Tom really believed in the ‘urgency’ of change given his contradictory failure to commit himself to acting ‘urgently’!

5.2 *Involvement – ‘Will You Still Love the Baby?’*

Tom emphasised strongly in the Phase 2 Kick Off meeting that the change needed to ‘get people on board, don’t push them away’. When Joe remarked that the plant needed people to ‘go the extra yard’, Tom asked ‘and why do you go the extra yard? Because it is inward or outward?’ Trevor responded: ‘internal’, and Tom agreed, pushing this further, ‘and you do this because it is recognised.’ The ‘involvement’ strategy to get employees ‘committed’ to the change appeared to be in place – at least in rhetoric. There was, however, another side. Joe, in a series of forceful interjections, presented the case for the ultimately authoritarian nature of decisions about change, with restrictions on involvement:

you will never get rid of the hierarchy. At the end of the day someone will say this is what will happen, they have to steer it all. However much they bullshit about end of hierarchy

In this context, he says, ‘someone has to say I have listened to the 5 crews, and then make a decision’.

As arose in a maintenance meeting a few months before, the employees were being given a chance to be involved in a change, but no choice was given about whether or not a change was to occur. At one

communication session, the maintenance people were asked for their ideas. One replied that management should go away and there should be no change. In a later communication session a few months later, the same maintenance person said 'You were here a few months ago, asking what we wanted, and we said to stop this and go away, but here you are back again!'. Joe implied that this should be recognised rather than avoided. As he put it:

I know we don't have any hidden agendas [smiles!], but we have to steer the outcomes so that it is a positive not a negative outcome, but if we say you decide, and then they say 'Go off and have a holiday and go home', then it is not really that, and they will not go the extra yard.

As the attendance at the *Phase 2 Kick Off meeting* (Tom's 'litmus test') suggested, there was not a great commitment from the workforce to be involved. There was no clear view of exactly why this was the case. Some suggested that money was the only motivator, and the paid training days ('crew days') should be used for involvement, 'having meetings off shift, you won't get anyone, unless you sack them if they don't turn up.' Another emphasised frustration at previous forms of involvement, in particular the lack of 'translatable outcomes' from 'talk fests', the boring nature of how information was presented, and even unintentional insults by management towards the workforce when they presented such information ('Except for you Tom, you don't insult anyone, because they can't understand you, not speaking Scottish. [laughter])

One interpretation was that this was a form of game playing by the workforce, a game that, as Tom outlined above, was also being played by the senior supervisor team ('if I wasn't involved, I don't buy in, I wasn't involved, so I have right of refusal.'). In response to a question about why so few people (3-6) turned up to a previous meeting to discuss the new production system ('single machine operation'), one controller commented 'they said they weren't involved, because it didn't go their way...its human nature.' This theme re-emerged later in the meeting following a statement by Joe commending the electricians for turning up (something that he had organised and worked at!), and an operator observing that machine operators did not turn up

because they don't trust management, and they just want money at the end of the day. I want money as well, but they will say that they were not involved, and then complain.

The most forceful presentation of the game was made by one other electrician,

They wont give a shit until the time comes when change is going to be implemented on them, and then they will say, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, cunt, cunt , cunt, cunt.'\\

Similarities exist between this 'I wasn't involved' game, and Ezzamell, Willmott and Worthington's (2001: 1072) documentation of a Northern Factory worker's view of how employees resist imposed change,

what you do is sand-bag yourself in behind a load of issues that don't really matter and argue for as long as you can about those without them getting to the 'real' issues....O.K. you've got to talk to them, but that doesn't mean you've got to accept anything...this has been going on for two years now and they're not prepared to fight us over it (the problem of demarcation) and I don't mind talking for another two years, cos that's all I intend to do...'

In Cokemaking Oz this avoidance talk was used as one strategy for hindering management's discussion of the issues they wanted to raise, and this then also allowed them to later on say they were 'not involved' in discussions about the 'real issues'.

To talk about games and strategies, however, should not be taken to mean that the nature and interpretation of such involvement practices are clear. The participants expressed a range of far more ambiguous and ambivalent views. Involvement games were more akin to Clegg's (1975: 49) view of organisational games in general:

The rules will not be as static and idealized as in chess or some other game but will instead be far more fragile, ambiguous, unclear, dependent upon interpretation, and subject either to production or transformation depending on the outcome of struggles to keep them the same or to change them this way or that. Obviously, in an ongoing game, a piece like the queen would start in a more privileged position than a pawn, simply because the extant rules, which are now open to interpretation, enable her to begin the sequence with more potential moves to make...[but] in everyday life, queens may begin to move as knights.

Two different aspects of the 'fuzzy' (Grint, 1997) nature of games were illustrated in comments by one 'controller', (Steve).

First,

The working party [the work redesign team] did OK over the 18 months...I think the idea behind it was beautiful, whether we got the best out of it I don't know, at least we got our say, at least it gave us a chance to say what we wanted, not that they got a result, that might not have been so good, but at least we had our chance to have a say.

Such a view could have led to cynical scepticism towards management involvement initiatives, but Steve still saw it as a positive development in itself, while recognising that desirable outcomes may not have been achieved. Amongst other employees (and managers), however, there was far less clarity over whether the workforce had actually got a 'result' through this process. In a worker scripted video on change at the plant, one operator speaking to another in their 'crib' room, says another one has 'caught on' when he observes that they have been given extra pay and not had to change that much. In the Phase 2 Kick Off meeting, one of the workforce said 'You threw a \$1000 at them, and you are not getting your value.' The introduction of 12 hour shifts, and associated changes in overtime and work practices, had reduced numbers and overtime costs, yet also led to an increase in the wage bill that had not been accompanied by identifiable cost reducing production efficiencies. The postponement of many job redesign issues until Phase 2, with improved conditions and pay for the workforce coming in Phase 1, could be interpreted by zero sum management/worker conflict perspectives as a 'win' for the workforce – even though others saw the exercise as either an ineffectual attempt at worker participation (the kind of discredited 'talk fest' observed by Fox (1988) of 'joint consultation committees' in general) or a manipulative con by management (as one employee put it), another 'what more can you do for less, can we fuck you up the arse and will you still love the baby? type activity'.

Second,

We haven't actually changed...nothing really seems to have changed in the bigger sense...[e.g.] sharing values that the coal and coke leadership want to impose on the crews, impose is the

wrong word, accept...[But] What has changed - nothing. You all espouse the idea...And people all talk...But ... what has changed, nothing.

Here, Steve's statement is profoundly ambiguous about whether the new 'value based' culture is one that simply involves management 'imposing' its values on the workforce or whether it has been effectively involved in creating a more 'accept'able set of values. This ambiguity about the nature of workforce involvement and agreement had earlier come up in discussions within the working party about when the group could have been said to have come to an 'agreement' or an 'acceptable' outcome. After the OD consultant had emphasised that what was necessary was to arrive at a result that was 'acceptable' to each member of the group, even if they might not 'agree' to it, one heating regulator, Craig, illustrated the difference to an inquiring member of the group in the following manner 'I often accept what my wife wants, but I rarely agree with her!'

7. Conclusion: The Carnival of Control

'the researcher, wearing his/her security badge, equipped with his/her tape-recorders, interview schedules, name lists and notebooks, all too easily becomes part of the panoptic machinery surveying/constructing the docile worker – the researcher's gaze becomes inseparable from the disciplinary gaze.'

Gabriel, 1999: 192

'I thought that he would be old with a long beard and talk down to yer'
Wendy, Joe's girlfriend

'I told you he wasn't that kind of professor, he's OK.'
Joe, Electrician

In the face of the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding cultural change initiatives, and the masks, mirrors and charades donned and played by the actors involved, even the intellectual attempts to go beyond the stereotyped views of control appear to provide far too controlling a view of events. While encouragement and praise should be given to those crafting out this intellectual activity, for this is no mean enterprise, limitations still remain in the overtones of a plodding intellectual bureaucracy trying to capture a will of the wisp. Even Gabriel's (1999) sophisticated analysis of control 'gives off' a sense of (if not ultimately remaining entrapped within) a rather too one-dimensional and one-sided view. It often seems as if such critics have more or less unwittingly adopted rather than replaced what Berger has described as the severely serious stance of the positivists or what Gouldner (1977) caricatured as the 'world historical over seriousness' of sociologies of the 'underdog'. The experience of the researcher in this case is less one of being caught up in, or resistant to, the type of 'panoptic machinery' referred to above, and more one of a relatively insignificant and insecure 'stranger' struggling to overcome stereotypes of academics as pompous, humourless, overly intellectual, judgemental, anally retentive, and ultimately selfish and untrustworthy publication producing intellectual vampires. As confidences are given, help is provided, and teasing occurs, the ethnographer who is not 'that kind of professor' inevitably exchanges confidences, provides assistance, develops friendships, and joins in an often politically incorrect horseplay. When the electrician above gave his 'fuck, fuck, fuck, cunt, cunt, cunt' comment, he turned to the first author and said 'Did you get that Richard?' 'How many fucks was that?' was the reply, to laughter. The ease with which people get along with the ethnographer, and avoid putting on a 'front' for the observer, depends on how a myriad

of such incidents are treated. In this way, the social scientist may be able to more clearly follow Berger's injunction to 'combine compassion, limited commitment and a sense of the comic in man's [sic] social carnival.' (Berger, 1991: 184)

So, what is the outcome of this analysis of the 'critical incident'? Do we have an idea of what 'really happened' in this change process? Are the main drivers of change or its consequences clear? Are the underlying complex dynamics of control captured in a way that allows us to generalise? The answer has to be, 'No'! In line with Geertz's classic account of an Indian story about the world resting on the back of an elephant which stands on the back of a turtle, which stands on another turtle and so on, the answer to questions about firm foundations is that it is 'turtles all the way down' (Geertz, 1973: 29). The observer, as much as the participants, is caught up in this world of uncertainty and shifting emotions, and his or her biases, as much emotive as intellectual, are consequently revealed in the ensuing stories. It remains somewhat surprising that many qualitative research studies emphasising the uncertainty, emotion and complexity of the 'data' studied, are less symmetrical in recognising the influence of these factors in the researchers' own role and accounting of events. There are clearly what Weber called 'elective affinities' between overly 'controlling' views of how change occurs and similar views of how research on change is or should be conducted. If, as Stompka (1999) argues, the key unit of a truly 'process' view of change is the 'event', then traditional processual case study analyses, providing structured 'realist' tales (Van Maanen, 1988) of 'what happened' in 'Company A' over 'Period B', need to give way to richer, more detailed, less certain, and more ironic ways of capturing and representing the fluidity of organisational 'becoming' and the methods employed to do so.

What the bulk of this paper has attempted to show, however, is the multi-level, rich, uncertain and complex nature of initiatives to plan and 'control' change. The world of change appears, at least from the reflections of the authors on these meetings and the experience of the research team in Cokemaking Oz, as less akin to the traditional Orwellian '1984' and Huxleyite 'Brave New World' images of control, and more akin to a Wildean world where 'the importance of being Earnest' is understood but, as Kunda (1992) observed, a sophisticatedly ironic presentation of self is a mask that is often celebrated for its achievements. Control in such a world – of people, events or processes – appears less of a one-dimensional functional activity and more of a multi-dimensional cavalcade. As Berger (1991: 184) put it, 'a comedy, in which men parade up and down with their gaudy costumes, change hats and titles, hit each other with the sticks they have or the ones they can persuade their fellow actors to believe in.' The paper has attempted to show some of the parade ('I wasn't involved', 'love the baby' games), the costumes ('how can I help?', 'those with vision'), the hats and titles ('equipment specialists', the 'three headed monster', the 'blob'), and concocted sticks ('smack them around', 'I have right of refusal'). It has done little to show the real blood that can be drawn, even with imaginary sticks (each of the senior supervisors, Peter and Tom have recently had their jobs and careers 'restructured'), inside the chaotic 'blender' of change.

The purpose of this paper, in true dialectical fashion, is therefore less to provide a new synthesis, and more to provide an antithesis to overly controlling and analytical theses of change and control – which, if acknowledged, may lead to more sophisticated attempts to grasp the intellectual and emotive complexities of such processes. The emotive language, the metaphors, the confusion are all communicated to help capture the messy fluidity of a process characterised by conflicting discourses, managerial doublespeak, and games with shifting rules. If it has succeeded in the former task, however, then its value may be like that of Wittgenstein's ladder, an implement that can be thrown away once it has done its job and helped us onto a new platform. As Joe responded at the end of the meeting to a question 'What do we do with all this information?' - 'Burn it'. The process is the thing.

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ⁱ Cokemaking Oz is a division of a large steel plant in New South Wales, Australia. It employs 400 people, mostly men. It consists of several different 'areas' – coal and coke handling (which organises the supply of coal and the shipment of coke), batteries (which contain the ovens in which the coal is 'cooked' to make coke), utilities (who look after oven door maintenance), heating and controlling (keeping the ovens at the correct temperature), gas processing (supplying gas and processing waste products) and several divisions of maintenance. The major customer for the coke is the nearby blast furnace, though some is also exported. Cokemaking Oz has been in business since the 1920's (?? - check). People within and outside the steel plant consider the coke ovens to be a dirty, unsafe place to work, and it has had a history of frequent industrial disputes. In early 1999, a new manager, Garry, was installed at the site. Garry had successfully brought about transformational change in other divisions of the steel plant, and there were expectations that he would be able to 'change the culture' in cokemaking. With the aid of a consultant an OD off-sider, he initiated what we refer to as 'Phase 1' in the article.