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Finding a reflexive voice: ... researching the  
problems of implementing new learning practices  
within a New Zealand manufacturing organisation.

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## **Preface / Acknowledgements**

Setting out to write a thesis is a daunting task; a journey of learning and self-discovery. I wish that now I have completed this journey, I could start again with the knowledge and insights I have gained. In the beginning I was not confident about how to proceed but relied on the journey itself to take me towards some useful ending points. I found that there were many pathways through the organisation I studied, some historical, some of the moment, some hinting at the future. Each pathway was perplexing and tantalising in the realities presented, and each populated with interesting and committed people trying to make sense of the organisational world they had a hand in creating. For people looking for one reality or prescriptions on how to achieve reflexive learning, this thesis is probably not going to satisfy this need. What I hope it does do is give some descriptive insight into the forces that shape organisational participants reflexive experience and perhaps stimulate ideas for ways in which reflexivity can be more readily engaged towards constructive challenge and change.

In the process of investigating and writing this thesis, the knowledge that has shaped and formed my own thinking and practice during the past 15 years as an organisational development (OD) consultant has been challenged. Investigating the productive effects of new sets of knowledge and practices on people and organisations has led me to look more closely at the ethics of OD interventions and attempt to identify ways to make my own practice more cognisant of these affects.

Over the past 2 years, a number of inspiring people have helped me to navigate my way through the concepts, possibilities and frustrations of the research; most importantly my supervisor Dr Craig Prichard. Thank you Craig for your wise guidance, your ability to ask questions that took my thinking in completely new directions, the way in which you helped me translate my insight into words, your support and encouragement, and for encouraging me to just write! Thanks also to Dr Phil Ramsay for reviewing this thesis in its 'semi-final' form and challenging me to engage my own reflexivity to gain greater insight into what I have learned from this research and how this applies to my own practice. And to the staff at the Massey library, especially Celia and Joanne, thank you for your support and helpful guidance, often in times of great stress!

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## Abstract

*This study explored the social forces mediating manager's participation in a new reflexive participative learning practice designed to improve profitability within a New Zealand manufacturing organisation. Despite a large theoretical and managerial body of literature on organisational learning there has been little empirical investigation of how people experience and engage their reflexivity towards challenging the status-quo to create high level learning and new knowledge. Power was identified as a potential moderator of the reflexive learning experience and the variable relations of power and learning were constructed from a review of literature and these relationships were explored and investigated within the case study. Two prevailing discourses were identified as powerful moderators of public reflexivity, the traditionalist discourse which constructed managers actions and conversations towards insularism and survivalist concerns and the productionist discourse in which institutionalised production practices encircled and mediated managers actions and what constituted legitimacy in conversations. This study used a critical action research method to place the reflexive experience of managers and the researcher at the center of the study and provide data representative of the social discourses that constructed variable freedoms and constraints upon the reflexive voice.*

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### The battlefield

In July 2002, I was engaged on contract to work with leaders in a manufacturing factory within a large organisation. My brief was to work with managers at the factory to create a “better place to work and a place that works better”. We used experiential techniques in conjunction with practices drawn from the *Learning Organisation* literature, particularly the work of Peter Senge (1990), to design and deliver an organisational development intervention to achieve the change.

On entry to this organisation my first impressions were of a workplace fabric typified by extreme reactions, feelings of disengagement, and decay. From a managerial perspective the organisation was a battlefield with the enemy being “them” and this view was reciprocated from the operators. Even the smallest changes to manufacturing practice or process were problematic and were ignored by the operators or needed to be implemented coercively. At the same time, operators felt constrained and helpless to affect meaningful changes to production problems. This factory was a battleground in which *the enemy* was at the same time powerful, powerless, tangible and invisible.

An organisational development approach was taken and what transpired over the next 12 months was a very difficult implementation of new participative management and learning practices designed to encourage improvements to the working environment and work processes through joint exploration, insight, and action. Fundamental to the learning processes engaged was the concept of *reflexivity*<sup>1</sup>, that is, managers and others were encouraged to interpret and gain insight into the constructed nature of their social realities – mainly through dialogue, conversations and self-reflection. Achieving *reflexivity*, especially in a group forum was particularly problematic, with group members being either: unwilling to share their insights in a shared forum; or deflecting and rationalising feedback they received; or using forums to ‘grandstand’ and politicise the improvement initiatives; or other ‘hot topics’ rumbling through the factory at the time. “Improvements” was an open-ended term inclusive of anything operators and managers felt would achieve the objective and the project deliverables emerged as a

heterogeneous group of solutions including: a move towards team based work practices, implementation of an operator initiated improvement and review process, personal leadership development for managers, and changes to the physical work environment. For a number of managers and operators, the initiative became another opportunity to fire off a volley of shots or to retreat or to gain recognition.

My motivation for undertaking this thesis is directly related to my experience of this organisation. It appeared to me at the time that people within this organisation were not free to meaningfully engage their ideas, insights, thoughts, knowledge in order to release their own and the organisation's potentiality. I assumed the difficulties we experienced in this organisation were not unique and emerged from this project with a hunger to understand more about how people within an organisation experience reflexive learning and knowledge creation. This led me to the research question for this study '*what are the social forces that constrain or free managers' reflexive participation in organisational development programmes?*' In this introduction I will briefly introduce the key notions of reflexivity and suggest an approach for reading this case study.

### **Why focus on reflexivity?**

Management advice comes in many forms and much of it attempts to encourage and support managers in their efforts to change organisations. In recent times, organisational learning has become a focus for managers as they attempt to create a relevant responsive organisation that can adapt and innovate faster than competitors in rapidly changing and global markets. There is a wealth of organisational learning literature available to managers attempting to design and implement programmes that leverage and assimilate knowledge both within and external to the organisation. Embedded in this learning literature is a concern with the importance of *reflexivity* to the success of new participative learning practices such as employee involvement programmes, empowerment or teamwork. Despite the growth in literature promoting the benefits of learning, there has been little empirical investigation of how people within an organisation experience reflexivity and , whilst it is generally accepted that learning occurs within a social context, we are left with the problem of understanding how social forces, particularly issues of power and control, moderate people's experience of *reflexive* learning. How can managers and organisations develop greater

capability for managers to engage in reflexive learning practices in positive and beneficial ways and how can this topic be usefully researched?

## Researching reflexivity

Reflexive learning can be found in a number of learning approaches within the organisational learning (OL) literature. Chapter 2 picks up the main threads of debate within this research community and is structured around three important contributions to this field: 1) The *learning organisation* (Senge:1990, Argyris and Schon:1978, Argyris:1990, 1993, 1999, 2004); 2) situated learning systems including *communities of practice* (Wenger:2000), and *work in learning* (Brown and Duguid:1991) and; 3) the need to *unlearn* (Hedberg in Nystrom and Starbuck:1981). Particular emphasis is given to finding the *reflexive voice* within the literature and placing this within a theoretical framework of the nature of OL constructs.

A number of writers highlight the shortcomings of OL/LO literature, particularly the lack of attention to power affects within the discourse. In Chapter 3, I review critical perspectives on LO/OL focusing on the social and constructed nature of learning and the power affects within this perspective. I argue that in order to find the *reflexive voice* within organisations, practitioners and students of organisational learning need to pay attention to the discursive affects of prominent discourses that make claims upon manager's actions and conversations legitimising what can and cannot be openly contested.

The methodology for this research is laid out in Chapter 4. An analytical framework for critically investigating the reflexive voice is developed from the literature review. The thesis explores the research question through development of a case study, which included three factories in the same manufacturing organisation that sparked interest in this study. Data for the study was collected through interview, observation, historical information and learning forums which I have termed *reflexive forums*. The thesis focuses on a particular organisational development intervention known as the profitability improvement process (PIP) recently re-introduced to the manufacturing division of this company. The PIP was chosen for this study because it requires reflexivity from a broad base of manufacturing employees which senior managers' feel: a) is not happening or; b) is not realising its potential benefits. Using a *critical action method* I investigated the ways in which power and control moderate participation in

this new process and attempted to influence change towards greater reflexivity within the PIP.

In Chapter 5 I introduce the case study organisation, Tileco New Zealand. I trace their history based on what managers believe have been significant events influencing learning within their company. Most managers believe that major change and diversity are the most striking feature of Tileco's historical landscape. Most significant are the ways in which responses to these historical events have been productive of 'truths' about learning, taking risks, challenging current or proposed practice, looking outside your own sphere of influence and the value of expending additional effort over and above day to day managerial practice. Using the analytical framework developed in chapter 3, discourses of tradition and survival are drawn from this data and their affects upon reflexivity are discussed.

The following chapter looks at the nature of the PIP discourse, how this has emerged within the past three years across the organisation and how this new discourse is different to, and the same as, prevailing profitability discourses. This chapter picks up the constructed and contested nature of the PIP discourse, giving insight into the effects of power relations on managers' experiences of high level learning and their freedoms to enact PIP in a meaningful and rewarding way. Managers recount a number of events such as changes in management style, change history, or critical learning events that were more localised to the three factories included in the study. There is a great variation in the way that PIP is practiced at each of these sites and this chapter explores these variations, particularly noting the ways in which discourses such as traditional management, manufacturing practice or pragmatic concerns disrupt the PIP discourse and make it open to resistance or re-interpretation. Of interest in this chapter is managers' predisposition towards insularism and silo'ed thinking, and the affects of institutionalised productionist thinking.

Chapter 7 focuses on the research intervention itself and attempts to find the reflexive voice within differing research contexts. Both managers and the researcher experiences feature in this chapter. What is significant in this chapter, are the ways in which the research project was itself constructed by discourses which prevail within Tileco and I found that the difficulties I experienced in conducting the research were suggestive of the experiences of managers within PIP. Public meeting practice and the effect of new

managers are discussed as examples of the interplay of prevailing discourse upon PIP and managers agency to reconstruct new ways of relating to each other.

In the conclusion, I summarise the social affects that influence managers ability to find a reflexive voice, explore the potential of PIP as a gateway to greater reflexivity, summarise the action research experience and make some recommendations for practitioners who are designing interventions to encourage the expression of reflexivity.

### **Critical reading of this research**

Finally, it is important that this study is read with a critical perspective. The insights outlined in this study are presented as a critique into what managers and others said, or did, or didn't do. As such they draw conclusions, based on interview data and participant observation during meetings or events and on how managers' respond to initiatives to increase the degree and scope of their learning. In order to avoid elitism (Alvesson & Deetz: 2000), examples of actual statements and events are also included and the reader is invited to make their own interpretations of these.

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<sup>1</sup> A term coined by Harold Garfinkle, who pioneered the field of ethnomethodology in the 1960's. Source: Calhoun (2002)

## CHAPTER 2

# The Learning Organisation and Organisational Learning

### Introduction

Locating the context for this study is problematic in that *organisational learning* (OL) is an umbrella paradigm for a number of management disciplines that contribute to knowledge creation in distinctive ways that are very diverse and increasingly fragmented (Easterby-Smith: 1997). Easterby-Smith (ibid) argues that it is most useful to view OL as located within six main 'disciplines' - psychology/OD, management science, sociology and organisation theory, strategic perspective, production management, and the cultural perspective' - each with their own 'largely incompatible' view of the nature of learning and each providing a useful perspective on the nature of learning within organisations. Each OL perspective is located in a distinct ontological approach and, perhaps with the exception of the strategic perspective, human experience and *reflexivity* feature in all of these.

Whilst Easterby-Smith and Araujo (1999) call for a 'measured and healthy pluralism in developing theories of learning in and around organisations' (p17), other writers are motivated towards a more homogeneous theory of OL and have concerned themselves with identifying ways in which these diverse perspectives can be reconciled. Tsang (1997) proposes OL approaches can be integrated by moving from descriptive to prescriptive theory validated by action research. Huber (1991) identifies four constructs that he argues link and provide a more complete understanding of OL: *knowledge acquisition* through processes and practices; *information distribution* leading to broad based learning; *information interpretation* processes that create more complete understanding (either through shared or differing perspectives); and *organisational memory*<sup>2</sup> repositied in people and systems. Elkjaer (Easterby-Smith, Antonacopoulou et al.: 2004) views OL/LO as distinguished by two threads: one a management tool for developing individual's reflexive abilities, and the other giving emphasis to socially *situated* contexts for learning. More recent commentaries (Gherardi:2002;Easterby-Smith et al.:2004) trace a growing divergence between change consultants and academics based on their differing and distinctive purposes - change consultants are

most interested in contributing 'normative models and change methodologies for improved learning' ('how organisations learn') whilst academic researchers are less concerned with results and actions and more concerned with gaining insight into the ways in which learning occurs ('how should an organisation learn?'). Prange (ibid) addresses the criticism that OL theory is not 'useful' for practitioners by suggesting that we look past prescriptive action orientated conceptualisations and view diverse theories as 'lenses not tools'. She goes on to provide an alternative interpretation on the lack of theoretical integration of OL literature ...

I suggest that non-cumulativeness can also be interpreted as an indicator of theoretical progression. Judged from an anti-positivist view it is even 'normal' to have divergent perspectives, as there is no 'objective' world to be discovered.'  
(p39)

It appears legitimate therefore, to review a diversity of OL literature as a context for this study. This poses the question, however, of what literature to choose? Easterby-Smith and others (Easterby-Smith et al.:2004) have identified what they intuitively believe to be the seven major contributions to the field of organisational learning in the past 25 years: single and double loop learning; espoused theory and theory in practice; the learning organisation; unlearning; socio-cultural perspectives; learning across boundaries; links between knowledge, learning and competitiveness. These contributions provide a useful starting point for this review and the reflexive voice is implicit in each perspective and for the purposes of this study, literature predominantly from managerial, socio-cultural and psycho/OD<sup>3</sup> approaches have been included.

This chapter is divided into 3 sections.

- In the first section, I explore the concept of reflexivity and define the 'reflexive voice' for this study.
- In the second section I consider the nature and promises of the managerial and technical literature relating to the *Learning Organisation* and developing a framework which looks at the goal and significant concepts within this perspective. Emphasis is placed on locating *the reflexive voice* within this approach.
- In the final section, socio-cultural approaches such as situated learning systems and the need to unlearn are explored, further developing the OL framework.

## Finding the reflexive voice within the literature

### *Defining the reflexive voice*

The reflexive stance acknowledges the social and constructed nature of knowledge creation and allows for variable interpretation of events. The definition of reflexivity used with managers in the earlier learning intervention with this company was ‘to interpret and gain insight into the constructed nature of their social realities’. However, this does not provide enough clarity about what it is we are looking for when we (managers and the researcher) set out to ‘find the reflexive voice’ in this study. What is the *reflexive voice* and how might it appear in organisations?

The concept of *reflective experience*<sup>4</sup> is attributed to John Dewey from the education and learning tradition (Elkjaer in Easterby-Smith, Araujo et al.:1999). Integral to this concept is the idea that learning occurs from individuals inquiring and reflecting upon problem situations and making meaning and taking action based on their insights in order to create new situations. Elkjaer (ibid) describes this as a continuous process of ‘situation>problem>inquiry>reflection>new situation’ (p84). Thus, reflective learning is problem and action orientated and occurs through ‘a continuous reorganization and reconstruction of experience’ (p84). Elkjaer (ibid) also notes that Dewey also saw learning through reflection is a positive process of growth and life development.

... the whole process is embedded in a social practice, which means that learning involves changes in both social practice and individuals engaged in a continuous reorganization and reconstruction of their experience – and expertise. They are engaged in personal growth processes as well as in social changes, such as organizational changes.’ (p85)

Within this construct, language is important as a means of taking *action*, ‘recognising and reconstructing’ experiences both in individual’s inner worlds and in social contexts where meaning is shared and constructed with others.

Reflexivity expands this concept, introducing a sense of uncertainty about ‘knowing’ and acknowledging multiple realities within situations. The Dictionary of Social Sciences (Calhoun:2002) identifies reflexivity as ...

‘one of the constitutive problems of modern philosophy and social science, rooted in the question of whether and how persons can know the world with any certainty.’

Reflexivity can also apply to interest and interrogation of ones own inner world.

‘...reflexivity often designates the process of *interiorization* – the interest and

interrogation of one's own interior life – that many historians and social theorists associated with modern self-hood' (ibid)

Critical theorists treat reflexivity as the 'basis of critique' and 'the only way to understand history and society' (ibid), whilst post-modern philosophers such as Foucault and Habermas see 'reflexivity' and 'modernity' as interchangeable concepts both concerned with 'inquiry into the conditions of the present' (ibid).

Recently, Harley, Hardy and Alvesson (2004) argue the constructed nature of the reflexive concept is value laden and posit that critical researchers 'take for granted' the notion that reflexivity is a 'good thing'. Their critique on reflexivity begins with the following definition of reflexivity.

'Reflexivity involves giving thought to how one thinks about thinking; reflexive researchers are interested in assessing the relationship between knowledge and the ways whereby knowledge is produced, and between knowledge and the knower.' (B1)

Whilst the problems they associate with reflexive approaches highlight some important issues for critical researchers, their categorisations of and concerns about reflexivity are useful for *defining the nature the reflexive voice* within this study<sup>5</sup> as follows:

- *Reflexivity as Subversion*: Just as the reflexive researcher must be 'disruptive; willing to unsettle the academic community and to make trouble'(B2), the reflexive manager steps outside day to day practice and asks difficult questions of themselves and their organisation and is prepared to challenge the status quo. In the organisational world, potential limitations on this construct can be translated as a) the assumption that managers can actually 'step outside' the social affects of day to day practice; b) 'beneficial constructive challenge' may become negativity without constructive alternatives / solutions and potentially loss of confidence in the knowledge managers currently possess and c) new ideas become the new 'status-quo'.
- *Reflexivity as Holography*: Just as the reflexive researcher asks 'what are the different ways in which a phenomenon can be understood and how do they produce different knowledge(s)', the reflexive manager looks at problems and ideas from different angles, seeking multiple interpretations that generate new and varied meanings. Potential limitations on this construct are the same as for academics, that is, inadequate alternatives, which in the organisational world could translate into mediocrity or non-robust strategies or solutions that rely on

combined meanings or multiple approaches to cover for inadequacies in each approach.

- *Reflexivity as Polyphony*: Just as the reflexive researcher creates spaces to speak as one non-authoritative voice amongst many, the reflexive manager challenges their own authoritative view and creates spaces for employees and other managers to interpret and make meaning from situations and events. Potential limitations on this construct in the organisational world are ‘orchestrated’ attempts by managers to include multiple perspectives which are then disregarded in favour of the manager’s view or prevailing wisdom.
- *Reflexivity as Skepticism*: Just as the reflexive researcher is subjected to, recognises and navigates or resists the social contingencies of the research world, the reflexive manager recognises the constraints and power affects upon them and within their own or organisational practices, and other social interactions, and have ways of taking action upon these. Potential limitations on this construct in the organisational world is the assumption managers can recognise and navigate these affects.

I opened this section by asking, ‘what is the *reflexive voice*?’ and we have seen from the review of literature that reflexivity recognises the socially constructed nature of knowing and knowledge and thus the reflexive voice is directed towards gaining insights into how knowledge is produced and sustained. The second question posed in this section was ‘how might the reflexive voice appear in organisations?’ and we have seen that reflexivity is expressed in subversive, holographic, polyphonic and sceptical ways (Harley et al.: *ibid*) and that there are potential limitations upon this expression. From this discussion, Table 1 summarises the defining features of the reflexive voice in the first column and the potential constraints upon the expression of the reflexive voice in the second column.

**Table 1: Defining the reflexive voice**

The Reflexive Voice	Constraints on the Reflexive Voice
Directed inward and outward. Engaged for sense making of ourselves and the world around us. Concerned with the relationship between, knowledge, the knower, and how knowledge is produced. Challenges and disrupts the status quo. Seeks multiple interpretations and varied meanings of problems, events, situations. Is non-authoritative and seeks and recognises others contributions / ideas. Creates spaces outside of day to day practice to inquire upon what is known. Seeks, recognises, acts on power affects within the knowledge sets of the organisation. Uses language as a tool for constructing meaning.	Can managers actually 'step outside' the social affects of day to day practice? 'Beneficial constructive challenge' becomes 'negativity without constructive alternatives.' Loss of confidence in the knowledge managers currently possess. Inadequate alternatives translate to mediocrity or non-robust strategies / solutions. Participation is orchestrated. Multiple perspectives are disregarded in favour of the manager's view or prevailing wisdom. Can managers recognise and navigate power affects?

## The Learning Organisation

### *Nature of the Learning Organisation*

This research is based on a problem identified during an organisational development intervention that used principles, tools and concepts derived from the learning theories of Argyris and Schon (1978) and intervention tools detailed by Argyris (1993,1990), and more particularly Senge and others (Senge:1990; Senge, Kleiner et al.:1994). Argyris' writings would be commonly attributed to the *technical*<sup>6</sup> view of learning, and these theories underpin the approaches taken within the practitioner literature often referred to as the *Learning Organisation*. Easterby-Smith et al (1999) note that the divergence of LO literature from organisational learning concerns is based on differences in purpose with LO

... concentrating on the development of normative models and methodologies for creating change in the direction of improved learning processes. (p8)

Argyris (2004) also places emphasis on the desirability of theory having *implementable validity*. That is, moving theory from descriptive accounts of organisational features that create understanding about learning issues, such as defensive reasoning and other 'underground organisational issues' (p220) towards action approaches that demonstrate

resolution of those problems in order to predict useful outcomes of the approach for facilitating and designing change...

...'The theories should predict the counterproductive features of the interactions between the two mind-sets, and should also specify the nature of change programs that will lead to the strengthening of productive reasoning and the weakening of defensive reasoning. Scholars could contribute significantly to this objective if they were to conduct research that produced knowledge about double-loop learning that had a high degree of implementable validity' (p220)

Thus it is legitimate, for the purposes of this study, to draw these sets of literature together within the *managerialist paradigm*. (Morgan and Sturdy: 2000) Within this approach, it is important to take a closer look at what is promised to practitioners and designers of organisational change.

### ***The promise of the Learning Organisation***

The *Learning Organisation* (LO) was popularised in the 1990's by a number of writers, notably Senge (ibid), Argyris et al.(ibid) and Argyris (1990). Other writers, whilst not making claim to the LO community, have focused specifically on technical approaches to learning within knowledge creating companies notably, the *spiral of learning* (Nonaka:1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi:1995) and Rylatt (2003) could also be included within this paradigm.

These writers and others have provided managers and consultants with a wealth of persuasive practice-based interventionist literature designed to leverage an organisation's ability to continually recreate itself through the widespread ability of members of the organisation to learn, share their learning and create new meaning and from this innovate or create new products, services, relationships, structures, systems, or processes. Bateson (in Easterby-Smith:1997) notes that in this kind of organisation, high level learning (such as scenario planning or challenging the status quo) as opposed to the more typical routinised low level learning (e.g.: adapting current processes, multi-skilling) is emphasised. High level learning requires organisational actors to engage in reflexive learning practices which access their tacit knowledge, that is, 'know how' or unstated knowledge that is implied. (Fiol & Lyles: 1985)

Within the LO there are a number of action orientated learning constructs supporting achievement of learning with the most influential (Easterby-Smith et al.:2004) of these

being derived from the work of Argyris and Shon (ibid) and Argyris (1990, 1993, 1999):

- Single Loop learning which is the correction of errors or action taking that does not alter the underlying principles / values of organisational systems, commonly applied to low level learning situations;
- Double Loop learning which implies that people have the ability to alter underlying organisational principles and supports high level learning;
- Model I and Model II theories in use which are observed as action strategies people engage towards learning. The objective of engaging Model I actions, is to 'reduce complexity and ambiguity' and to challenge and overcome *defensive reasoning* which limits high level learning. In order to achieve a state of learning that is productive of organisational learning and growth, people need to act in ways more typical of Model II which emphasises *productive reasoning*, that is, with openness about what they think / believe and revealing their reasoning and assumptions. The governing values of Model II are

... valid information, informed choice, vigilant monitoring or the implementation of the choice in order to detect and correct error. (Argyris:1993,p55)

Argyris also notes that people will often espouse Model II behaviours but in fact engage Model I defensive reasoning.

...to the extent that individuals use Model II theory instead of merely espousing it, they will begin to interrupt organizational defensive routines and begin to create organizational learning processes and systems that encourage Double Loop Learning in ways that persist. (Argyris:1993,p 55)

The LO literature outlines a number of case studies, interventions and activities (de Gues:1988; Senge:1990; Senge, Kleiner et al.:1994; Argyris:2004) that are designed to engage and develop managers abilities to achieve Model II behaviours. Senge is to the forefront of this literature, building a case for organisational change in the *Fifth Discipline* (Senge:1990) in which he identifies five disciplines as core competencies for learning organisations: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; shared vision; and team learning. And, in other practitioner literature (Senge, Kleiner et al.:1994) managers and other practitioners are provided with a rich array of tools and strategies for achieving high level learning within their organisations.

Reflexivity is at the heart of these concepts and the engagement of reflexivity towards normatively defined *productive reasoning* is a core competence for managers within the Learning Organisation. Table 2 summarises the expression of the reflexive voice within this approach.

As we have seen, reflexivity is more than an individual's cognitive ability to inquire or reason, although these are important. Embedded in the reflexive concept are social aspects that are integral to the construction of shared meaning and creation of new knowledge. In the main, these are represented in the LO literature as sets of behavioural ideals or prescriptions that managers and others need to master in order to overcome their own resistances, and hence organisational defences, to learning. There is a sense of normalised order to the learning organisation derived from managers being able to:

- a) observe and record current reality and organisational systems and their effects;
- b) having a range of choices for acting on these to create different outcomes and a better organisational future;
- c) behave in ways that are consistent with a shared ideology of openness, truth, self-reflection and collegiality;

**Table 2: The reflexive voice within the Learning Organisation**

Approach	Goal	Significant Concepts	Reflexive Voice
Single (SLL)+ double (DLL), loop learning <sup>7</sup>	Use both incremental and radical change to solve organisational tension.	Model I Defensive Routines Encourages Model II learning systems	Engaged towards revealing defensive reasoning in personal and organisational contexts
Espoused theory + theory in action <sup>8</sup>	Understanding of individual learning processes towards action.	Model I + Model II theory in use Organisational defensive routines to protect from political threat. Normatively defined towards 'productive reasoning' Individual defensive reasoning	Engaged towards personal insights that reveal inconsistencies between my espoused and actual action taking.
Learning Organisation <sup>9</sup>	Mastery of shared learning disciplines in order to: •continuously learn together; •learn faster than competitors; •develop 'work' as a social community; •develop alternatives to 'authoritarian controlling organisations', creating 'freedom' for organisational members	Personal mastery – personal vision and ability to see current reality. Making mental models explicit Alignment to shared vision Team Learning through dialogue Overcoming organisational defensive routines Normative - Systems dynamics, archetypes, rules Politics is an aberration <sup>10</sup>	Engaged towards revealing and acting on mental models with the intention of: • achieving values alignment; • gaining insight into systemic affects of organisations;

Thus, within the promise of continual organisational renewal there are some requirements of employees whose role it is to employ their reflexivity to: challenge their own “Mental Models” (Senge:1990); overcome embarrassment and threat and engage in ‘Double Loop Learning’ (Argyris:1990); stop insulating themselves against ‘honest self assessment’ and recognise that their capabilities may be a hindrance to the future (Rylatt:2003); commit and invest themselves in the process of ‘articulation’ and ‘internalisation’ in order to pursue the ‘Spiral of Learning’ (Nonaka:1991); be willing to reveal personal beliefs and assumptions through ‘dialogue’ (Senge et al.:1994) and reflect upon their personal and organisational learning disabilities (Argyris:1999; Senge: ibid). What is implicit in the learning organisation literature is the need for organisational participants to personally engage and invest themselves in the learning process in order to continually renew and reconstitute themselves and by implication their organisation.

As Argyris (2004) points out *defensive reasoning* which creates *anti-learning* is an *omnipresent and powerful* affect within an organisation. In a somewhat emotive way, he describes these affects.

It inhibits learning, especially when learning is most needed, when it is used to challenge existing routines and the status quo, and to innovate. Defensive reasoning is dangerous to organisational performance and effectiveness ... it is doubly dangerous because it can overwhelm productive reasoning precisely when it is needed ... it is triply dangerous because human being become acculturated early in life to using it skilfully. (p212-213)

Argyris (ibid) outlines a ‘*primitive*’ model for conducting research on Double Loop Learning. The Directors in this example are impressive in their abilities to gain the ‘*skills*’ for finding a reflexive voice, and to engage their reflexivity about their own and their organisational shortcomings and there is a hint at a promise that the ‘*undiscussables*’ will at some stage become discussable as Directors within the organisation learn to trust each other. My own experience of utilising these concepts was similar to those recounted by Argyris (ibid), and created uncertainty, at least in my mind, around the usefulness and appropriateness of this set of practices as a change strategy. What was it we were missing?

## Socio-cultural approaches

Recent debates (Easterby-Smith : 2000) concerning the location of learning have moved away from the focus of learning on learning systems perspectives such as those developed by Senge, Argyris, and others, to a *social constructionist* or interpretive paradigm. That is, learning is located in and derived from the socio-cultural practices of an organisation which is most often viewed as a community. In this view learning occurs in both tacit and explicit ways in processes of sense-making by groups and individuals. Social learning systems such as *communities of practice*, *working as learning*, and *unlearning* have made important contributions to our conceptualisation of how learning occurs within social and organisational settings. Generally, these approaches to learning can be referred to as *situated learning*, that is, 'learning occurs, and knowledge is created, mainly through conversations and interactions between people' (Easterby-Smith et al.: *ibid*). Within this perspective the concepts of legitimacy, peripherality, participation in communities of practice, the relationship of learning and working, and the need to unlearn are significant to this study. I will briefly introduce each of these in turn, identifying the nature of the reflexive voice within these concepts, before discussing the more problematic aspects of these approaches in the next chapter.

### *Legitimacy and Peripherality*

The first of these is *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) proposed by Lave and Wenger (1990, in Brown et al.: 1991). LPP posits that learning occurs through legitimate participation in, or on the edge of communities, in which practices are to be learned.

Legitimacy and peripherality are intertwined in a complex way. Occasionally learners ... are granted legitimacy but are denied peripherality. Conversely, they can be granted peripherality but denied legitimacy. [for example] ...[where] legitimacy is explicitly denied in instances of 'open door' management, where members come to realise that, though the door is open, it is wiser not to cross the threshold. If either legitimacy or peripherality is denied, learning will be significantly more difficult. (Brown et al.:1991, p50)

In this process of legitimate observing, conversing and participating, the learner gradually masters new learning and practices in a process of 'enculturation' (Brown et al.: *ibid*) thus adopting the values and norms of that particular community of practice.

They acquire that particular community's subjective viewpoint and learn to speak its language. ... Learners are acquiring not explicit, formal; 'expert knowledge'," but the embodied ability to behave as community members'. ... Workplace learning is best understood, then, in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed. The central issue in learning is *becoming* a practitioner not learning *about* practice. (Brown and Duguid, p48)

Yanow (2004) picks up the themes of peripherality, observing that *LPP* seems a more relevant concept in situations where organisational members are 'attempting to master a practice' rather than where organisational members had already gained experience and expertise. In this latter case, Yanow (ibid) presents a set of differing priorities for learning at the 'peripheries' of organisations, proposing that the privileging of management knowledge over practice-based knowledge places 'local knowledge' on the periphery of organisations and knowledge becomes more legitimised as managers move into the 'center' of an organisation' (Yanow: 2004)

While within the practitioner community, status and its attendant power derive from competent practice, from the perspective of organizational 'centres', the further from the center, the less power and status one is perceived to have, and the less legitimacy is accorded to one's knowledge ... peripheral workers have knowledge (or 'information') , which is seen analytically as a source of organizational power; and yet, in these situations, that power is non-existent as an organizational 'reality' (that is a reality of the lived experience of organizational members at both centres and peripheries). Without legitimacy accorded to their knowledge, these workers are not on the organization's 'mattering mat' (Goldstein,1983). (pS22)

### ***The relationship of learning and working***

The *community of practice* concept places emphasis on practitioners participating, interacting and engaging within a community with other practitioners to develop shared sets of knowledge, perspectives and competencies (Wenger:2000). Wenger sets out a number of conditions that need to be 'designed into' an organisation in order for communities of practice to be successful (see Table 3). Learning in this perspective is socially constructed and situated within social, historical and cultural settings.

From this perspective, learners can in one way or another be seen to construct their understanding out of a wide range of materials that include ambient social and physical circumstances and the histories and social relations of the people involved. (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p47)

Wenger (ibid) posits that learning is achieved in such communities by the tension between a shared view of competence (which defines what members of the community need to know) and ongoing need for new competencies (gained through experience and interaction with the world outside of the community).

There is a sense of informality and fluidity to these groups, a concept which is extended by Brown and Duguid's (1991) thesis on work, learning and innovating where they coin the term *learning-in-working* to describe this 'fluid evolution of learning through practice' which emphasises knowledge as 'enacted and situated' (Easterby-Smith: ibid). Brown et al. (ibid) argue communities of practice are highly situated, contingent upon changing membership and circumstances, improvisational with the resources at hand and importantly, often evolve and exist in the gaps between formally defined work-groups or work tasks. In this context, the legitimate and abstract *maps* of organisational canonical practice do not reflect the actual practices and activities of the communities within the organisation.

### ***The reflexive voice within situated learning perspectives***

Where would we find the reflexive voice within a community of practice? There is a sense in the literature that communities of practice are socially cohesive and populated with active, curious people who are willing to share and develop knowledge together in participative ways and are welcoming and inclusive of newcomers. The reflexive voice in this community can be engaged for interpretation of and insight into existing knowledge sets in order to share tacit understandings which contribute both to new knowledge and also to construct knowledge about how things *really* work. It is not simply reflective but is also engaged to make meaning from the performance actions taken within the community. (Wenger: ibid) The reflexive voice can also engaged to look inwards to the community itself, acting upon the dynamics, principles and actions of the community in order to (re)construct its purpose and practices. (Wenger: ibid) And lastly, the reflexive voice can be given legitimacy and can be informally expressed in *influential interstitial* communities. (Brown et al.:ibid), however, as Yanow (ibid) observed, the significance accorded the reflexive voice is reliant on the form of knowledge produced. These expressions of reflexivity are summarised in Table 3.

### ***The need to unlearn***

Hedberg (in Nystrom and Starbuck:1981) proposes that organisations need to *unlearn* in order to learn, discarding past responses to environmental stimuli in order to create new responses. This provides a *counterintuitive* approach (Easterby-Smith et al.:2004) to OL in that it focuses on destabilising conditions such as problems, crisis, opportunities or the actions of people as stimuli for learning new organisational responses.

Hedberg (ibid) proposes responses to environmental stimuli can be understood via two mechanisms which develop and sustain theories of action:

1) What is attended to: at this level of the learning system, what is to be learned is contingent upon the environmental stimuli managers focus upon which is filtered by their existing knowledge sets (mental maps / world views). Thus, mechanisms which enable both selection and interpretation of environmental stimuli are influenced by previous learning.

2) How this is responded to: at the second level managers will engage a wide variety of *response assemblies* based upon responses learned in similar situations. These may be appropriate or may have low validity in the case of *incomplete learning cycles* which occur where managers abilities to engage new knowledge is a) constrained by tight role definitions or restrictive practices; b) constrained by political behaviours and other organisational resistances; c) based on *superstitious* learning where environmental outcomes are incorrectly attributed to an individuals actions; and d) not legitimised because of *ambiguity* and complexity leading to multiple possible interpretations of cause and effect and the need to select one legitimate response out of many possibilities. (March and Olsen: 1976 cited by Hedberg: ibid) Incomplete learning cycles give rise to 'myths' (which can be interpreted as theories of action), 'schools of thought' or other misinterpretations of cause/effect relationships.

In order for organisations to learn, particularly in response to significant or substantial changes to their environment, they first need to *unlearn* their current response sets which have been successful in the past.

More substantial changes to organization- environment relationships require that old responses be deleted and sometimes replaced. This unlearning is often difficult, and it takes time. Environmental changes create uncertainty, so organizations are tempted to rely on previously successful behaviours. (Hedberg: 1975b in

Hedberg:1981, p9)

Within this approach, there is acknowledgement of multiple realities and situational differences in the speed of learning which can be evolutionary (adjustment) or revolutionary (*turnover* or *turnaround*). *Unlearning* is achieved by *undermining* (feedback that demonstrates current responses are failing) or by *conquering* (current responses are undermined by new responses introduced by new managers or consultants). This unlearning system relies on complete learning cycles, that is, direct feedback and evidence to undermine existing response sets. Hedberg (ibid) identifies a number of ways in which organisations respond where the learning cycle is incomplete including: individuals unlearn but their viewpoint is not widely shared resulting in no change to organisational myths or theories of action; or organisations changing their responses, myths, strategies but members of the organisation hold onto their past successful responses; or organisational inertia; or the departure of leaders / managers as they are attacked by pressure groups taking notice of disconfirming feedback. Whilst some organisations are able to respond to unlearning triggers, (that is, problems, pressure groups, leadership crisis resulting in managers departing, opportunities in the external environment) and change their theories of action, others will flounder and die. Hedberg (ibid) describes these two scenarios.

These triggers cause hesitancy and build up distrust in procedures and leaders. A turbulent period then frequently follows. Inconsistent messages are issued by the leaders, and organizational members and outside evaluators begin to search for new leadership and alternative strategies and myths. Ultimately the world view and the standard operating procedures break down. The organization has unlearned its yesterday (Hedberg et al 1976) and finds itself either paralyzed or busily relearning. (p19)

Not all organizations manage to do so. A certain amount of excess resources are needed in order to invent and implement new orientations but, although diminishing slack often triggers organizational search (Cyert and March, 1963), the slack that remains at the time of unlearning is often insufficient for survival. Other organizations get so disoriented during their unlearning that they never manage to pull their act together, their goals erode, their members develop apathy, and their leaders leave nothing but a strategic vacuum. (p19)

We can turn now to the reflexive voice and ask how is this expressed within this prescriptive and more strategic approach? Hedberg discusses ways in which unlearning can be facilitated within organisations through: a) experimentation and practices (such as recruitment) that foster and develop an *experimental attitude* or; b) other practices

that *create appropriate filters* on external and internal information and encourage managers to focus on ambiguities and variations in order to develop attitudes of curiosity and discovery or; c) redesigning environments to promote risk taking and experimentation. The expression of reflexivity is implied within this literature through concepts such as *disconfirmations* or *pressure groups* or the need for *experimentation*. Hedberg (ibid) implies that organisations can promote experimentation by recruiting managers with the appropriate qualities for experimenting, risk taking, designing and navigating failure, questioning, or unfreezing current world views. Some managers contribution will be to depart the organisation in order to create an organisation that can unlearn and relearn. Two possible ways for engaging the reflexive voice can be interpreted from this set of literature, either people will voice their opinion and question prevailing management or they will leave the organisation if their voice is not heard.

### Summary

Table 3 summarises the organisational learning discussion, identifying the potential ways in which the reflexive voice is engaged in these approaches.

**Table 3: The reflexive voice within the OL literature**

Approach	Goal	Significant Concepts	Reflexive Voice
Situated Learning <sup>11</sup>	Learning is situated in social practice	LPP – Legitimate peripheral participation Metaphor, Narration, Story-telling	Engaged for interpretation / insight in order to produce new situated knowledge
Organisational Peripheries <sup>12</sup>	Learning at the peripheries of organisations is marginalised	Double Periphery - meaning 'translated bi-culturally' along horizontal and vertical peripheries producing 'local knowledge' Local knowledge not legitimised and is 'underprivileged' within the organisation.	What is heard depends on legitimacy of knowledge (local vs managerial knowledge) Gains more authority as it moves to the 'center' of the community
Communities of Practice <sup>13</sup>	Learning achieved through interaction in community of people with shared skills, knowledge, and profession.	Modes of belonging – engagement, imagination, alignment Community dimensions – learning energy, social capital, self-awareness Boundary Dimensions – coordination, transparency, negotiation	Engaged to make meaning from the performance actions taken within the community. Also engaged to act on dynamics / principles of the community itself.
Learning in working <sup>14</sup>	Knowledge is enacted and situated in work practice	Non-canonical - emergent, informal, fluid structure, come together for shared work activities	Informally expressed in interstitial spaces
Unlearning <sup>15</sup>	Un-learning is discarding past responses in order to re(learn) and create new responses	Counter-intuitive, learning related to destabilising conditions such as problems, crisis, opportunities. Two level stimuli / response model initiates learning or need to unlearn. Inner and outer organisational environmental conditions influential Organisational memory + forgetting	People will either: • Voice their opinion, or question prevailing management • Leave the organisation if their voice is not heard

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of *organisational memory* proposes that organisations have memories which are comprised of the knowledge of its individual members, including their tacit knowledge, variously located with members of the organisation and systems which store knowledge and information. Issues related to sustaining organisational memory are the departure of organisational members (and their tacit knowledge) and the norms and systems used to locate, store and retrieve information.

3 Organisational development (OD)

4 Attributed to John Dewey within the tradition of education and learning as cited by Elkjaer in Easterby-Smith et al. (2004)

5 This subject is returned to in the methodology chapter where issues associated with my own reflexivity as researcher are discussed.

6 Easterby-Smith and Araujo, (Easterby-Smith et al, 1999) use this term to describe writing that assumes 'organizational learning is about the effective processing, interpretation of , and response to, information both inside and outside the organization.' p.3

7 Argyris (1992)

8 Argyris (1992)

9 Senge (1990, 1994) Argyris + Schon (19788, Argyris (1992)

10 Coopey & Burgoyne (2000)

11 Lave and Wenger (1990 as cited in Brown et al.: 1991) are foremost in this school of writers.

12 Yanow (2000)

13 Wenger (2000)

14 Brown and Duguid (1991)

15 Hedberg in Nystrom & Starbuck(1981)

## CHAPTER 3

### From promise to problematization

#### Introduction

In the manufacturing environment experience described in the Introduction, we sought to create changes in the group's culture by implementing practices based in managerial and psycho/OD literature including open *dialogue* (Senge et al.: *ibid*) meetings, *transformational leadership skills* (Bass and Avolio:1994) and operator initiated *forays* (process improvement practices). All of these new practices required people to engage their reflexivity to create insights on the affects of their individual and team approaches and behaviours and to make changes to support the *shared vision* created for the intervention of a 'better place to work and a place that works better'. Developmental interventions based on learning organisation theory and practice (Senge: *ibid*; Senge at al.: *ibid*; Argyris:1990), included *left and right hand column*, review of *case study*, *walking the talk*, 360° feedback based on *ideal learning behaviours*, teamed with *experiential action learning*, as a framework for developing cultural change. Whilst we enjoyed some successes in this project, the implementation of the learning organisation models proved to be difficult and 'patchy' in uptake from managers. Within the approach we were taking for this intervention, I interpreted this 'patchiness' as managers resisting the change effort by engaging Model I *defensive routines* as outlined in Chapter 2.

Unravelling the defensive routines engaged by managers, and myself as consultant, was challenging for us all. More significantly, managers protested that a number of the interventions were too abstract for the 'realities' of the situation they were facing and that they had difficulty using these to create forward momentum for change in their traditional culture. Or they felt these approaches were okay and worked 'within the comfort of the learning context' but 'fell off the edge' when it came to leading and engaging this learning in the 'real world' [read 'in the factory']. These responses resonate with the difficulties experienced by other organisations in implementing double-loop learning as reviewed by Argyris (2004).

There was little attempt to make underground cover-up strategies discussable. Indeed, striving to do so was seen as *foolish*, likely to be *counter-productive*, *impractical*, and at best *romantic*. (p220, emphasis added).

Some writers challenge whether it is even possible for managers to find the reflexive voice, at least without intervention from an external source such as a consultant or other change agent.

Organisations metalogic - rules for assembling responses and rules which define situations – typically are inaccessible even to managers and other policy makers so that these people lack the ability to implement new behaviour modes in their organisations (Beer: 1972 cited in Hedberg: *ibid*, p9)

Within the prevailing learning system, members of the organisation could not surface the underlying dilemmas which had arisen from the organizations earlier growth, nor could they surface the incongruity between their espoused theory and their theories-in-use for development. ... When *with the consultant's help*, members of the corporation were able to piece together the stories of successful and unsuccessful development, their diagnosis revealed inconsistencies in organizational theory of action which had become organisational dilemmas. (Argyris and Schon: 1978, p43-44 emphasis added)

By *problematizing* (Foucault in Rabinow and Rose: 2003) this situation we can begin to ask questions and critically explore the learning experience of managers or other personnel in similar situations.

### **The productive relationship of power and knowledge**

Whilst there are a number of references to issues related to power, politics or control in the non-critical OL/LO literature reviewed above, they tend to be either: a) expressed as ‘things to *learn out* of the organisation’ or ‘things to *take account of* in designing learning interventions’ or ‘things *to avoid*’ or at least ‘watch out for’; or b) assumed or overlooked within the literature. A number of critical writers lament this tendency for LO literature, and more generally, OL literature to overlook or stigmatise issues of power and control. (Coopey:1995; Blackler and McDonald:2000; Coopey and Burgoyne:2000; Easterby-Smith, Crossan et al.:2000; Knights and McCabe:2002) Is it possible that there is a relationship between power and learning? By exploring the relations between power and knowledge, will we gain some insight into how the reflexive voice might be articulated in such settings and how this could possibly open the gateway to new knowledge and innovation?

***Power –wielded by individual agency or defined by underlying forces?***

In order to explore power effects on the reflexive process, it is firstly important to take a brief detour to define the concept of power for this research. Although power is a central concept to the social sciences (Hoy, 1986), there are a number of schools of thought on how power can be investigated. Hoy's (ibid) critique of progress in understanding the nature of power is a useful starting point for this review.

The simple behaviourist model sees power as individual agency, that is, one person has 'power over' another – either to achieve their own interests in a conflictual situation or to prevent the issues of the other person from ever arising. Lukes (in Hoy, ibid) and others are critical of this view as it assumes that those who lack power are fully conscious of their own interests, whereas their real interests may in fact be latent or unconscious as a result of 'ideological distortion' (p126). Lukes (ibid) takes a more radical view, extending this approach and claiming that to fully understand power and its effects, these 'real interests' must be somehow be identified and verified. Common to both models, however, is the assumption that 'power is linked to human agency' (p127).

'Structural' theorists, however, believe that power effects are driven by underlying social forces and are more usefully studied from perspectives such as ideology and societal or organisational structures such as economic structure (Marx), stratification (Weber), or human culture (Levi-Strauss). In these paradigms, an individual's ability to enact power is defined by structural forces and Hoy (ibid) puts this well when he notes...

... 'although history happens as a result of individual's wills, it does not happen as they will it' (p127)

Whilst writers such as Lukes would place Michel Foucault's writings on power within the *structuralist* paradigm, Hoy (ibid) argues that within the *critical* approach, Foucault's method for the historical study of power provides another way of analysing power 'without attributing power either to conscious agency or to underlying forces'(p128) .

***Power - invisible and enacted at the micro-level through discourse***

Foucault sees power and knowledge as relational and productive forces that are not necessarily negative or manipulative but act upon each other to produce or repress ways of acting and thinking in differing situations. (Rabinow et al.: ibid) He used the term

*discourse* to describe the objects of knowledge we find meaningful and truthful within particular contexts. In this discursive view, knowledge is subjective and constructed through social activities such as conversations, investigations, organisational rules and practices and shared insights which operate at micro level within an organisation. (Morgan & Sturdy: 2000) For Foucault power is active within discourse opening and closing the field of possible action:

[Power] operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or begin capable of action. ... Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of 'government'.<sup>16</sup>  
(Rabinow et al: *ibid*, p138)

Thus, a discourse both constructs and is constructed by social activities. In other words, knowledge about the world is constructed by managers and knowledge, particularly historical knowledge, constructs what is possible.

Discourses, both official and unofficial, (McCabe, 2000), stabilised or emerging (Morgan et al: *ibid*), carry power and authority enacted through countless interactions between people within varying situations and circumstances. Within these varying contexts, knowledge is an apparent subjective and socially defined 'truth' which carries an inherent power and authority, enabling people to undertake the actions needed to fulfil their role effectively. Discourses therefore carry the power to get things done and to act on social boundaries that are limiting knowledge creation and learning. This productive nature of discourse governs 'the way a topic can be reasonably talked about and reasoned about' (Attias, 1997) and practiced within particular contexts, it gives what we do and say authority, and it will change both over time and from situation to situation. Thus within a particular discourse, how people understand the world can organise and order relationships in ways that produce or restrain certain actions, conversations or practices. Morgan et al (*ibid*) articulate this well.

"Power stands behind knowledge, not as an 'invisible hand' which manipulates what is to count as truth but as the energy which runs through its veins, giving it 'effectivity' making it 'work' to change existing practices and expanding its reach into ever more areas of life." (p29).

McKinley (2000), suggests that participants in an organisation have more freedom to act than is suggested by Foucault. He argues that there is a gap between knowledge and power, a gap occupied by tacit knowledge and unregulated social processes” (p107), and that this gap is where reflexivity and tacit knowledge reside. He goes on to say that “acceptance of this gap may be a precondition for management’s attempting to enhance the reflexivity of the labour processes” (ibid). In other words, the spaces where reflexivity is engaged are important spaces to attend to if management, for example, wish their people to challenge the status quo, inquire upon what is known or offer multiple perspectives on problems and organisational futures. It would be useful then to find out more about how reflexivity operates within prevailing discourses within organisations and as Hardy and Clegg (1996 in Blackler and McDonald: 2000) suggest:

... researchers should explore how, in particular situations, voices are heard or are silenced to illuminate how people (including academic researchers) necessarily participate in the web of relations that they help to create”. (p 835)

### ***Power - a definition of power for this critical research***

It was argued in the above sections, that the deterministic approaches of ‘power as agency’ or ‘power derived from structural forces’ are not adequate for the investigation of reflexivity in this case study. Rather, power has been located in various discourses each variably stabilised and codified, that organise and order in non-determining ways, managers relations to themselves, others, and the practices they use to get by in organisations.

Thus, by unravelling what managers believe is possible and their varied experiences of those practices and processes requiring reflexivity (both current and historically), we can begin to build a picture of the ways in which new knowledge and ways of acting are practiced, engaged, contested or ignored. By asking these questions such as: ‘how do managers govern their efforts?’; ‘what are the power effects within historical and emerging discourses?’; or ‘what can and can’t managers talk about within their organisation?’, we will perhaps gain some insight into reflexive learning and the resistances managers have to personally engaging their reflexivity towards challenge and change.

## Problematizing functional approaches to learning

Functionalist and technical approaches to organisational learning assume that managers, or consultants, are able to design, plan and control strategies and interventions that create the desired affect, in this case, of increasing learning capabilities. In this paradigm management control is *unproblematic* (Knights and McCabe:2002), that is, it subscribes to the behaviourist view of power which assumes that managers have the capacity to get others to do what is required of them. Knights et al. (ibid) point out the difficulties in this approach which leaves managers unaware of their need to understand or explore power relations within a particular discourse<sup>17</sup>.

The possession of power by those in higher echelons of hierarchies is taken for granted largely because invariably employees do confirm, or at least comply, with the demands made of them by managers. However, the unproblematic treatment of power leaves rational managerialists unable to understand how consent or compliance works and, more importantly, its precariousness.' (p248)

Further to this, these approaches assume that managers themselves can act in a consistent and coherent manner leaving no 'space for employees to resist'. Where this does not occur, Knights et al argue, employees will claim that reflexive space to contest the discourse or create other contesting discourses.

TQM<sup>18</sup> is just one of a multiplicity of discourses that are dynamic and require social renewal to be sustained and, in this sense, it is often both 'internal and 'external' to the subject. That is to say, it is a one and the same time a pressure or constraint acting on the individual from outside, but also, an internal standard by which subjects measure, evaluate, and discipline themselves and others including those managers who were the initiators of TQM. (p248 – 249)

Arguably, there are numerous examples of inconsistencies within discourses in the OL/LO literature that leave room for such resistance. The following highlights some of these tendencies.

### ***Learning Organisations – controlling freedom and social virtue?***

Senge (1990) treats power games and political manoeuvring as undesirable and a hindrance to learning and posits the need for managers to apply their reflexive voice towards creating *reflective openness* and developing *shared vision*, which are seen together as 'antidotes to internal politics and game playing' (p274). The following is a good example of this:

[A shared vision is a ] 'force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further – if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person – then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see that it exists. Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision'. (Senge: *ibid*, p206)

However, shared vision is most often defined and designed by senior managers within the organisation. This situation that appears to be implied by Senge, who on the surface, seems to accept that the power to engage employees in a shared vision is problematic. He outlines the issues managers may face in *enrolling* others (and perhaps themselves?) in the vision and suggests a strategy for achieving the commitment of others:

The hardest lesson for managers to face is that, ultimately, there is nothing you can do to get another person to enrol or commit. Enrollment of commitment requires freedom of choice. *The guidelines above* [being enrolled in the vision yourself; being on the level; and being willing for others to make a free choice on their own enrolment] *simply establish conditions most favourable to enrolment*, but they do not cause enrolment. Commitment likewise is very personal; efforts to force it will, at best, foster compliance. (p223, emphasis added)

Senge also gives advice to managers who want at least compliance to the vision.

... I recommend that you be on the level with it: 'I know you may not agree wholeheartedly with the new direction, but at this juncture it is where the management team is committed to heading. I need your support to help it happen'. Being open about the need for compliance removes hypocrisy. It also makes it easier for people to come to their choices, which may, over time, include enrollment. (p223)

An alternative Foucauldian reading of this approach is that 'enrolment in shared vision' is a form of subjection that is productive of a particular identity and has the effect of setting aside alternative viewpoints. If successful, 'enrolment in a shared vision' will have the effect of reconstituting employees. (McCabe:2000)

Secondly, Senge is suggesting is a form of powerful control that *through consensus* and enrollment shifts the 'locus of control and authority' away from managers to workers, a seemingly desirable state. This is challenged by Barker (1993), who proposes that 'substantial consensus about values, high-level coordination, and a degree of self-management by members or workers in an organization' (p408) gives rise to *concertive control* which imposes greater surveillance and control upon workers.

...my analysis suggests that concertive control does not free workers from Weber's

iron cage of rational rules, as the culturalist and practitioner-orientated writers on contemporary organizations often argue. Instead a paradox occurs: The iron cage becomes stronger. The powerful combination of peer pressure and rational rules in the concertive system create a new iron cage whose bars are almost invisible to the workers it incarcerates. (p435)

Further to this, if we return to the unproblematic view held by managers as suggested by Knights and McCabe (ibid) we can envision managers who is at the same time: aware they are unable to influence others commitment; assume they can create conditions for enrolment; feel they can use their position to command compliance where this does not happen; possibly unaware of the pressures the shared vision places upon their own actions and identity; unaware of variable and subjective pressures and constraints that they and their employees will bring to bear on the vision.

Lastly, resolving difficulties along the road to shared vision, personal mastery or double loop learning are painted by Senge (ibid) and others as 'problems to be overcome' by managers who are open to change in conjunction with consultants that can help them achieve this. However, a more complex interplay is painted by McCabe (ibid) who identified that within change strategies, such as a move towards learning organisations, there can be a number of 'conflicting, contradicting or reinterpreted discourses deriving from innumerable points'. (p9) McCabe argues that each discourse is power-laden and, as the contradictions and conflicts within the discourses are revealed, often on a daily basis, new approaches, such as shared vision, are open to resistance and disruption. Thus discourses can be 'tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations' and 'there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.' (Foucault:1979 cited in McCabe: 2000, p941).

Applying these interpretations to the learning organisation, we are left wondering what do the values *freedom* (Senge: 1990) or Model II *social virtues* (Argyris:1999) promoted in the literature mean for people within the organisation. What is the experience of a manager whose personal vision or values do not match those of the company? Can managers 'opt out' of walking the talk? Will compliance be enough to achieve learning or do I need to reconstitute myself to create learning and experience freedom within this organisation? What happens when a manager requests compliance but does not get it ... at what point will employees need to comply or leave?

In applying these critical perspectives to subjects such as *shared vision* or *personal mastery* inherent in the learning organisations, we can see that the power affects that

produce reflexive learning are only obliquely referred to or are nicely avoided in the LO literature. Thus, to find the reflexive voice, it is suggested managers and consultants are more challenging and questioning of learning and what is to be learned rather than being naively engaged towards a normalising discourse such as *shared vision*.

***Power and control within collective learning practice***

Another example comes from Wenger (2000), writing on the potentially negative affect of an organisation's need for control and ownership in informal and emergent learning systems such as communities of practice ...

"This paradox could be bad news because the organizational requirements of social learning systems often run counter to traditional management practices.[Wenger and Snyder, 2000] The currency of these [social learning] systems is collegiality, reciprocity, expertise, contributions to the practice, and negotiating a learning agenda; not affiliation to an institution, assigned authority, or commitment to a predefined deliverable. But there is also good news. " (p243-244)

Wenger (ibid) does not elucidate in this article how legitimacy will be achieved in communities of practice within a traditional organisation but, we can assume that people within this kind of organisation will need to have the power to 'structure, coordinate, negotiate, and design' legitimate communities of practice. These approaches appear to be contradictory in that they seek to minimise and marginalise political behaviours and demonise power (Fox:2000) but seem to implicitly assume, as discussed above, that managers or practitioners are able to act upon and design the conditions of their organisational environment towards learning. Further to this, legitimacy in Weberian terms implies 'genuine authority' given to managers by subordinates in some kind of consensual process ('Weber, Max', Scott and Marshall, 2005), but it can also imply *ideological hegemony*, that is, legitimacy is 'imposed from above' through manipulating social norms. (Scott, ibid) From a Foucauldian perspective, the power to give legitimacy is embedded in social relations occurring in various organisational contexts, some of which will be quite unrelated to communities of practice. Buchanan and Badham (1999) argue that understanding this embedded nature of power, being able to develop 'power bases' for action, and having a well developed political repertoire, are the very competencies that managers need to have or learn in order to enact change. However, open discussions and negotiated solutions around issues of power and legitimacy are not apparent in the COP literature.

Brown et al (ibid) pay more attention to power affects within communities of practice acknowledging that ‘attempts to foster such synergy through a conceptual reorganisation will produce enormous difficulties from the perspective of the conventional workplace.’ (p55). Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) argue the need for their *political metaphor* to ‘understand better the dynamics of the learning process’ (p881) and conclude that

... it takes an unusual form of organization to provide both for the autonomy of constituent communities-of-practice and a level of free and easy connectedness sufficient for new knowledge to be disseminated. (p880)

Blackler and McDonald (2000) provide some insight into the links between power, mastery and collective learning, arguing that these are inseparable. Within this approach they have chosen to adopt a Foucauldian view of power as constructed by and constructing ongoing activities.

...our approach is to study power as both the ingoing product, and the medium, of collective activity. (p835)

As organisational life is arranged to operate stable systems of relationships, routines, practices, procedures, ways of interrelating, and ways of looking at things, they propose that this places limits on what managers and others believe is achievable.

Such systems obscure the arbitrary foundations of social life; in their daily lives people are defensible and ideas of what is possible in human affairs become confused with descriptions of what already exists. (p848)

Within this context, they suggest that organisational dilemmas or ‘situations that are not fully understood’ are significant contexts for organisational learning, creating new ways of looking at things, extending what is possible, challenging current practices or ‘loosening familiar social relations’. Dilemma’s are sites of ‘power conflicts’ (Fox: ibid) thus there is the need for managers and others to have capabilities to engage and navigate these affects. A concept central to this occurring is *decentred collaboration* developed from Engstrom et al.’s (1998, cited in Blacker et al. 2000) work on *knotworking*. This form of collaboration is typified by its emergent, improvisational, fluid, and ‘short-lived’ form. Whereas *communities of practice* could perhaps be seen as ‘knots of interaction’ that have stabilised around established activities or networks, ‘knots’ are variable by nature, bringing together different people, tools and technologies around particular activities in a ‘recurrent pattern of relationships’ over time. This form of collaboration is disorderly with changing priorities and unexpected twists in both the

development of collaborative activity and also in the way members of the ‘knot’ are changed by the experience. Most significantly, there is no one point of control, that is, control is *decentered*.

Without a shared overall understanding of what might be achieved at certain key times participants endeavoured to respond to the priorities of others and to contribute to the project as best they could. At such times it was clear that no one was in control of the course of the project. (Blackler et al.:ibid,p845)

They situate *decentered collaboration* within an organisational learning dynamic<sup>19</sup> that produces tensions between stable and emergent practice, pragmatism and new insights, conservatism and innovation, current and future priorities, each with power affects upon action.

...organizational learning is revealed to be a complex mix of intersubjective and generic sense making, heedful and decentered collaboration, enrolment and performance, apprenticeship and proficiency. In the complexity of this situation it does not seem sensible to us to seek to distinguish these processes definitively; each defines the other and contributes to the part-continuing, part-emergent patterns of power and activity in an organization. (p841)

They emphasise the power affects of stability and conservatism on change and innovation, which, in their case led to ‘short-term’ episodes of collaboration followed by a return to the status quo.

...there are clear pressures towards conservatism in complex organisations. (p 841) ... Episodes of decentered collaboration were relatively short-lived, however. As the moments of shared concern passed, established outlooks and structures tended to reassert themselves and participants were pleased to return to familiar ground.’ (p846)

Whilst *decentered collaboration* is the site of significant learning possibilities, Blackler et al. (ibid) suggest it is a ‘precarious process’ which cannot be ‘engineered’ however they suggest that organisations could perhaps seek to develop ‘temporary activity systems that support high levels of interactive complexity’ and that ‘contain the anxiety’ generated by the uncertainty of approach and outcome. The reflexive voice within *decentered collaboration* appears to be freed by ‘loosening’ relationships, accepting ambiguity, open exploration of dilemma situations, engaging the ‘messiness’ of organisational life and, whilst this may be anxiety creating, acting in ways that are different to conventional practices, approaches or expectations that, for the most part, feel ‘out of control’.

### *Critique of Unlearning*

Inconsistencies relating to Hedberg's concepts of *unlearning* are highlighted by Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) who assert that unlearning can be triggered not just by problems and crisis outlined above, but also by the engagement of openly political dialectical methods described by Mirvis (1996, cited in Coopey et al. *ibid*). In organisations these could be perhaps represented by building scenarios or 'strawmen' that encourage debate and surface a multiplicity of values and interpretations. They argue, however, that this occurs within a tacit and entrenched power and political system that these topics need to be 'surfaced and discussed' if high level learning is to occur. Coopey et al. (*ibid*) present a radical argument, proposing that organisational learning is 'facilitated by a free and open form of politics in the workplace based on a system of political, social and civil rights and obligations within a framework of legitimate authority' (p869). They propose organisations will be more able to create conditions for learning when managers and others are competent to engage legitimate political behaviours to create *learning spaces* in which:

- all employees feel free to contribute their ideas, talents and perspectives;
- employees openly express their concerns, are listened to and their concerns discussed;
- the reinforcement, proliferation and reconciliation of ideas is *visible*;
- the *normalising pressures* of 'experts' and 'change champions' (including consultants) are negotiated;
- conflict and disagreement is seen as constructive, including challenge of the ideas or knowledge of the *dominant group*.

Thus, reflexivity is directed at surfacing and challenging the political and power systems of an organisation. As Lather (cited in Reason and Bradbury:2001) puts it, knowledge is 'constructed, contested, incessantly perspectival and polyphonic'.(p6). Essentially, the reflexive process requires actors to be free to 'construct and contest', not only to inquire about the assumptions within the prevailing sets of knowledge but also to express diverse viewpoints and challenge whether prevailing knowledge sets, including power relations are relevant or useful.

### **Summary**

By problematizing the literature on learning in organisations we have seen that the tendency in the literature to overlook or stigmatise issues of power constrains the agency and capability of managers and consultants to enact change through learning initiatives. To fill this gap, it is important that managers are encouraged and provided with the competencies and wherewithal to:

- engage their reflexivity towards understanding, challenging and acting upon normalising discourses such as shared vision or the pressures towards conservatism;
- create learning conditions that loosen relationships and are at times ambiguous and ‘out of control’
- challenge the political and power systems of an organisation and their impacts on learning initiatives.

Thus within these conditions, managers will potentially have greater agency to articulate their reflexive voice in constructive and influential ways.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Government’ in this sense means ‘the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed’ (Rabinow et al: *ibid*,p138)

<sup>17</sup> In their critique, Knights and McCabe (2002) give insight into power affects within TQM and their application to other innovations such as the PIP investigated in this study.

<sup>18</sup> Total Quality Management

<sup>19</sup> See Blacker and McDonald (2000, p838) for a diagrammatic overview of this dynamic

## CHAPTER 4

# Methodology

### Overview

This study asks the critical research question, ‘what are the social forces that constrain or free manager’s participation in an organisational development programme identified in this case study as a profit improvement programme (PIP)?’ To investigate this question the study identifies the PIP as a discourse and explores the relations and interaction between PIP (as a discourse or discursive practice) and other discourse that prevail within the research sites.

But what does it mean to be critical? Implicit in these questions is the idea that PIP practice occurs within a web of socially constructed power relations acting upon manager’s reflexivity and their subsequent action taking to realise profit improvement. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) define critical studies as seeking

‘to disrupt ongoing social reality for the sake of providing impulses to the liberation for or resistance to what dominates and leads to constraints in human decision making.’ (p1)

However from this general definition diverge a number of epistemological approaches. Normative studies (Alvesson et al.: *ibid*), based on the scientific paradigm (Kuhn:1962), are deterministic and seek to objectify and quantify social relations. Within this paradigm, the research process delivers up new facts that contribute to an existing body of knowledge about the research topic and there is an a priori sense that these are permanent, factual, and constant over time and place. Using Burrell and Morgan’s(1979) functionalist definition we can locate Learning Organisation literature within the normative paradigm.

The dilemma is that managers’ ability to be reflexive underpins achievement of the organisational learning and as we have seen from the literature review, managers’ ability to act on and influence organisational outcomes is dependent upon the constructed and constructing nature of knowledge and power relations. Assumed within this interplay is a more chaotic view of the case organisation in which managers will subjectively construct the PIP discourse across sites, over time or from situation to

situation, leading to *multiple and conflicted* (Alvesson et al.: *ibid*) descriptions of what it means to engage in profitability improvement. Within this context, the normative world view in which obvious or instrumental explanations for what constitutes a barrier or freedom to act does not provide a useful approach for investigating power relations within the PIP.

### **Critical action research**

Managers need to be able to engage with the PIP discourse in a way that is tolerant of multiple meanings and viewpoints, provides insight into the power effects of PIP practices within different contexts, and frees managers to act upon these. Thus managers participating in the research need to have the opportunity to shape and define not just the research outcomes but also the research itself. In order to achieve this, Alvesson et al. (*ibid*) advocate that critical researchers use participative research methods which for this study I will call *critical action research*.

### ***Participation***

Action research is an umbrella term for methodologies that: are participative and democratic; make use of participant inquiry and reflection; are concerned with both theory and practice leading to useful knowledge and outcomes; and that liberate the human spirit. (Reason et al.: *ibid*). Action research seeks also to contribute to the research community and at the same time solve an organisational problem such as the one posed in the PIP case study. (Waddell, Cummings & Worley: 2000; Gummesson: 1988). By adopting a critical action methodology, managers will have the opportunity to describe, reflect upon, interpret and act on their own interactions with the PIP discourse and in doing so engage their own reflexivity.

Assuming that I could work with managers to define what constitutes PIP discourse, the second main challenge of the study was to identify research strategies that could sensitively support discussion of the power relations produced by PIP discourse and navigate manager's self-interest or political manoeuvring. For managers, PIP, power and reflexivity are lived experiences occurring within an organisational fabric that provides a number of pressures for managers to express differing viewpoints in differing contexts. As we have seen, managers are instrumental in creating the web of power

relations that construct their experience. How can the researcher unravel this web in a way that is meaningful for both managers and the research itself?

Alvesson et al. (ibid) advocate that critical action researchers are engaging in a dialogic process whereby managers are inspired to create change within their own organisations. In order to achieve this, this research needs to adopt an intellectual role defined by *three moments*: Insight, critique and transformative redefinition.

### ***Insight***

The *first moment*, ‘insight’, is defined by the authors as ...

the process of seeing into the various ways in which [taken for granted] knowledge and the seeming objective character of objects and events are formed and sustained. The term recalls the hermeneutic understanding of language as disclosive and opening a field of consideration rather than the representational view of language which underpins knowledge as truth claims.’ (p140)

That is, by sharing my own insights and listening to the meanings that managers’ ascribe to PIP practices, I will be opening up fields of conversation and dialogue that enrich understanding. Alvesson et al. go on to note that whilst managers may be capable of this kind of reflexivity on their own, this is unlikely to occur without prompting from the researcher who has greater freedom both from practical constraints, such as time or focus on production outputs, and from discursive constraints, such as tradition or accepted sets of knowledge (‘truths’). In this moment, the researcher is not privileged with greater insight but acts as a facilitator of and contributor to meaning and interpretation leading to insight.

### ***Critique***

Managers’ experience and understanding of their organisation develops over time and certain practices, viewpoints, or ways of talking about profit become ‘privileged’ and act as ‘truths’ (in the Foucauldian sense). In Alvesson et al.’s (ibid) *second moment*, the action researcher problematises the issue, engaging critique to a) highlight and reveal dominating viewpoints and b) create space to explore other perspectives or alternative meanings.

Alvesson et al. (ibid) advocate that to find these alternative perspectives, the researcher needs to focus their critique on social ‘structures, conventions and bodies of

knowledge'. Morgan and Sturdy's (2000) discursive study into the emergence of strategic discourse in financial services in the UK, provides a useful example for investigating the PIP discourse in this way. They focused their study using 'a framework of knowledge about the world' (p122) as interpreted from a) managerial practices, controls and measurement systems within the world of financial services; b) structural elements such as culture and marketing; c) emerging 'frameworks of strategic knowledge' produced by language and; d) the historical events that prompted the emergence of 'strategy' as a force within the industry. If we identify Morgan and Sturdy as an exemplar here, I am able to form a set of more specific research questions that direct attention towards critique of the prevailing discourses constructing managers experiences of PIP within the case organisation.

1. What are the main concerns people have with regard to reflexivity about their current work practices?
2. What subjects personify the PIP? How do people talk about the PIP?
3. What are the managerial practices within the organisation for enacting or dealing with these subjects?
4. How has the PIP discourse emerged over time? Has this meant that traditional profitability discourses have changed?
5. How does knowledge about the PIP acquire authority?
6. What are the rules of inclusion and exclusion that produce the ways that profit improvement plans (PIP) and learning are practiced and talked about?
7. How is the PIP discourse contradicted or inconsistent leading to spaces for resistance such as reinterpretation, official/unofficial discourse, or pragmatic discourses?
8. Who defines ideology or vision around learning and the PIP?
9. What social practices construct the freedom or lack of freedom people have to engage in reflexive practice?

These questions formed the basis for more specific prompter questions asked in the interviews and also for the analysis of data. See the Interview Protocol in Appendix Two for how these are mapped to the interview questions.

### ***Transformative Re-definition***

Transformation, forward momentum and change are characteristic of the *third moment*. As we have seen, critical action research is concerned with creating new knowledge and outcomes that enable managers to challenge the dominant discourse and inspire them to enact change. One of the challenges of this research approach is that managers, who operate in the pragmatic and rational world, seek concrete and ‘real’ solutions to well defined organisational problems. They may have already participated in normative studies which provided them with certainty of outcome, or recommended new knowledge and practices that could be taken away and implemented, driving an expectation for ‘solutions and recommendations’ from this research. However, as Alvesson et al. (ibid) point out, the third moment is not to produce objective knowledge that is privileged to the researcher but to enable managers with the ability, skills and technology to reflexively engage their own insight and critique. Further, it is not just about reflection and understanding but is also about ‘helping to create new responses to the current situation’ (p145)

If the research facilitates managers’ insight into the multiple ways in which the PIP can be interpreted and the confidence to openly contest and challenge the aspects of PIP that are constraining their ability to achieve greater profitability, it will have taken a step towards success. If it also creates confidence and inspiration for managers, enabling them to act on this new knowledge, creating new ways of working, relating, debating and deciding, then this success will be complete.

### **Research methods**

For this study to be considered *critical action research*, participatory methods of data collection that generate insight, provide opportunities for critique and open up new ways for managers to engage with their world is expected. The study used three methods to explore the research questions: interviews, observation, and reflexive forums. The participatory nature of each of these methods is described below.

#### ***Interviews***

22 managers, including factory managers, the NZ operations manager, North and South Island operations managers, the financial accountant, and senior personnel involved in PIP, participated in an interview lasting approximately one hour. In most cases, the

interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The interviews were interpreted using the general research questions, resulting in a set of 'rich data'.

The interviews were informal and conversational in nature and I used prompter questions based around the general research questions (see Appendix 2) to guide the interview. Historical perspectives on the organisation were explored using *Life Histories* (Musson in Symon & Cassell: 1998) which place individual experiences at the center of analysis. This method seeks to access the space between 'typifications' of the PIP discourse (e.g.: group language and practice) and an individual's sense making of this. The second method included in the interview was the Critical Incident Technique (Chell in Symon et al: *ibid*) which asks informants to talk about critical or important incidents or events that have shaped their organisational experience. The advantage of using these methods is that it allowed me to a) specify practices important to sense-making, b) identify events that have influenced the way in which the individual has constructed their experience of the organisation and c) identify changes in social context. (Musson: *ibid*).

Finally, as themes, alternative perspectives and conflicts emerged from the interviews, these were raised in interviews with other managers creating the opportunity for alternate perspectives to be engaged in the interview.

### ***Observation***

I attended a number of meetings at various sites including: 3 PIP planning and review meetings at a South Island factory; the CEO briefing at a North Island site; production meeting at a North Island site; and the North Island Manager's meeting. During these meetings I recorded observations and insights about the conventions and social structures of these meetings (e.g.: where people sat, the format of the meeting, the topics that were covered, levels of participation and challenge, problem solving conversation vs. dialogue, instances of managers challenging their own thinking). See Appendix 3 for an example of these notes.

### ***Reflexive Forums***

We have seen that in order to 'find a reflexive voice', the research method must provide spaces for managers to engage their reflexivity. A participative workshop was designed to feed back research themes and create spaces for managers to construct, contest, inquire about assumptions, express diverse viewpoints and challenge whether prevailing

knowledge sets and organisational activities related to profit improvement, the PIP and the research itself are relevant or useful. A series of four workshops were designed: one with senior managers interviewed for the research and one with participants at the three research sites. The term 'reflexive forum' was used to describe these forums which themselves formed part of the research data.

During the workshop, managers were:

- a) Given an overview of the participatory nature of the research method and the role of managers to inform and shape the research outcomes.
- b) Presented with the research themes identified from interviews and observations for dialogue and (re) interpretation.
- c) Asked to reflect upon the research themes and share insights and possible courses of action to enable ongoing reflexive critique.
- d) Asked to give feedback on their experience of their participation in the reflexive forum itself.

## **Creating 'good research'**

### ***My role as researcher***

As we have seen, my role as change agent in this research is not a pragmatic role in which I will identify and implement changes, but one in *I will participate with managers* in critique, helping them to gain insight into the experiences and conflicts within the PIP and in doing so inspire managers to take action.

Alvesson et al. (ibid) encourage researchers to focus upon the process of research rather than procedures, techniques, rules and concerns about reliability of data. This does not mean that good research happens without defining the methods that will be used, rather that researchers will acknowledge their own role in constructing the research outcomes and the choices they make about what is included and what is excluded from the research.

Good research acknowledges that there is a researcher making an immense number of choices affecting the research results. Good research also struggles with the problems of personal (and group) bias or idiosyncrasies. (p80).

Thus the researcher interacts with and constructs the research data in a role that some writers (Lee: 1999; Symon et al.:ibid) have labelled *participant observer*.

In addition, my prior involvement with the informant organisation would align most closely to *Investigative Participant* on Adler and Adler's (1987) *Continuum of Field Research Involvement*. Based on this, my "insider" relationships and perspectives could give greater understanding of the informant experience or, considering my existing relationships are predominantly with the plant's management group, it could serve to bias my perspective.

It is therefore important to expand my own reflexivity (Nason and Golding in Symon et al.: ibid) by:

- 1) Incorporating other's perspectives into my analysis through feedback, joint analysis and review (Waddell et al.: 2000)
- 2) Maintaining a personal narrative (Ellis and Bochner: 2000), to record my reflections on my own biases, assumptions and preconceptions.

### ***Representing the data***

The research methods chosen for this study were selected for their ability to access managers varying interpretations, interrelationships and experiences within the PIP discourse and produce rich thematic data for discussion and reinterpretation. The contexts for each of the data collection methods were different. It was assumed that different meetings would construct different sets of social relationships with different histories and different power effects. For example: 1:1 interviews are more private and intimate than the forums or meetings and potentially the influence of the researcher is more or less influential, depending on the relationship with the informant. A senior management meeting would produce different power relations than a plant manager meeting with subordinates. The CEO briefing would potentially produce new ways of people engaging with each other. In this way, different methods were engaged not for the purpose of triangulation - in the sense that the data could be 'verified' by different research methods producing the same themes - but to cast a wider net in capturing the difference and variation in relationships as they related to the PIP discourse. Alvesson et al. (ibid) refer to this as *situational focus*, arguing that this has the advantage of providing

... a limited but, one may hope, more profound and enlightening insight in to certain aspects of the social relations and processes in companies ... a detailed description of naturally occurring events. (p205)

From these descriptions, other interpretations can be drawn.

### ***Risks and ethical challenges***

The risk of harm to participants is low; however there are two considerations for the research:

1. The practice of reflexivity requires people to confront certain conditions and practices they have a hand in creating. This can be challenging and potentially uncomfortable for individuals.
2. Venturing into the arena of power and control could reveal some not so desirable aspects of these relationships.

Because of this, full ethical approval was sought and granted for the research.

As a consultant, I have provided organisational development services to Tileco over a number of years including three previous contracts with this client, two of which were of a similar nature to this project:

- 1) Cultural change project spanning 12 months at the Bell Road factory. This project included team development forums, leadership training and experiential activities.
- 2) Cultural change project spanning 12 months at the Midtex factory. This project included team development forums, leadership development sessions, experiential activities, designing and implementing reflexive learning process (the foray process) with leaders and operators at the plant, leadership coaching.
- 3) Facilitation of the Manufacturing Management Development annual conference over 4 -5 years.

This poses an ethical challenge in that there is a risk that:

- a) my professional relationship and hence existing power relationships with managers within this company will influence results;
- b) the way in which I have constructed 'truths' about the organisation will get in the way of what I observe, or what managers relate to me;

c) my professional identity as consultant to this company will be compromised by the issues raised in the research, potentially, leading to loss of this company as a client.

### ***Managing ethical risks and challenges***

These risks and ethical challenges will be managed by:

1. Presenting myself to the participants as a researcher rather than a consultant, including removing reference to my company name and using Massey letterhead. The research upon which this thesis is written did not involve any monetary exchange with the case organisation. The research was partly funded by an enterprise scholarship grant from FORST<sup>20</sup>.
2. Engaging my own reflexivity to challenge my own thinking.
3. Continuing to develop relationships of openness to alternate views of the issues raised within the research with managers.
4. Viewing and promote any issues raised as systemic issues within the company which are therefore opportunities for change and growth.
5. Maintaining a balance between positive and negative outcomes of the research.
6. Using professional facilitation techniques to facilitate the forums including creating a safe environment (psychologically, physically and emotionally) in which to participate and being sensitive to political issues.
7. Encouraging participants to have 1:1 meetings with me to discuss any issues they have with the research process / outcomes.
8. Inviting managers to participate in the research. Participation was voluntary and managers had the ability to cease participation in the research at any stage.
9. Briefing participants fully on the research at the beginning of the research and asking participants to formally give their consent to participate. Participation in the action methodology means they continued to be informed as the project progressed.
10. Using an action research method which is a very transparent methodology in that the researcher and participants work together to define, review and legitimise the research outcomes.

11. Keeping the anonymity of participants. The names of individuals are not identified in the research write-up. Where possible, details of situations and other contexts have been changed to protect individuals from being identified in the research. Individual and factory names and sometime titles, where referred to in the write up have been changed.

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<sup>20</sup> Foundation for Research Science and Technology

## CHAPTER 5

### Historical perspectives

#### Introduction

Tileco manufacturing has a rich history of traditional carpet and yarn manufacture, long serving, loyal people, diverse workplaces and workforces and colourful stories of people and events. Most managers used the words ‘change, challenging, diverse’ to describe their experiences of this company. Long serving managers talked about their productive and desirable experience of the *good old days* and felt this has been lost in the new clinically corporate style of the company. Newer Tileco managers talk about the need for change, the need to make ‘harder calls’ and the need for more modern management approaches. Located in the heart of this analysis, these contradictory characteristics of this organisation provide a context for exploring and gaining insight into the ways in which people experience learning and change.

There is a sense that ‘high level learning’ (Easterby-Smith, Snell et al.: 1998) is a practice that occurs outside of the local factory environment with substantive changes often forced either by critical external events or from top levels of management. Often these have been implemented without regard for creating positive or participative learning experiences. In most cases, factory managers and their people report these as ‘painful, frustrating, not in touch with reality or still having ongoing negative effects’. Changes driven from within the factory have historically tended, with a few exceptions, to reinforce more routinised low level learning such as process improvement, cost reduction, multi-skilling or safety initiatives. Within this context the *Profitability Improvement Process* (PIP) is most often treated by managers as a mechanism to continue doing ‘more of the same’ low level learning albeit with a greater more formalised focus on cost savings.

This chapter briefly reviews the history of critical events within Tileco that managers believe have influenced learning within their company. Most managers talked about the change history of the company and some about its variable affects on their desire to invest themselves or their people in the PIP. Managers also talked about the diverse approaches, styles, products and priorities practiced at different times and in different locations throughout their tenure with the company. Alongside this, traditional

practices and methods are seen as a force closing the gates of progress and although there have been a number of initiatives in the past 3-5 years which have begun the process of changing this, the weight of tradition is still highly influential in the PIP.

### **A company history characterised by diversity and change**

The Tileco brand is iconic, a status gained in its nearly 80 years of manufacturing in New Zealand. Against a fabric of stable and traditional yarn and carpet manufacturing practices, their history as an organisation is littered with periods of growth and decline and near death crises punctuated by changes in ownership, managers, product, company name, people and management style. Phoenix-like in nature, Tileco has risen from each of these crises, when others have failed, to survive and once again become profitable.

Tileco traces its New Zealand origins to 1929, when it began production of felt slippers. At the end of the war, they undertook a large expansion diversifying their product range to include carpets by installing 10 carpet looms in the large Lowtex site which at this stage was perhaps 3-4 times the physical size of the current factory. They listed on the share market in 1945 and in the late 1940's built the Midtex factory and purchased wool scour capacity in the mid-North Island. During the late 1960's Tileco de-listed from the share market and continued operation as a limited liability company. Further expansion of their operations occurred in the 1970's with the purchase of Kingco Carpets and Tuftco, a tufted carpet maker, in Foxton.

By 1985, Tileco had become a subsidiary of a large corporation, Bigcorp, and was listed as a conglomerate of many businesses with around 8000 staff worldwide. Despite the New Zealand share market crash in 1987, Tileco continued its expansion, building the Hightex factory to make woollen spun yarn and purchasing a yarn factory in the North Island, and for around 9 months, the company name was changed to Tiletrax. By 1989, Bigcorp was struggling to stay afloat and Tileco narrowly avoided extinction when it was rescued by MultiTex who purchased the company just 2 weeks before the owners collapsed into statutory receivership. The rebuilding of the company included divestment of non-core business and by the mid-1990's Tileco was back to manufacturing carpet and yarn, was the third largest manufacturer in New Zealand, exporting two-thirds of its output and employing 1,200 people. At this point it was purchased in a protracted and secretive management buy-out in which two different groups of managers from within the company competed for the purchase. Whilst the

managers who were successful in their bid have now departed the company, the group of managers who tried unsuccessfully to buy the company at this time, are still with the company and currently hold key management positions in the manufacturing group. In the period following the buy-out, purse strings were tightened and staff numbers reduced.

With the purchase of Carpetco Industries in 2000, Tileco again diversified its product range, this time to non-woollen carpet, and expanded its operations offshore. This was followed by rationalisation and reorganisation to achieve efficiencies and cost savings designed to offset the significant losses the company was experiencing. The major effect for New Zealand manufacturing has been the rapid expansion of woollen yarn manufacturing operations as a result of the transfer of plant capabilities from offshore to lower cost New Zealand factories and employee numbers are back to just over 1000 people in New Zealand.

In 2004, Tileco again listed as a public company on the New Zealand stock exchange and in 2005 has experienced serious challenges to the profit and growth promises made at the time of the share float. The fallout from this situation has been the departure of the CEO and other changes arising from a review of their operations by an external agency are likely. At the time of writing, the outcome of this review is unknown.

Over the past 75 years, Tileco has ‘grown like topsy’ with 7 factories still operating from their original sites throughout the North and South Islands. These sites have traditionally operated as separate fairly autonomous entities and whilst there is some interaction between factories – mainly at the technical level - it is argued that these factories still operate in an insular fashion today.

### **Tradition, people, practice**

Carpet making is an ancient tradition with the manufacture of hand loomed rugs evidenced as early as 6000BC and continued for thousands of years as a respected cottage industry craft. The first carpet factory, using traditional yarn making and weaving techniques, was built around 350 years ago at Wilton, England. Industrialisation soon followed and this became the catalyst for the rapid growth of automated textile mills. Even though there have been developments in technology and vast improvements in conditions of work since William Blake’s reference to these ‘dark and satanic mills’, woollen yarn and woven carpet manufacture today uses the same

traditional carding, twisting, spinning and weaving components as their early predecessors. Tileco NZ makes woollen yarn and still makes Wilton carpets (amongst others) and managers describe operations as highly traditional with the woven carpet operation at Midtex being a niche process in today's modern manufacturing. Within this environment new technology and the division of labour has ensured that one individual no longer needs the crafter's skills to produce a top quality product. A 'carpet maker' is now represented by a raft of semi-skilled or un-skilled production operators, quality controllers, engineers and managers, each with their own limited sphere of control and influence over the manufacturing process.

Long term employees described their experiences within this lively historical context in variable ways. They talked about weathering the difficult times and feeling excited and challenged by change and growth in more buoyant times. Others could see the productivity benefits brought about by rationalisation and corporatisation but grieved the loss of a more autonomous people focused workplace.

...the real heady days of Equiticorp,

...today productivity at the plant is twice what it was in the past. This is good as we needed to change. Change has been forced on us and whilst some people have accepted this others have kicked out at this.

Alongside this is the sense that long-termers are loyal and passionate about what they do and have pride in the products they produce.

... every person has an absolute passion and commitment about the carpet and NZ made woollen carpet its part of NZ – you see it when you hand around carpet samples.

Table 4 below attempts to capture and summarise the traditional organisational fabric of the manufacturing group in New Zealand. The company is characterised by structured bureaucratic practices and whilst some managers expressed frustration at the level of 'red tape' and hierarchy, others commented that there was less hierarchy than other organisations they have worked in.

**Table 4: New Zealand Manufacturing Group Organisational Fabric**

Company Characteristics	<p>Bureaucratic, hierarchical, red tape.</p> <p>Geographically spread, localised silo / insular operations</p> <p>History of change and crisis but enduring, phoenix like in nature</p> <p>Financially driven operation</p> <p>Systems - advanced in some areas and backward in others</p> <p>Markets - Declining woven market due to globalization and advances in tufting technology</p> <p>Industrial Relations – variable relationships of influence</p>
People Practices	<p>Lifetime employment rewarded</p> <p>Non performers reallocated within the organisation</p> <p>Pride in brand and product, commitment, loyalty</p> <p>Unresolved conflicts</p> <p>Status derived from technical expertise</p> <p>Career development - variable feelings with some feel they have had a number of opportunities and others feeling there is favoritism</p> <p>Training and development – 'on the job' training, historically low investment in external training and development</p> <p>Personnel support traditionally through personnel managers /industrial nurse now the responsibility of managers</p> <p>Industry Training and Cadetship (recent, limited access to most staff) - market leaders</p> <p>Human Resource Team (recent) which has implemented HR practices such as performance management, safety, recruitment, cadetship, graduate recruitment.</p>
Manufacturing Practice	<p>Traditional stable processes</p> <p>Midtex - Unique, specialised, niche</p> <p>Technology – variable from high expertise to semi-skilled / unskilled</p> <p>Distanced from hub of global manufacture</p> <p>No. 8 wire innovation (needed to create responses to address isolation and lack of money)</p> <p>Silo operation between and within factories</p> <p>Supply Chain managed through centralised planning unit</p> <p>Limited research and development</p> <p>Old Machinery</p> <p>Focused on kilos out the door with more recent focus on 'just in time'</p>
Management Practice	<p>Scientific Management predominates – division of labour, specialization, focus on productivity and production performance, standard work procedures, some multi-skilling (recent) but limited movement between specialist functions, structured and formal.</p> <p>Varied management styles - Paternalistic, 'family', authoritative, reactive, consultative, most managers action orientated</p> <p>Deference shown to next level up</p> <p>Respectful of each other</p> <p>Conflict avoidance</p> <p>Corporate Change Strategy predominantly directive and with coercive use of targets</p> <p>Factory Based Change Strategy – varied</p> <p>Political</p> <p>Managers traditionally appointed internally from technical pool</p> <p>'On the job' learning predominates</p>

### *People Practices*

Until recently, people practices such as recruitment and selection, retention, absenteeism, safety and health, industrial relations, performance management and staff development were left to managers. Modern approaches to these practices were missing or have only recently been implemented in the factories and traditional approaches have resulted in people practices that have encouraged long term retention, loyalty, insularity

and the use of supervisory practices to achieve performance outcomes. The recent introduction of an HR function within the group has led to sometimes difficult implementations of corporate-led initiatives to introduce modern HRM practices. Whilst some employees appear to have moved about the company in different roles, for most people there appears to be limited opportunities for career development or progression within the company. In the absence of development and performance plans, this situation has been constructed as 'playing favourites' by some of the respondents in the study. As a way of managing performance, poor performers were most likely allocated to another role in the organisation. Some respondents appeared to have long term unresolved grievances with the company. The nature of these varied but dissatisfaction with the company was most often expressed by those long term managers who had been sidelined from a key management role into another position at some stage in their tenure with the company. A significant portion (27%) of those interviewed were in this position, having previously been employed in senior management positions that they no longer held. Across the factories studied, industrial relationships between managers and non-salaried personnel varied from conflictual and disputive through to more consultative and facilitative. Whilst there are some practices and initiatives emerging to support new learning practices, (for example; appointment of a process engineer to work across the factories, a graduate recruitment scheme, and cadetship scheme) access to these are not available to most staff and these initiatives are not well established into organisational practice.

### *Manufacturing practice*

Manufacturing practices are stable and structured and are achieved within a scientific management regime with a key focus on safety, production targets and quality, most often in that order. The manufacturing process is part of a supply chain operation<sup>21</sup> controlled by a centralised planning unit. The insularity of factories is reinforced through the supply chain and even within factory sites where the supply of product from one functional operation to the next is completed without necessarily understanding or investigating what is needed 'up and down the line'. Some managers talked about a feeling of isolation arising from the operation being distanced from the 'global hub' of yarn and carpet manufacture.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Management Practice***

Traditionally managers were recruited from the internal pool of technical people and predominantly learned how to manage by emulating other managers within the organisation. The organisation has provided limited formal management training, and what has been provided has been mainly for managers at supervisory level. Long termers recall varied styles of management with 'Boss' managers (paternalistic and technically authoritative) being common. From my observation during the study, relationships between managers were deferential to the next level up and respectful of each other. Related to this was an apparent lack of openness, inquisitiveness or overt challenge during group conversations and significantly, with one or two exceptions, a general lack of participation in meetings. The tradition of change is littered with examples of directive and often coercive corporate based change strategies. A common practice within this tradition is to force change by using targets or key performance indicators to coerce managers into new ways of practicing, often without supporting the change with dialogue, new knowledge or additional resources. Examples of this included the drive to reduce absenteeism by setting a 3% target or to improve safety by setting a Long Term Injury target.

Within this context, particularly long term managers appear captured by tradition and technology, believing that there are limited opportunities to realise significant profitability gains within such a traditional operation.

... potentially a process and environment that doesn't always respond or need a lot of modern transaction thinking because it is still an old process. Some attempts to drag it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century have overlooked the realities of the old process that is required to produce the carpet.

In interviews and meetings, managers limited their thinking to traditional manufacturing perspectives, such as quality, safety or production processes, as a way of increasing profitability or at least productivity. A common theme was related to the age of machinery with managers expressing the view that their ability to make further gains without considerable investment in new more modern plant was severely limited. They argued that the company would not make the investment required to modernise their plant. Whilst not all managers shared this view, it was expressed by a number of managers, particularly those closest to the day to day manufacturing operation. More generally, managers felt constrained by the limited resources they felt they had to work with.

... lots of constraints on it [the PIP], dollars, there are not a lot of dollars.

... and we have just sat down with an outside outfit and talked about how we can increase our profitability through these services. We were going to support it and talked about it and then it didn't happen. [why?] Well, it would have gone to the board and they would have said we are not going to spend the money...

Senior managers, however, pointed out that managers were often self-limiting and that capital has always been available provided there is a good pay-back on the investment.

Capital is interesting because Health and Safety is another thing that will get a PIP approved. In reality capital has been restricted in the past but that restriction has been more implemented by the operational people than the executives of the company...that's a generalisation, but over a long period of time it is not like we've got a good history of putting up capital expenditure requests [capex's]<sup>23</sup> and the board saying no ... our behaviour has been to make those decision ourselves and we shouldn't be..

There does appear to be difficulty in accessing this capital however, and of the 5 PIP projects in the 04/05 PIP that required fairly significant capital investment, only 2 of these had received board approval at the time of writing.

For operators 'on the floor' the work they undertake is most often locked into traditional methods and there is little emphasis on reflecting on practices that are working or have worked in the past. There is a sense of '*don't fix it if it ain't broke*' and more emphasis is given to mistakes and errors with longer term managers taking pride in their ability to engage kiwi ingenuity and common sense to fix technical problems within the constraints of limited resources.

... [there is a] lack of research and development. [Why don't they invest in that?] Probably too much tradition in the industry ... you've got what you've got, its worked in the past, it will be fine, why change it ... that why we've got so much old equipment.

... And I've seen it to the stage that people will leave rather than accept change ... we still have this on the floor here, and they still talk about the way we used to do things ...and they don't understand that we don't have the money that used to be wasted on those items and we need to think of other ways to do it. That statement would come up at least once a week from somebody ... you can't go back...some of them are thinking up to 30 years back . It comes up all the time ...Going with tradition ... things change ... unable to accept change

Traditionally, technical expertise is valued and the more expertise required for a job the more status is assigned to the person holding that job. In the past, factory managers

were appointed based on their technical expertise rather than management expertise and, as noted above, there has been limited investment in formal management training for these managers. When asked whether they were able to critique or challenge current practices, managers most often moved the conversation to technical innovation and appeared to take pride in their ability to identify and implement change using ‘kiwi ingenuity’.

... [From one long term manager] ... My learning has been done on the job (observing my manager), hands on, experience. I've read a few management books on how to manage, some are good, some are bad but you can get a bit out of each one. The company has provided a few training courses on staff handling.

... We are very critical and reflect on the process / machinery – always looking at better ways to improve old machinery – like the old #8 fencing wire – we have to do this because of position and cost structure.. We can't afford new machines. There is only so much you can do – what else can we do without spending \$'s.

### **The ‘good old days’ and the ‘dark ages’**

Within this context of tradition and change, longer term managers wistfully recalled the ‘good old days’ and whilst they attributed different reasons for their positive experiences of learning during this time, they saw these variously defined and located periods as a zenith of learning within their own factory. In the ‘good old days’ there was more time, money and support for stepping outside of day to day operation to focus on forming, developing and implementing ideas. The approach was more social, more entrepreneurial and the evolution of ideas was a natural part of the work process. There was more autonomy and less perceived constraint on dreaming up wild or silly ideas. For some factories this process was more elite and occurred within the domain of managers, whilst for others it was broader based.

...a huge successful effort in building up that team and then having brainstorming session for improving profit and because it was the first time it was done some really significant profit improvement initiatives came out driven from within the plant – not driven by masters – but directly managed within the plant.

... The speed of change was easier because there weren't so many steps and people you had to go through. From a person on the floor to the GM – there might have been 3 people in-between ... and then the GM was reporting straight to the CEO of BTR Nylex at the time. We also had the advantage of BT Nylex being a big worldwide corporation so capital wasn't the issue it became shortly after.

What was to follow was described to me by one manager as 'a dark period where it was like going from democracy to communism'. Located during the period following the management buy-out, the 'dark ages' were ushered in by a number of factors including strategies to cut costs, increase profitability and lower compliance costs such as focus on production performance ('kilos out the door), termination of social activities (too risky in terms of health and safety), corporate driven re-structuring and budget cuts around non-essential items (such as training ... and milo!). It was almost as if the factories studied had entered into a siege, with managers frustrated by limitations on their resource, autonomy, and influence. From a learning perspective, this created an environment where managers defended their actions and resources, and even small changes were difficult to explore or implement.

... Once we merged back into Tileco we came across a lot of constraints that I don't think were good for the company. They were constraints about training, it was almost as though the bank account had closed and there were so many more hurdles put in the way to making what should be natural progress.

... ideas would remain 'on the table' and not go further. Over time if ideas don't go it shuts you down from saying anything. The past 6 -7 years felt like empire building. It was like you could open only one door at a time and there were a series of doors to go through / open. This was constraining and frustrating like we had an elastic band on our feet when you want to run.

In one-on-one situations, a number of managers talked at length about organisational issues or strategies that they believed the organisation should be either pursuing or discontinuing. Managers presented their viewpoints in an authoritative manner and their opinions were often in conflict with company strategy, structure or process. I constructed this offering of opinions as 'smart-aleckery', that is putting down of others opinions by presenting a differing, authoritative, often compelling and always untested opinion on the current or future state of affairs. These 'smart-aleck' alternatives were most often carried through the organisation via the grape-vine and appeared to exert a powerful influence upon how others, particularly operational staff, constructed their view of a desirable future.

**Table 5: Comparative Learning contexts**

NZ Manufacturing Group	
Good Old Days	The Dark Ages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation removed from day to day management</li> <li>• More money to throw at developing projects</li> <li>• Retreats</li> <li>• Time to do it, more relaxed</li> <li>• Less structured more free flowing</li> <li>• More autonomous</li> <li>• More elitist – them (operators) and us (managers)</li> <li>• More entrepreneurial</li> <li>• More team feel to the group.</li> <li>• More attention to social aspects of team</li> <li>• More humanistic, feeling looked after</li> <li>• More training and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More corporate visibility and requirement stifles brainstorming</li> <li>• More formality and structure</li> <li>• More clinical process</li> <li>• No time</li> <li>• More interruptions / interference</li> <li>• Less money to engage learning (and other) processes</li> <li>• Focus on production targets and 'kilo's out the door'</li> <li>• Less autonomy</li> <li>• High performance culture emerging</li> <li>• Greater requirements for safety, higher quality, cost saving</li> <li>• Wanting more for less.</li> <li>• Smart-aleckery</li> </ul>

In this chapter my aim has been to critically explore those historical and traditional perspectives of Tileco which were identified by managers as important to their relationship with this organisation. The traditional nature of carpet making technology drives a highly stable and proceduralised manufacturing operation and managers have been responsible for achieving the same outcomes using the same technological processes for 75 years with a very stable long term employee base. In the following discussion section, I argue that technological and management practices have become established and customary, creating the rules for ‘how things are done and talked about’ within the organisation despite the meanings and contexts for the establishment of these practices perhaps being forgotten or unknown, and possibly no longer relevant. I have called these sets of knowledge and conventional practices discussed in this chapter *traditionalist discourse*. Within this *traditionalist discourse*, the way that managers practice and relate to the organisation has become institutionalised and this produces constraints on the freedoms they have to challenge and discuss new ways of practicing. Within this traditionalist discourse, organisational crises depicted by the dark ages has further undermined managers’ freedom to be open and to invest in learning, instead giving legitimacy to limitation practices and ways of thinking which I have called *survivalist discourse*. Another significant feature of the traditional Tileco landscape is the insularism of the operation which has arisen via historical events and traditional

ways of interacting and I have called this *insularism discourse*. Thus the discourses of survival and insularism are powerful features of the traditionalist discourse, the affects of which were observed within management practice, between levels of management, across geographically dispersed factories, throughout the supply chain, and most significantly in the way managers appear to think and talk about the operation. For example:

The bulk of factories are quite insular ...as a generalisation, a lot of our ideas are coming from within boundaries. If you go back 5-6 years ago, and we might say 'shall we move the xx (piece of equipment?)' or something like that and you never would because the cost was so great. Some of the ways of going forward weren't there 5 years ago. For people who have been here 5 years ago it is not easy because things have moved on but they haven't noticed that someone has taken the barriers down.

### **Analytical Framework**

Table 6 depicts the data presented in this chapter within the analytical framework developed for this study. The nature of the prevailing discourses within this manufacturing environment are summarised in column 2. Column 3 highlights how these are sustained by the power effects within the discourse which in turn construct what managers can talk about in a group forum and how they can practice. The power affects on the reflexive subject are outlined in column 4 giving insight into the freedoms managers have to engage their reflections and insights towards high level learning. This framework will be used to explore the claims made by the traditionalist, survivalist and insularism discourses and their productive affects upon the reflexive subject.

**Table 6: Productive affects of the traditionalist discourse upon the reflexive voice**

Discourses	Differentiated by...	Power within the discourse - what we can talk about and how we can practice...	What this means for the reflexive voice...
Traditionalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalised practices</li> <li>• Hierarchical Management</li> <li>• The Tileco Way</li> <li>• Lumbering and complex</li> <li>• Control vested in senior managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too hard to get things going outside of institutionalised practices</li> <li>• Changes don't stick therefore why invest yourself in them</li> <li>• Don't challenge</li> <li>• Don't make waves, be positive</li> <li>• Technology improvement is limited given the traditional nature of the operation</li> <li>• Reliance on senior managers to drive change agendas.</li> <li>• Use of informal power / influence to achieve change outside the sphere on 'issues that matter'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalised thinking blocks new ways of thinking / practicing</li> <li>• Inertia and uncertainty to engage new ideas</li> <li>• Challenges to status quo are not stated publicly</li> <li>• Reflexivity directed at keeping the status quo</li> <li>• Dialogue and sharing of insight and knowledge moderated by defence of opinion</li> </ul>
Survivalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited resources and investment - dollars, time, people, training</li> <li>• Limited investment in external knowledge / or building absorptive capacity</li> <li>• Cost cutting</li> <li>• Limited / no investment in forums for future or more strategic thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't fix it if it ain't broke</li> <li>• Making do, reliance on existing 'know-how'</li> <li>• Limited / no investment in forums for future or more strategic thinking</li> <li>• Focus on low hanging fruit - what is achievable, easy, low investment cost</li> <li>• Smart aleckery' and the 'grape vine' lead future' thinking.</li> <li>• Cautious about engaging new ideas particularly those requiring investment</li> <li>• Look like we are doing a good job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrained and dominated by present production concerns</li> <li>• Limits vocabulary to the current problem / crisis</li> <li>• Inward focus</li> <li>• Limited to 'good news'</li> </ul>
Insularism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different sites, different practices</li> <li>• Working to a financial accounting model which requires 'in the box' thinking – working on the parts not on the whole</li> <li>• Managers encouraged to focus their efforts on those things that fall inside their span of control</li> <li>• Specialisation of the craft means operators understand the parts rather than the whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes outside the box too hard because they take enormous amounts of energy</li> <li>• Lack of acceptance of ideas from others because our site is different to yours – your learning can't be applied to our operation</li> <li>• Limited absorptive capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encircles and mediates action</li> <li>• Limits knowledge with which to be reflexive.</li> </ul>

## **DISCUSSION: Discursive affects on reflexivity**

From the literature review we saw that the power of a discourse to endure lies in this ability to ‘stay hidden’, out of sight of managers who are caught in its constructed and constructing nature, and who’s actions and conversations are moderated by the ‘truths’ it produces. As McKinley (Prichard, Hull, Chumer, & Willmott: 2000) noted however, these discursive affects need not be all pervasive if managers engage their reflexivity to act upon the discourse. From the results we can see that a number of managers, particularly newer managers, were most reflexive about the affects of tradition and traditional ways of thinking and all managers talked, unprompted, about tradition and its ‘weighty’ affects. Significantly, these insights were only expressed in one on one interview situations and managers reverted to more traditional ways of interacting in group forums or meetings. In this case what the *traditionalist discourse* implies is not so much that managers can’t reflexively engage the discourse, but that they can only do this in private. Contradictorily, whilst managers appear dissatisfied with the status quo and appear to want to change this, their public actions continue to give legitimacy to traditional ways of practicing and at the same time build inertia toward change. What was not clear was how fully managers understood the power affects of the traditionalist discourse on their learning practices and behaviours or whether their private resistances were attempts to defend and bring cohesion to their own practice (Blackler et al.: *ibid*) In other words, were managers protecting themselves or simply following the rules of traditionalist discourse which locates reflection and critical commentary in private spaces (such as the interview) or doing both? From a discourse point of view both of these options can be legitimate and what is important to note, is that within the traditionalist discourse reflexivity which gives rise to critical commentary is reserved for private rather than public spaces.

Exacerbating this affect is the history of top down implementation of changes often poorly understood by the people affected by the change and often implemented in a coercive manner. The ‘*Tileco Way*’ is a metaphor used to describe the BOHICAN<sup>24</sup> affects of those on the receiving end of these changes

... there's so much red tape nothing gets done ... it will never happen so let's stop it before it starts ... lack of trust in management to do a good job.

The meaning constructed by people on the receiving end of these changes is that managers (particularly outside the factory walls) are in collusion and not interested in

their input. We have also seen, however, that senior managers perceived their own ability to enact change in ways that was not reliant on target setting, dictate or performance objective was limited. The dominance of these methods of change hides the concern senior managers have about their ability to ‘capture the hearts and minds’ of people during change processes and produces resistances to the engagement of open dialogue around change and implementation issues relating to change. The NZ Ops Manager was reflective on this point ...

... We are good at being structured. eg: we have a concept of lean manufacturing and the first things the guys [on the board] talked about was lets get some KPI's in place .. now we are very good at that and using that to try and make people do things ...but the more and more you go down that path .. it might keep it going longer than you thought, but it will never be the way to make significant change.

What this appears to produce is a number of situations in which changes ‘slide off’ and traditional ways of doing things are powerful in creating more of the same. As one senior manager commented ...

... in my experience you can plug new people in but after a while it goes back to being the same.

Long term managers and operators especially, have been able to see both the lack of effect and cyclical nature of changes giving support for the claims made by the traditionalist discourse. For managers, these claims appear to have created inertia around substantive change and overt challenge, an aversion to risk taking and an acceptance that a number of ideas / changes will end up in the ‘too hard basket’. Within this discourse, reflexive activity becomes directed at producing low risk achievable change which maintains or evolves the status quo and learning becomes interpreted as skills training, process improvement or problem solving.

Throughout Tileco history there have been extended periods where limitations on resources both to run production processes and also to develop people have been an important element in constructing how managers can practice and what they can and can't talk about. Social ‘realities’ such as this give rise to new discourses and practices that are sometimes deliberate but that also have *unintended consequences* (Morgan et al.: *ibid*) and during these times of limitation ‘we must survive’ became implicit in the actions and conversations within the organisation. This *survivalist discourse*, however useful during these times, seems to have endured and its dominance has arguably created problems for reflexive learning.

During the *dark ages*, managers placed fences around and defended their operation in order to preserve and make the most of their limited resources and to try and protect the autonomy, freedom and humanism of the *good old days*. With ‘kilos out the door’ becoming a priority, ‘work’ became defined as only those activities which produced product so all efforts within the factory needed to be focused on keeping the machines running and any activity not directly related to this was regarded as non-essential and time-wasting. There were also fewer numbers of people required to produce more and so the need to achieve greater productivity per person became a priority. This was exacerbated by no investment in training or developing operators in ‘non-essential’ practices such as process improvement or ‘quality down the line’ and limited investment in basic operator training. This meant managers, who were drawn from the technical pool, focused on minutiae within the operation, becoming responsible for machine and process innovation which gave them satisfaction and pride in their ability to achieve #8 wire innovations. In this environment, it seemed a natural step for managers to also take care of process improvement further undermining operators’ agency and sense of accountability to achieve this. Managers own agency was constrained by the growing pressures from the corporate body for them to justify and demonstrate tangible safe outcomes from any investment in activities, such as retreats, team activities or extended meetings, that did not appear directly related to production or that required additional monetary investment.

‘Learning’ within this context became limited to short term fixes to problems or technical innovations and there was little time and no forum for managers to reflect on more substantive issues such as what factories should or could be doing to maximise the resources they had or the potential long term effects of their current practice. Managers could talk, for example, about how they saved the company hundreds by developing a replacement machine part in-house, or about how they increased throughput by reducing the time required for a particular process, or possibly anything that a) fell within their span of control; b) demonstrated greater productivity and saved the company money; c) did not require monetary investment; and d) did not challenge the status quo. Interestingly, as we shall see in chapter 6, these claims seem remarkably similar to the first objective of the PIP.

Within the survival period, communication from senior managers about the future appears to have been needed more but was limited, or absent, giving more agency and

power to the 'grape-vine' and 'smart-alecks' offering opinions about the organisations future. These subjects have persisted and in this study smart-aleckery seemed to operate as a form of resistance derived from uncertainty about the future and confidence in organisational leaders to make the right decisions. In the absence of learning forums where managers could for example engage in dialogue about issues such as company direction or leveraging resource utilisation across manufacturing or growth at their factory, 'smart-aleckery' filled the gap. The 'grape-vine' operated as a mechanism for communicating these thoughts and resistances. Opinions speeding along the vine were powerful in constructing resistance and inertia towards new practices or being able to openly contest how things were currently practiced.

Surviving also meant there was little investment in creating *absorptive capacity* (Cohen and Levinthal:1990) and so managers learned to rely on their own expertise and resources and this included developing relationships across the group through which they could 'talk technology'. There appears to have been limited ability for managers and operators to access or assimilate knowledge from outside the organisation. More motivated factory managers sought external knowledge from publications or management text-books but in the main managers needed to rely on their own knowledge sets learned from their managers. Operators were caught in the same *insular practice web* with job specialisation, the division of labour and 'learning by doing', producing a learning environment in which more of the same predominates, and creating new knowledge is difficult and the organisation becomes 'more practiced and hence more capable at activities in which it is already engaged' (Cohen et al.: *ibid*, p134) Moreover, most managers were long termers and technically orientated so the inference can be drawn that it will be difficult for managers to engage their reflexivity towards new insights or to develop new perspectives in the absence of new information or stimuli, even if they had time to do this.

In these ways, the *survivalist discourse* appears to narrow the sphere of managerial influence, making them cautious of initiatives that may require risky practices such as large investments. Compounded by the insularity of the operation, surviving had the affect of isolating managers from needed support, creating a discourse in which managers do not have the capacity to imagine let alone put into practice different ways of doing things as they do not have the knowledge or skill to do this or it just does not occur to them to do so.

Whilst managers talked about the ‘dark ages’ in the past tense, there was a sense that the survivalist discourse continues to dominate and produce constraints around particularly long term managers ability to engage with the organisation today. The phoenix-like nature of the organisation suggests that there have been recurrent ‘dark-ages’ and with the latest profit challenges the organisation is potentially re-entering one of these phases today. This recurrent nature of profitability challenge has legitimised the narrow range of responses managers use to meet these challenges embedding them within the survivalist discourse. The survivalist discourse appears to place high level learning in the back seat ... we are too busy surviving to talk about how we need to practice in order to survive. As with the traditionalist discourse, some managers are perhaps unaware of its productive effects upon their practice.

I would expect that if an organisation is committed to high level learning, it would take opportunities to act upon the survivalist discourse, discussing and unravelling the rules about how managers practice, in this way unlearning what has been learned and reforming this learning into newer more relevant practices, however there was limited evidence of this happening within the research.

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<sup>21</sup> In this case, the supply chain is the movement of materials and information from suppliers to the manufacturing division and from here to the sales group.

<sup>22</sup> Some managers cited this as Europe where the annual carpet technology expo is held.

<sup>23</sup> CAPEX is a capital expenditure request.

<sup>24</sup> BOHICA is an acronym for ‘Bend Over Here It Comes Again’ a popular term in change consulting practice implying inertia and apathy towards change arising from continual and faddy implementations of new practice, ideology or values.

## CHAPTER 6

# The nature and emergence of PIP

### Introduction

This chapter explores the nature of the PIP discourse and how this practice has emerged within the past three years. Although each of the sites studied have constructed quite different PIP practice, there were some important social practices common to all sites that contribute to the various freedoms managers have to fully engage the PIP. These practices and the responses of managers and others to PIP provide insight into the potentiality of the PIP as a broad-based high level learning framework.

Traditionally within Tileco, cost savings within manufacturing factories are driven by a regime of annual budget cuts within which managers are responsible for finding savings to direct manufacturing costs (DMC). Manufacturing Factory Managers have input into their budget guidelines each year, forecasting what they believe is realistic and achievable. Corporate finance control budget preparation using the information provided by Factory Managers in conjunction with other business information to define each factory's annual budget. This process is viewed as normal and healthy, at least by senior managers within the group, provided it is done objectively and without favour. Aligned to this is the belief that managers have an 'internal drive' to strive towards year on year productivity improvement and cost savings.

### Resurrection and reinvention of the PIP

The Profitability Improvement Process (PIP) is an improvement process designed to drive profitability over and above normal budget management. Historically, it appears PIP has been engaged when necessary as one strategy to address profitability crises within the company, the key one being the crisis in the late 1980's. In 2003, Tileco were again faced with the critical need to improve profits and the PIP was reinstated by the GM Manufacturing, similar in intention and format as earlier versions of PIP. In the next two years, PIP operated in an unstructured way and was limited to factory managers coming up with ideas for profit improvement and initiating projects with defined savings targets. Projects were identified at the beginning of the financial year and managers were required to present their plans at the annual manager conference.

Results were then reported 12 months later at the end of the financial year, again at the manager conference. At the conferences, there was a sense of competitiveness between factory managers in relation to their plans and results which were often presented creatively using medium such as role play. During this period, managers did not see the PIP as a particularly effective or important aspect of their work life and experienced it as an 'add-on' that could be achieved by identifying a few easy cost management initiatives that would normally fall within their budget management. In the current environment, one of the follow-on affects of this is the belief that the process has plucked the 'low hanging fruit' and managers' feel they are now faced with a harder task to identify and make future savings.

At a senior level, managers attributed the poor performance of PIP in these first two years to the lack of a person at corporate level driving the process which they believe would have led to greater recognition that PIP was an equally important aspect of the management role. The need for a corporate driver being key to the successful consolidation of changes such as PIP was expressed by other people interviewed.

PIP is viewed favourably by senior executives within the company and managers believe this provides them with access to support and resources that they perceive have not been available to them in the past. However, at the time of writing this thesis, recent and critical issues related to profitability have initiated a widespread review of the company, more restructuring and downsizing and some senior executive who are supporters of the PIP are departing the company. Potentially, this will sideline PIP for other approaches.

In the 2004/05 financial year, PIP was given greater emphasis and was re-established to achieve two key objectives. The first of these was to provide a framework for managers to come up with ...

... wide ranging solutions, initiatives, ideas that would improve productivity in the business that would in part off-set those increases that we were getting so that our cost of manufacturing still remained competitive against competitors (local and offshore.)

A simple system of control (Project on a Page) and monthly monitoring and reporting at both factory and corporate level was implemented across the supply chain and manufacturing factories. Factory managers were given support by cost accountants to define appropriate measures for their improvement projects, an aspect of PIP that was

difficult to formulate for some projects and that is still seen as a problematic area of PIP. Capital funding could be applied for using the existing capital expenditure bid process (CAPEX) and the pay back period for PIP projects was variously reported by managers as being: limited to 12 months; or limited to 24 months; or could be longer if it was a 'good project' with 'good payback'. Apart from these resources, managers were expected to implement projects within their current people, time, money, knowledge and expertise resources. Factory managers set their own financial goals for PIP and, although overall targets were not formally set for each factory, managers seemed to have a good feel for what was expected of them in terms of financial contribution and performance. The North and South Island operations managers had differing but clear goals for overall performance of the operations under their control. In this new form, some managers see the PIP as an effective management practice, however, newer managers who have participated in similar processes outside the Tileco walls feel the PIP is in its infancy.

Recently, senior managers within the organisation defined a *shared vision* for Tileco which they have 'rolled out' to the manufacturing factories. A core and stated value within this vision is '*empowerment*'. The second thrust of the PIP is aligned to this vision, supporting broad-based empowerment in which managers involve as many employees as possible, at all levels, in initiating, developing and implementing PIP projects. It is believed by senior managers that by engaging a large number of wide-ranging broad based ideas, the PIP process will become more valuable as managers will have a much richer pool of profit-driving ideas to draw from.

'... to have a programme that is well recognised that had a set process and structure about it that ideas and initiatives could flow up from the floor and they could somehow be developed into proposals that could then flow into the programme.'

However, senior managers reported that factory managers have failed to realise the potential of engaging their people in the PIP, a theme resonating with the problems I encountered in earlier learning initiatives within this organisation. From the learning organisational literature, we can reasonably expect that the success of this second objective is reliant on people's ability to engage reflexive learning and managers' ability to create learning conditions such as those outlined in the organisational learning literature.

## Interplay of the traditionalist discourses within the PIP

The projects undertaken in the current year, with one or two exceptions, were designed to achieve cost savings at individual factories as opposed to projects that would require more substantive, long term or widespread changes and this practice which is insular in nature limits the potential of PIP to drive real profitability. Ironically, whilst factory managers are required to influence the people under their control to come up with wide-ranging suggestions for improvement that could require changes outside of their immediate position, managers themselves are limited in their own ability to influence things outside of their own sphere of control. In my own experience of facilitating past conferences, the session briefs often included direction to make sure managers ‘keep the conversation to those things that they can control’ or to ‘make sure you keep things positive’. In other words ‘don’t let them challenge’ which is perceived as negativity. The practices of ‘staying inside the box’ contradict the second objective of PIP and whilst managers did not explicitly draw this inference they were reflective and frustrated by their own lack of influence upon more broad based or strategic issues. ....

... There are no forums, those opportunities, for the investment of a person to actually go around and collect all those concepts and ideas. That would be a valuable investment within the company – it doesn't happen. As a full group we only meet once a year where we're not reviewing the past ... all our bi-monthly meetings are all about reviewing historical data against accounting figures and we're stuck in that warp ... its a rut we are in that we shouldn't be in its not how you take a company forward. [I can only recall] one forum at a company conference where there was discussion led by a senior manager on the topic of 'where we should head''. We've had topics and headed that way but none of them have been truly about movement.

... There's another whole set of opportunities in profit improvement I believe which are much much greater if we were able to harness the front and back end of Tileco together to, for example, modify product ranges or what we offer the market in a way that recognises that we providing some feature at cost in a product or service that the market doesn't value. Or are there new ranges or new products or new offers that by getting together with the front end of the business, sales and marketing people, that we could actually make more profit? The way we're organised means that when the manufacturing part of Tileco NZ talks about profit improvement we are just talking about cost reduction.

In addition to this, as we have seen within the *survivalist discourse*, managers and others have learned to rely almost exclusively on their internal expertise, knowledge and other resources to initiate and implement productivity improvement changes. This

presents a challenge to the organisation's *absorptive capacity* (Cohen et al.: *ibid*), that is their ability to generate new learning by accessing and recognising valuable new knowledge, assimilating it and applying it towards changes that drive profitable outcomes. Whilst managers individually may or may not have knowledge about new trends in management practice or technological advances, there are limited or no opportunities to share this knowledge or to access, let alone assess, the value of new information. Thus, their capacity to absorb new knowledge, to be creative, to develop shared insights or to create new perspectives is limited by insularism and survivalist concerns. An example of this was articulated by one manager who is frustrated by the inability of the organisation to engage in this level of learning ...

... I personally believe that Tileco business methods are still living in the 70's. I do a fair bit of reading on business type stuff and one of the things that changed and brought America back into the manufacturing game as opposed to Japan who had control of it was the theory of constraint and the business practices that that brings about. Adopting that and using that will make Tileco a stronger company. Lots of people in Tileco know about it but once again the forum or the desire isn't there.

Whether PIP is a profitability or productivity improvement process was repeatedly highlighted as an issue by managers, who argue that as projects are limited to initiatives which can only be achieved in their own factories, this confines PIP to achieving productivity improvements which may or may not increase profitability.

...intent is to make Tileco more profitable by avoiding wastage of money. Unfortunately it comes across as more of a cost cutting exercise rather than a true profit improvement exercise ... a real short term fix is what can be achieved by PIP in its present form.

In 2005 PIP financial results substantially exceeded targeted savings and this was viewed as a 'successful result for PIP'. Beneath the aura of success however are concerns that whilst PIP is successful, there is potential for PIP to divert managers attention away from core issues such as quality or safety which could lead to major losses that in effect negate any saving made under PIP.

... Now that comes back to your silo thinking- even though we have PIP, one of the weaknesses is their inability to think broadly as well – you can do the PIP and get the accolades for the \$200,000 but somewhere else we have failed by \$500,000. I think that's relevant ... it's not within the PIP brief because that's your project but it's no use only doing that one thing because it could imply that you have ignored something else. What should you do as a manager to stop the \$500,000

loss...maybe in that example we would have been better to forget about the PIP and having the manager making sure he didn't lose the \$500,000. We would have been \$500,000 better off – under this scenario we are \$300,000 worse off.

Further to this, PIP success is narrowly evaluated using a set of financial measures leaving no room for others forms of success. If PIP 'success' was broadened to include high level learning outcomes the end result could look more like 'we were unable to achieve the desired outcome but we learned a lot about the limitations of our approach or our product or our organisational responsiveness'. Interestingly, these concerns were expressed by both senior and middle managers however both groups appeared to lack the agency to change PIP to operate in a less insular fashion.

... We've got to change our mental thinking away from [the set of accounts] being the performance indicators and profit is the number one goal and customer satisfaction and ability to service the market are the goals straight underneath and the rest will look after itself. But, we're not a mature enough company to get there yet.

In this study, most of the participants were at management or senior levels within the group and production operators were not directly observed or interviewed. The perspectives of operators are important however, particularly in relation to the objective of creating a broad-based programme through PIP. How does the insularism discourse affect their agency to participate and engage with learning outside of (or even within) their day to day practice? Some insight to this was provided by the engineering manager at one of the factories ...

... The upper level of management here sometimes don't have a full understanding of how small the circle of the operator is and how he's going to think about statements that are made. You think you are making statements for the benefit of the company, statements that could change, but an operator's been working in one job for 20 years or they are worried about how this will affect my wee circle. Managers need to jump out of their shell and go into the operator's [and ask] 'how am I going to see this?' Sometimes when [managers] are told how they'll see it, they'll say 'oh, that's ridiculous, that's not what I meant' but that's the way it will be picked up.

The North Island (NI) operations manager sees 'reducing insularism' and 'leveraging resource, knowledge, abilities and skills' as a priority and sees PIP as an important part of achieving this. In the main he talked of achieving this through encouragement to share information vertically and horizontally, and restructuring activities into 'cross-factory' initiatives.

I guess I'm the sole link – but part of my role is encouraging firstly the factory managers but secondly the supervisors to encourage more learning and more passing on of information and results. In each of the plants there are things that those plants do particularly well ... the challenge in moving forward will be about trying to say "*Hightex*<sup>25</sup> does this particular thing best here, now we've got to adopt this at *Lowtex*." Rather than needing to go through that whole learning exercise, the person that sponsors that project should be the manager from *Hightex* ... he's got the knowledge and we are going to use that knowledge to implement it here.

### **Tradition, survival and risk behaviours**

PIP is not new to Tileco and according to some long termers the PIP process was well established in their early days at Tileco, operating under corporate control and with recognition and support from senior managers. PIP at this time was as a team-based improvement process engaging people at all levels of the business. One long term manager recalled PIP in the early days ....

... I was "brought up on" PIP in my early days of Tileco. It was a formal process we went through each year after the Budgets were completed. It was a very effective tool in these days for improving profits. Had both elements of employee / team involvement and ownership and the corporate requirements and corporate drivers including high level visibility and recognition.

This is interesting, because for a number of managers something that managers referred to as 'corporate structure' was cited as one of the main factors stifling reflexivity and learning.

... I guess the dry corporate structure to the PIP is detrimental to people's entrepreneurial [spirit]... I suppose everybody knows that what we end up with is going right to the CEO and is going to be documented and there's going to be monthly reporting and so forth of that. That may stifle the brainstorming a little bit I think ... it has that effect.

... take the place without full understanding of how it works and why it needs to be done. The place has been going for decades and fine tuned itself is part of its survival ... with little input from corporate structure except for financial goals. When those from outside the corporate decide things without sufficient weight being given to decades of development there have been unpleasant outcomes

'Corporate structure' appears to encircle idea generation and risk taking and a closer look at these responses suggests that there are a number of risk-adverse behaviours working to limit the inclusion of more 'risky' ideas in the PIP. The PIP asks managers to set both conservative and stretch goals and it could be argued that the stretch goals

are the aspects of the PIP ‘at risk’. However, there is a sense that managers are ‘working to the process’ and making sure the projects they choose are the things that will contribute the most financial gain, in the time period available, with least effort and risk of failure. The criteria that managers use to decide which projects will be selected appears to support this aversion to risk, particularly when we contrast these behaviours with the typical risk behaviours found in organisations committed to high level learning as identified in the literature review (see Table 7). PIP is removed from formalised performance objectives which on the surface would appear to construct greater freedom for experimenting, trialling, making errors. However, failure appears to be associated with ‘loss of face’ rather than ‘opportunity to learn’.

‘Risk aversion’ appears to be a legitimate claim made within the *traditionalist and survivalist discourses*. Table 7 outlines the criteria managers stated were used in their decision-making on PIP projects and what they avoided. This is contrasted with the risk behaviours we could expect to see in an organisation that engages high level learning as part of the planning process as observed in the literature. There was no sense in the interview responses or observed meetings that managers, and particularly long term managers, overtly engage in challenge or inquiry into the status quo or even into the ideas and assumptions that are being discussed.

**Table 7: Comparison of PIP decision criteria and Learning Organisation behaviours**

Decision criteria for selecting PIP projects		Typical risk behaviours in relation to learning organisations
Criteria	Avoid	
...How achievable is it? ...	... Too hard basket ...there is no point in taking on something too hard or you are going to fail	‘Undiscussables’ brought into the open
...Can you influence it?		
...What is the probability of success?	...Removing people ...the one thing that we have tended to shy away from in this business is looking at projects that are going to mean people that will have to leave the business	Challenging our own and others assumptions and the way we think about things
...How easy would it be?		
... How significant is it?		
...Is it practical to measure?	... Loss of Pride ...I don't think there are repercussions [for failure], what's probably at stake is pride... that we have delivered, done our part	Encouragement and freedom to challenge the status quo
... What could go wrong?		Visualising multiple futures
...What is the dollar return potential?	... Loss of Face ...we don't formally link it with performance management [failure] is really about loss of face rather than some kind of discipline or budget cuts.	Encouraging diverse views and approaches.
...Is it feasible?		
...Factory Manager defines the projects		
...Does it increased company profile		
...If you drive hard and put time into it, your stuff gets to the top.		
...Safety is given priority		

Supporting this interpretation were the more risky responses given by managers when they were asked, 'If you could only make one change to improve the profitability of the company, and there were no constraints on you doing this, what would you do?' Interestingly, none of the 'one change' responses have been, are currently or are intended to become PIP projects. Changes suggested were related to management structure, purchase of new equipment, greater integration and/or rationalization of the manufacturing or wider operation. Most of these changes would require some across factory or across organisation participation and would in the current PIP discourse be seen as outside the scope of managers. Managers saw that real profitability gains would be made through these changes and there was a sense that the current PIP projects were at best 'limiting the haemorrhage'.

... Like putting a Band-Aid on a big cut.. you only stop the bleeding. It's not really going to make you really hugely more competitive or stronger in the future – from the helicopter view its just making it cost static.

One manager declined to comment, believing the question to be 'too contentious' and in previous projects within this company, managers have also appeared reluctant to raise 'hard issues' with senior managers. Thus risk aversion is expressed as deference or conformity or perhaps even fear within the *PIP discourse*. Significantly, managers feel they have a lot of autonomy to 'run their own ship' within the PIP as expressed by one manager...

... And we are given a lot of freedom to choose what projects – total freedom to choose what projects...

who went on to say ...

As long as there's some targeted improvement, *meets the requirements*. It doesn't matter what we choose. I think that's appropriate. (emphasis added)

### **PIP and Production ... aka 'if it ain't production it ain't anything'**

Whenever managers talked about the PIP projects, their conversations were within the context of 'production' concerns or improvements. This took the form of: a) production technologies, for example; machinery, technical expertise, skills training; b) cost to produce, for example; waste, safety, yield, kilos, cost of quality or; c) production planning, for example; job scheduling, production output, distribution, budgets. One manager described the impact of production on potential learning opportunities.

... What can happen in manufacturing with manufacturing managers is it becomes

so focused on manufacturing ... like on productivity, quality, safety ... and you are just so focused on that you are not being exposed or consider anything conceptual or to challenge that ... or take a learning and think how does this fit here and there? So I think its that kind of thing ... otherwise we can stay in day in day out here and that's all we are fixed on.

Another manager, when questioned about how their site decides which PIP projects to include each year, was dismissive of PIP and responded ...

... we're here to do a certain job, the priority is keeping the machines running and keeping the carpet or yarn output, after that is there priority?

Returning to the objective of broad based learning within PIP, we can see the pressures on operators to 'keep the machines running' within this regime will impact upon their ability to be reflective, let alone reflexive.

Managers PIP projects for the 05 year were almost without exception related to production outcomes. It was noted above that PIP is narrowly evaluated and the measures used are related to production cost savings under the financial categories: Utilities, Materials, Direct Labour, Overheads, Quality, Freight, Revenue Increase. Other outcomes that could potentially be considered in relation to learning or the PIP objective of broad based involvement of factory personnel are not considered.

The full intention of PIP is not reflected in the current practice or the language managers use to talk about PIP. There is the sense that managers must 'stick to their knitting', in other words, production is what you do best and 'if it ain't production, it ain't anything'.

### **Analytical Framework**

The productive affects of this *productionist discourse* on the reflexive voice are summarised in Table 8. It is argued in the following discussion, that these concerns and practices form a powerful and pervasive discourse that is both an institutionalised feature of the traditionalist discourse and a constraint on high level learning practice.

**Table 8: Productive affects of the productionist discourse upon the reflexive voice**

Discourses	Differentiated by...	Power within the discourse - what we can talk about and how we can practice...	What this means for the reflexive voice...
<b>Productionist</b> If it ain't production it ain't anything	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Expertise valued</li> <li>• Focus on production targets and 'kilo's out the door'</li> <li>• Requirements for safety, higher quality, cost saving</li> <li>• division of labour</li> <li>• specialization</li> <li>• focus on productivity and production performance</li> <li>• standard work procedures, some multi-skilling (recent) but limited movement between specialist functions</li> <li>• Structured and formal.</li> <li>• PIP is seen as limited to production cost savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology of yarn / carpet making</li> <li>• Cost savings to production practices – e.g. safety, quality, volume, yield, waste,</li> <li>• Production is the most important job we have to do</li> <li>• My own value is limited to my technical expertise</li> <li>• I can engage my thinking towards technical improvements or cost savings to production</li> <li>• People are viewed as resources</li> <li>• Improvements are evolutionary and technical / production process improvement focused</li> <li>• PIP is just something we should be doing anyway.</li> <li>• Limits managerial and operator practice to productionist / pragmatic concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits the vocabulary people can use to talk about profitability to production processes.</li> <li>• Limits time to engage in reflection and enquiry</li> <li>• Excludes alternative ways of thinking</li> </ul>

## Multiple realities of PIP

As it stands at the present, the PIP is a framework, a set of techniques, and a system of control and monitoring that can be utilised by managers to generate and implement ideas for cost savings. It has the potential for broad based learning and experimentation and perhaps more profitable outcomes but this potential was only hinted at in the study. Although PIP is a corporate process with centralised reporting, managers have responded to the PIP in quite different ways across the three sites studied. PIP is practiced and talked about differently creating diverse 'PIP realities' each providing us with insight into the various power affects and resistances to engaging reflexive learning. Whilst some managers interviewed see PIP as a positive process that is attractive this year because it is well structured and it provides 'clout' to achieve ideas where they feel they have not had this before, others have mostly ignored the PIP. These differences were observed in relation to the priority, scope, acceptance, value and meaning attributed to the PIP.

In the next three subsections I ‘drill down’ into the particular company sites researched in this case study<sup>26</sup> and locate the situational ordering of the traditionalist and productionist discourses. I turn first to Midtex, where I find managers embracing the PIP and working hard to survive but lacking agency to affect those things they believe are needed for survival. Then I turn to Lowtex, where I find managers working almost exclusively within the *insularist and productionist* discourses, constructing pragmatic resistances to the PIP based on what they hold to be true within these discourses. Finally, I turn to Hightex where I find reflexivity and knowledge creation is privileged to the factory manager and the broad based objectives of PIP are resisted within the factory by engaging practices and relationships that are traditional and hierarchical.

As we shall see, my findings resonate with McCabe’s (2000) Intermotor’s case study:

‘ we saw managers ... floundering with, moulding and manipulating, the concepts. They did so in both ‘productive’ and ‘repressive’ ways, rendering the ultimate outcome far from totalising or straightforward.’ (p950)

### ***Midtex - once the ‘jewel in the crown’***

The Midtex factory was purpose-built to provide top of the range woven carpet and white yarn giving it an almost elite status within the manufacturing group. However, whilst the yarn and tufted carpet factories within the group are currently busy and buoyant, the Midtex factory is downsizing and is concerned about profitability.

[We are] threatened with a declining market (on the face of it). A lot of energy and effort and some success is going into this – resulting in the need to change the business fast to make sure it is not a drain on rest of Tileco....[There is] continuing uncertainty about the sustainability of [this] plant in the future. All our efforts and sales people efforts go into this. 25% of staff were made redundant less than 12 months ago –issues of security and sustainability hangs over everyone.

This factory has had a number of significant changes in the past 8-10 years and until recently most of the factory managers and supervisors were long term employees. A radical and acrimonious change to the shift structure (from 8 – 12 hour shifts) and removal of the bonus scheme were forced into the factory by a ‘rainmaker’ in 1998, the negative affects of which were still being articulated by employees when I worked with this site in 2003.

... there was some massive changes made in how we do things .. changes made by a rainmaker who forced the changes by collusion and underhand means and I

guess for a period of a year there was no innovation – like the dark ages

In the case of the ‘rainmaker’ there seemed to have been little, if any, scope for the factory manager to influence either the change or the hard-line manner in which it was enforced. In my own experience at this time, the site managers alienated themselves from the wider group, refusing until the last minute to come to the annual conference (to which I was invited) and responding negatively or keeping silent on topics raised at the conference. Soon after this, the factory manager was moved to a senior technical position by mutual agreement and a new factory manager was recruited. Thus, this dynamic began to change in 2000 when management at the senior and supervisory levels within the factory were restructured resulting in a number of new managers being recruited either from outside the group or outside the factory into these positions and the existing managers were, in the main, moved to other positions within the factory.

... a very slow recovery from that started with the appointment of [the new manager] ... things have slowly changed ... opportunities for freedom of expression and helping management slowly change from being terrified to say anything to more open and frank dialogue.

It is interesting to note in this example, the effect of coercive change and dirty political manoeuvring on learning and reflexivity. That is, managers isolated themselves from the rest of the manufacturing group, felt they could not express their ideas or concerns, and did not challenge senior managers about what was happening at their site. Whilst managers at the site are now not ‘terrified’ to challenge outside the factory walls, they are still resistant to doing this.

... there is a whole population out there that is not as open in thinking, more critical, not as open to free thinking and talking ...can't speak your mind, can't say what you think, be careful of what you say, choose who you are talking laterally to even on a technical level. This is not really very different now .. its not any better...too structured, too much ... [reflective here for a long pause] ... no I don't think its any better.

Managers at this site still don't feel comfortable ‘sticking their neck out’ preferring to ‘pick their battles’ and work in a more political way to achieve change where they believe this is important. The powerlessness felt by managers and the level of energy needed to affect things outside of their control was summed up by a senior manager at the factory in relation to expressing his views about PIP being a cost reduction process rather than an innovation / improvement process...

... that's still alive and well. It doesn't get talked about. I guess because it's beyond

our influence and it beyond [the GM's] influence. So I talk to him about it but there isn't any point because nothings going to change there that we can do anything about. An in fact to a degree its wasted energy that needed ... nobody has that much spare energy to waste on things you can't influence.

Managers were asked if and how they challenged their own or other's thinking on PIP within their own management team. This response from one manager highlights the reluctance managers have to challenge each other's ideas and thinking in a direct way as the resulting outcome may not be what is wanted or expected.

I think you are saying that some things come up that take you out of your comfort zone. That may have been suggested by someone else but is really centred around your area of activity and so it takes you out of your comfort zone... and that does happen and the individual that's been taken out of comfort zone often through logic ends up wearing that PIP project assigned to them. Specific ways of dealing with it is that the manager says you are the one (on choice) its not a particularly good process actually because the person is resentful because someone else suggested it and then someone dumped it on you and you really believe "no I don't think that's going to work" but everyone else does and now it's me that has to make it work.

In a similar vein, one manager described the self-censuring process managers engaged to avoid being responsible for something that the management team might make you responsible for without due consideration of the feasibility of the project.

You avoid wild silly ideas which may well be wild sounding ideas but which other people may build on and come up with an idea that might work so there is that .. you may say if we do this we might get some money and we might not and often that becomes a PIP .. so it may be all of a sudden you have to make them work ... and sometimes they don't and there's (as you saw in the session) that some of them are not working?

There is a sense in these comments that the team processes engaged to review ideas move quickly to closure, hinting that 'decisiveness', a norm of traditional decision-making, rather than learning through reflexive dialogue is valued within the group.

This site is highly unionised, and managers reported a culture in which it is very difficult for managers to enact change of any significance without coercion. In this environment, 'empowered broad based learning' is threatened by the dynamics of political power plays, as expressed by one manager ...

... at operator level if somebody comes up with a good idea and wants to implement it I promote it (I've got one doing that right now) but what happens is he

takes a lot of flack from the others – why are you doing this for the management – whereas he's doing it because he wants to get ahead .. he's the odd one that wants to be there doing things and he's strong enough in himself to say I don't care what you say.

A consequence of this appears to be a dependence on managers to 'fix problems' as this is not seen as an operator's job.

Historically... we've definitely got a culture of "we've got a problem what are you going to do about it manager ".. we're working our way out of that and we've made huge in-roads in the last 2 years. But still people aren't prepared to come forward.

A number of managers at this site saw *Interwoven*<sup>27</sup> as a significant learning event that supported the change to more openness within the factory, particularly within the management team.

... The whole *Interwoven* experience here ...for the better. That gave forum<sup>28</sup> and permission and made it part of how we do things around here... a beginning into that of being able to be innovative and sometimes off the wall ... it didn't have to be analytical and logical ...

... we probably have, post-*Interwoven* a better learning environment here than what some other plants would have. The other plants reflect the same issues in that they were probably one man band operations and there was no huge formal method or forum for sounding out ideas they were just individuals working on individual tasks.

... *Interwoven* courses last year would have been the biggest influence on the manager's way of thinking about things ... it had a bigger effect on upper- middle management than it did on operators. The operators are old tooth here and some of them took it on board but you've got some really long term people here and they are not going to change it doesn't matter what you do.

*Interwoven* and the appointment of new managers to the team, appears to have been significant in giving confidence to managers to try new approaches and perhaps has had a 'loosening' affect (Hedberg: *ibid*) upon relationships. Not having to be 'analytical and logical' (read scientific management) potentially indicates a change in the 'rules of interaction', that is, it is legitimate to have public conversations that do not focus on traditionalist and productionist concerns. An example of this is the site wide downsizing (from 300 to around 200 personnel) in late 2004. In past restructures of this nature, *Tileco* has applied a 'last on first off' rule which has led to emphasis on retaining long term personnel. Significantly, in this latest change new rules relating to

skills and abilities including, most relevantly, attitudes to learning were used as criteria for who would stay and who would go despite a substantial amount of risk involved in taking this strategy<sup>29</sup>. Various interpretations of the power affects of this action can be made. Is this a first step towards 're-privileging local knowledge' (Yanow: Ibid) as acknowledging the ability to learn also acknowledges the practice based knowledge contribution of workers on the factory floor. Or is it a form of concertive control, rewarding those workers who are willing to support a shared vision?

CAPEX training is another example pushing against tradition. Traditional thinking about PIP would suggest an approach that asked 'where can we find savings without spending?' However, in the 2005 PIP the Operations Manager identified that knowledge of how to use the CAPEX process was a limitation to achieving more strategic initiatives. He initiated training in CAPEX processes delivered to South Island Managers by one of the more experienced managers in this group. This had the affect not just of upskilling managers but also of opening the door to 'higher hanging fruit'.

Within this factory, PIP has this year taken a more team-based approach with the factory management team meeting to brainstorm, decide on and assign PIP projects either to managers within this team or to managers in other areas of the factory. Whilst some managers reported that the ideas they brought to this meeting resulted from employee concerns / issues or ideas, in the main this process is limited to the management team.

... what we have going this year is something that is more meaningful for managers than in the past it would have been [PIP] never made any sense or never really impacted on them, it was just an exercise. It's more real because we've organised them to be involved in it. Managers are involved in it. I would say their attitude would be that it's helping... that this mechanism which is overlaid on the structure, the formal structure, although the military structure... this method has made a possible contribution, it's actually targeted and unearthed some savings for the first time probably since they've heard about or been involved in PIP.

In summary, factory managers at this site appear to be working hard to encourage and create spaces for reflexivity and transformative action within the PIP (and other practices). It is interesting to note that whilst managers talked in the interviews about concepts such as 'team approach', 'PIP as a more meaningful process' or having a 'better learning environment', the PIP review meetings I attended were typified by low participation and were focused on planning, progress reporting and productionist

discourse (see the example in Chapter 7). Managers private expression of the value of a team based approach to PIP seems to ‘come unstuck’ in meetings. There appears to be a number of contradictory discursive elements at play in this situation. Firstly, reflexive learning approaches were given greater legitimisation in the *Interwoven* process and are perhaps productive of a new discourse which claims ‘this is the way in which we should relate to each other’. Manager’s historical experience of change encircles reflexivity and says ‘be careful what you say and who you say it to’. Traditional meeting practice produces ways of interrelating that are planful, deferential and decisive, constructing pragmatic resistances that say ‘what I say needs to be conservative as it may be picked up too quickly and commit me to something I cannot achieve’ or ‘don’t challenge or you will have PIP projects ‘dumped’ on you even if you don’t believe they will work’.

### ***Lowtex... the poor cousin***

Lowtex was Tileco’s first carpet factory and once covered a huge site, perhaps 2-3 times its current size, with 5 separate manufacturing operations producing both woollen yarn and tufted carpet. Over 500 people were employed at the factory in the early days. Closure of the tufting operation at the site, other reductions to production and greater efficiencies reduced this number to around 100 people by the early 2000’s. There is a sense in the more recent past that this factory has lived on a knife edge with employees waiting for the ‘axe to fall’.

...closure of tufting had a major impact on attitudes here (150 – 200 people lost their jobs). People were insecure and morale was crap. Feeling that it was just a matter of time and we are going to be closed down... waiting for the axe to fall.

... we are lucky to still be here. I can remember the day the CEO was on-site to announce the closure of the Lowtex plant 10 – 12 years ago because of low productivity and high cost. The factory manager and another manager convinced him it could be turned around and it took them 2-3 years to do this.

As with the wider Tileco group, there is a history of acrimonious and perhaps poorly managed change at this factory, as illustrated by the fall-out from the transfer of plant from the offshore operation to Lowtex in 2003. This expansion was implemented over 12 months and included installing extra plant and more significantly, recruiting around 200 people to take staff numbers from 100 to 300. The lack of agency to make this initiative a success was expressed by some managers who felt removed from and unable to influence decision making around implementation of the change. One engineering

manager expressed his anger at engineering personnel at the factory being bypassed in the design phase of the installation. He believed the installation was done badly and overlooked local expertise and knowledge held by the engineers, resulting in issues such as poor integration with current equipment.

... People who have hired my experience went ahead and did it themselves on computer ..if I had of drawn it, I would have been able to pick up what was needed ... if I had done what they did I would have given up. It's not hard / difficult, I don't believe it was done very well at all.

Some managers carried an air of resignation and were ambivalent or angry about their lack of ability to influence both the changes thrust upon them and for some even gaining support for their current day to day role.

... It's the lack of wherewithal to change or influence anything. Its only when a failure appears that they start to notice ... they don't notice.

... I have a niggling feeling that we are being left to our own devices.

One manager described the high level of resistance to any change in the factory or even to gain compliance with standard procedures. There was a sense that this manager felt unable to affect any change to this situation which he believes has been the status-quo during his tenure at the factory which has spanned 35 years.

... There is a great reluctance for change through the plant .. but the trend is toward looking at things critically and that quality assessment (Telarc) is very good for making you get on with things ... it is starting to dribble into what we do in every day practice now but it has been out of the system for so long its going to be major battle for [the factory manager] to make it happen here. There is still a reluctance to change anything even with Telarc ... no one wants to live in a day to day confrontational battle. That's what some of the supervisors are feeling now. 'They recognise the need to change, but we have always done it this way ... we don't change because you have 2 hard nosed guys who have been here for 30 years and they won't change. We need to take a direct/ harder line .. we tried to death training and as long as you have guys standing there saying 'I'm not going to do it' and unless the team makes it happen its not going to happen and they don't realise they are part of the team. Changes related to practical stuff – cleaning, housekeeping etc,... just need to follow the procedure but we are still fighting about filling in tickets .. this has always been the case in 36 years.

The biggest issues impacting manager's desire to engage their own reflexivity seems to be related to their lack of agency combined with a sense of being worn down by problems that don't go away, by a perceived lack of resources and time, and lack of

autonomy to 'run their own ship'. They are operating in survivalist and insular mode which are removing their 'power to' affect meaningful action. This sense of inertia was articulated by one manager who had been with the organisation for over 30 years, who had talked at length about the lack of resource and support to achieve what is needed, and who finally looked resigned and said ...

... identifying faults and actually changing them and having something in there that would not allow that change to swing back ... I'd like to be able to not have to solve the same problem year after year.

The disjoints between what is required of them, both in relation to PIP and to wider production issues, and the lack of resource to do it and the need to have credibility within the organisation, resulted in behaviours such as 'working the system to get what is needed to do the job' or 'modifying the cards' or 'fudging the figures'. When asked what the consequences are of not achieving what is required in the PIP one manager replied.

... I don't believe there are any consequences but in a management team you want to do well and everyone is a career orientated person and company minded and if the boss says he wants something you try and do it. The perception is you are expected to come up with something, you are expected to contribute and expected to get a result. But what happens if you don't make that result? There is competition among the plants to reduce costs that is what we perceive. It is actually pretty hard but the consequences ... no one is going to beat you up or give you a warning ... but, like a rugby tournament, you want to impress. 'Doffing on the run'<sup>30</sup> is a classic example [this was] perceived by our manager as being a way of improving productivity, none of the management team really supported it. I have been down and know what the guys are doing and the gains that you make are not there. Other things offset the gains (e.g.: wastage higher) so what happened there was ... to be quite honest is the manager nipped over the figure ... that made it seem like we were making improvements by doffing on the run but everyone knows it is a waste of time. So my view of the PIP process is that it is not very good I suppose. If people mention PIP I just sweat a bit and think here we go we've got to squeeze blood out of a stone again.

Thus, the prevailing discourses at this factory direct the reflexive voice towards current concerns and, in order to survive, limit PIP outcomes to 'good news', which takes away the opportunity for real learning. In addition, the practice of 'fudging the figures' also constructs the possibility of pragmatic resistance to investing in the PIP. In other words, it does not work, lets pretend it does (we need to give good news and appear authoritative), it wastes time and resource (not good under the rules of productionist

thinking, it forces me to collude in this deception (I don't like this), therefore PIP is not a good process and a waste of time.

At this factory, long termers also recounted the 'good old days', in this case typified by a more relaxed, more humanistic and less 'kilos-based' environment where people felt supported and 'looked after'.

... There were 5 cafeterias fully staffed where people could buy meals. Vans picked staff up from the railways stations. In the old days we had full time trainers, now we have fewer indirects and workers are also trainers, less support now. There is a greater focus on production / kilos / quality. We lose sight of the fact that we need good training. A "kilos-based" culture has arisen in the past few years.

Managers expressed their feelings of Lowtex being the 'poor cousin' of the group, one of the least favourites, who suffer from lack of support to implement new initiatives or day to day support from senior managers. There is a strong feeling of resentment around the old and outdated nature of the machinery and a feeling that the company will not invest in improvements to existing machines or new machinery. Even though the factory has expanded, 'new' plant was in fact second-hand and according to some managers not appropriate for the type of operation at the factory. Issues like these contribute to the feeling that they are the 'poor cousins' of the group or that there is limited resource to achieve what is needed.

... We've been hounded to get the machines up and running – why aren't they – because they are not the best – you tell the senior manager that next time he gets a car he gets a Morris Minor and see how quickly he gets around.... how well he does. Because a car is a critical part of their life. And what do we get? A machine that's older than the oldest machine here ... that has no interchangeability no spares it's not even a 24 hour a day machine ... so we give them a list that will get it maybe up to standard ... oh you can't spend that ... and you are told to manage the situation. They haven't supplied the correct machine I haven't even got the people to do it... they know all this .. I'm telling them. In the end this is how it will go ... people haven't done anything about it ... nothing happens. When I go they will bring another guy in and he will say, 'I need ....', and he will probably get it ....that's what is frustrating.

... there are some productivity gains to be made ... but there is no money to spend on large things ... but I think that view is changing because we have got engineering graduates in the company now to look at options and work out paybacks etc to see if things are worthwhile. There are gains to be made ... but we have always got part way there and then all of a sudden the factory manager said 'no it is too dear we are not going to be able to do that its not in the budget'... you know ideas discussed prototyped and then just stopped because the money is not

available.. I don't know if the money was not available or if he just didn't want to push it.

However, in terms of learning, managers feel that they are technically innovative, consistently critiquing and improving the machinery and their own processes. The production manager, when asked about learning reinforced the need to maintain the focus on production, indicating that that is their *real* job. This manager, when asked how people critique their own practice currently, responded that he was looking forward to external expert help to gain greater efficiencies in the production process.

...there are some industrial engineers from Foxton (process engineers) coming to look at workflows etc. This is good / great – help from outside is awesome. We are focused on production ...busy getting the kilos out.

This doesn't seem to be good news for attaining broad based involvement in PIP, and, as the process engineer is a recent university graduate appears to give greater legitimacy to 'scientific' rather than 'practice-based' knowledge. (Yanow: *ibid*) Seemingly in contradiction to this, the factory appears to operate in a more insular manner than the other factories in this study, relying on their own resources and expertise to create new learning or to design and implement new practice. For example: Whilst the other factories have taken steps to increase the resources they have for the PIP eg: Capex training or relationships with Canesis<sup>31</sup>, the managers at this factory appear reluctant to initiate support from external knowledge sources or expertise.

... Learning and Innovation – we don't have a lot of contact with other parts of the industry e.g.: Canesis who is our research arm. [We] put it in the budget to go there but it was turned down so we couldn't go. It's hard to be innovative if our horizons are not broadened. The company only buys one textile publication and this is a fashion / clothing magazine – it's useless.

Whilst managers expressed their need for more support, there are numerous historical examples of this factory liking to 'go it alone' which contradict this. For example: a new performance management system designed by the HR group was ardently resisted and not implemented by factory management until very recently. If we return to the claims of situated learning theorists, (Yanow: *ibid*; Brown et al.: *ibid*) perhaps this paradoxical situation is explained by the dynamic that is likely created when a long term operator with local knowledge developed in informal and interstitial spaces on the periphery of the organisation is, most likely, *given* work process solutions that are

accorded more legitimacy by the center of the organisation and are based on theoretical or canonical knowledge of the newly arrived expert.

Managers at this site are indeed ‘floundering with, moulding and manipulating’, the PIP concepts, constructing and constructed by what they believe is achievable through the PIP and the resources that they could potentially draw upon. Inconsistencies between what is required from PIP (innovative ideas, broad based participation) and the ‘truths’ of prevailing discourses (no time, no money, they don’t listen anyway) leave spaces for resistance to PIP. The level of participation in PIP this year is low and the senior people interviewed at the factory described the PIP as something ‘we would have probably done anyway’ or as something that ‘managers should be doing as part of their normal job’.

One of the most significant factors in building the ‘truths’ around PIP at this site, appears to be related to the style and approach of the previous factory manager (a new factory manager started at this site just 3 months prior to this study) who possibly saw PIP as ‘one more thing to do with limited resource’ and had approached PIP without a lot of input from other managers. I was fortunate to see the affect of a new factory manager on ‘loosening’ and ‘unfreezing’ the status-quo with other managers at the site. At the time of completing the research process, managers were feeling like problems were being solved and ‘things were starting to happen’. A hint at caution was expressed by one manager, who perhaps has seen the discursive affects over time on new entrants to the organisation ...

...but he's still new and its an advantage.

### ***Hightex Factory ... the flagship***

The factory manager and four senior operators were interviewed at this site. This factory is small and the manager is closely involved with operations and also a ‘long term’, having been at the site, mostly as factory manager for all of his 20 years with the company. Because of its size, senior managers see this factory as having potential for a centre of excellence, a model factory, a testing ground for new initiatives, and most significantly a flagship and *centre of learning*.

The factory appears to operate as a ‘one man band’ in relation to PIP and only the factory manager had knowledge of the PIP projects the site was running for the year. These projects had in the main been initiated by the factory manager in consultation

with senior managers, or external experts and with minimal input from other staff including senior staff (supervisors and senior operators). The factory manager was aware that the expectation for PIP is for a more broad based practice and justified his reasons for doing this, the main one being that he feels his people do not have the knowledge to be innovative.

... The staff that I ask generally do not have a lot of information available to them to come up with ideas – most of the ideas they come up with are *just* common sense stuff (emphasis added). In terms of learning and innovative knowledge we need to improve. We have cadets (we have 6 learning here currently), we have carding engineer and supervisors but these people need to expand their area of knowledge – none of our guys have visited any other factories then some innovative ideas can come from that. We are a wee bit too narrow.

The factory manager appears to give more legitimacy to knowledge ‘at the center’ (Yanow:ibid) of the organisation or expert knowledge external to the organisation. This is perhaps understandable given his long term tenure in a small operation (he probably knows his own operation inside out) and the expectation from senior managers that the site operate as a flagship for the rest of the organisation.

... Because technology in textile does not move forward at 1000 mph therefore there is not a lot of development without spending big dollars. So to initiate some projects that will improve our profitability under PIP umbrella have generally been senior management decisions if you like in consultation and taking in ideas from staff but generally speaking it is done with myself and one or two others [more senior]. Innovation is by researching what is available in the marketplace, generally the textile NZ agent that we are in touch with on regular basis. Or the textile exhibition in Europe where innovation is displayed – we express what we want to do what we want to achieve... we look at any new innovations between exhibitions on a very regular basis.

The factory manager seems to be active, curious and interested in absorbing and enacting technical developments from experts and senior personnel within the wider organisation. On the surface, this factory appears to be learning and is certainly embracing the PIP. Learning appears to be privileged however, to the factory manager and a closer look at the responses from others interviewed paint a different picture, one that is encircled by traditional hierarchies and productionist discourse. One of the senior operators is a good example of this:

I am happy to do what I am asked to and do not see it as my role to drive innovation or come up with ideas. But I have fine tuned the blending area over the

past 10 years to achieve the 'best operation'.

The senior operator and factory manager both seem to marginalise this common sense 'best practice' knowledge evolved through practice improvement; knowledge that could provide learning and growth in other factories within the organisation.

So we are left wondering about this flagship and center of learning 'who learns' and 'how is that learning shared' with the wider organisation? The challenge to the Hightex flagship is to recognise the limits they place on knowledge and reflexivity produced by insularism and hierarchical practices.

### **DISCUSSION: Finding the reflexive voice within the PIP**

The results above describe the interplay of PIP within prevailing discourses at Tileco identifying a number of power affects that potentially moderate manager's reflexivity within the PIP (summarised in Tables 6 and 8). The intention is not to present these subjects as a *totalising* PIP discourse (McCabe: 2000) but to view PIP as emerging sets of practice and knowledge that is variously influenced by a 'multiplicity of discursive elements' (Foucault in McCabe: *ibid* p935). Within this context, power is 'mobile' and enacted from 'innumerable points' each impinging upon the freedoms managers have to engage their insight and reflexivity toward transformative change.

#### ***Insularism and the PIP***

The *insularism discourse* appears to be pervasive, constructing silo'ed thinking and ever decreasing circles of agency and influence as we drill down into the organisation. The insularity of the process and lack of clarity around the objective of PIP appears to leave room for managers to contest the PIP as a useful practice. By constructing a *PIP discourse* that is silo'ed and treated as 'add-on' with narrowly defined success criteria, the pragmatic concerns identified by managers provide a legitimate way for managers to resist full investment in the process.

Strategies such as 'across-factory activities' and 'encouragement to share learning' require changes to the social relationships between factory managers and others. We saw in the literature review that practices such *decentred collaboration* can be the site of significant learning possibilities, but will require a loosening of relationships towards open exploration and a willingness to challenge dilemma's or conventional practices. In the current environment, whilst there appears to be some knowledge sharing at a

purely technical level mainly by technicians such as the carding engineers, relationships appear to be 'prickly' and managers often defend their own engineers practice. Added to this is the sense that senior manager 'interference' with technical innovation is inappropriate and without understanding of the 'reality' of the situation. 'Doffing on the run' is a good example of this. The practice was developed at Hightex and was then *suggested* to the Lowtex manager by senior managers as an innovation worth implementing at the Lowtex factory. However, for various reasons attributed to technical differences by staff at Lowtex they could not realise the gains promised by the Hightex innovation. The pragmatic and resistant response of the factory manager (ie: concealing the failure with false figures), constructed by traditional discourse (it was their idea, don't make waves, challenge to the appropriateness of the technology is seen as negativity) had the affect of constructing the reflexive voice as something we could call *negative subversion*. That is, 'beneficial constructive challenge' has become negativity and for this manager (who has now departed the organisation) perhaps a loss of confidence in his own knowledge and abilities. In this example of the repressive affects of the traditionalist discourse, we can assume that the manager did not have the ability to navigate the power affects of the discourse instead constructing a more pragmatic discourse with which to respond to this dilemma. In avoiding the dilemma, the opportunity to create learning insights into the technical aspects of the problem and across-factory collaboration was lost. What do managers learn from this? 'Be wary of cross-factory collaborative attempts, work harder to stay ahead in the political game'.

### ***Inertia and tradition***

From the literature review we saw that, by navigating power conflicts embedded in dilemma's, managers can extend what is possible and challenge current practice. (Blackler et al.: *ibid*). In this case, it seems that managers avoid dilemmas, such as their 'unrealistic' desire to make substantive change outside their sphere of control, and express their concerns privately or not at all. The *pressures towards conservatism* described by Blacker et al. (*ibid*) are apparent within the PIP resulting in practices that are constrained by managers own beliefs about what can be achieved. In the only project example that did challenge these boundaries and relied on managers influencing sales and marketing, the project was floundering, and in the process reinforcing the prevailing discourses. Even where there are organisational crises (and there have been plenty in Tileco history) which could potentially 'overshadow normal routines' and

'loosen familiar relationships and assumptions' (Blackler et al.: *ibid*, p848) productionist concerns focus manufacturing personnel inwardly on keeping the machines going and doing more of the same with less. What do managers learn from this? Stay in the box, stick to your knitting.

Forums for evaluating whether the PIP response is relevant in the current environment are absent (at least between senior and factory management) and so PIP is constructed within the context of past experiences of senior managers which are possibly romanticized as part of the 'good old days' or in the case of newer managers lived in relation to the dynamics of other organisations. The lack of success in transplanting this experience into the current environment indicates a lack of attention to socially constructed resistances and limited *response assembly*. (Hedberg: *ibid*) Managers have not *unlearned* past responses and PIP is in effect 'more of the same' status quo traditional thinking; that is set targets, provide a structured process, impose corporate measures. This potentially closes the PIP gateway to creating new social dynamics that would encourage broad based learning and leaving PIP as just another change that will potentially 'slide off' the radar.

Hedberg (*ibid*) suggests that managers will leave the organisation if their voice is not heard, however, this does not appear to be true for a number of long term managers at Tileco. For some of the long termers, reflexivity was expressed in resistant and problematic ways (see Table 1). I encountered managers in the study, who expressed negativity without constructive alternatives, or had lost confidence in the knowledge they possessed, or orchestrated meetings, or complained about the treatment they had received, or deferred to senior manager opinion (at least in public) or offered authoritative opinionated views. This form of reflexive challenge to the status-quo creates inertia and is seen as negativity within the organisation and more significantly appears to produce resistance to other more constructive forms of reflexive challenge.

### ***Multiple Realities of PIP***

Despite PIP being positioned as a flexible and empowering process in which managers and operators can define and control outcomes, it appears that management control of PIP is vested with the CEO who approves the projects and supporting resources, and financial accountants who define project measures. Whilst the CEO is relatively accessible to managers during quarterly visits, these visits appear to be orchestrated by

managers and the CEO to demonstrate positiveness and success rather than to challenge or discuss problems (see the example of this in the next chapter). Centralised control of PIP, within an historical context of acrimony and survival responses, appears to act as a repressive force, limiting risk behaviours such as PIP projects that ‘push the boundaries’ or ‘challenge to the status quo’, or exacerbating the need for ‘good news’ stories and for managers to appear authoritative.

Further to this, with the departure of senior managers, the implication for future support for PIP is that PIP will lose its impetus unless it is engaged by senior managers new to the organisation. Within the traditionalist discourse, managers talked about ‘flavour of the month’ initiatives and because of this there is a sense that managers will just ‘go through the process’ of meeting the targets required without really investing themselves in it ... after all it may be gone tomorrow.

Looking horizontally, we saw that PIP was responded to in variable ways across the sites researched. At Midtex managers were working hard to create reflexive learning spaces within the PIP, however whilst this emerging discourse appears to be productive of new approaches at the same time it is producing pragmatic responses that constrain the reflexive voice in meetings. At Lowtex, the new more consultative style of the factory manager appeared to have a loosening affect on productionist relationships and traditional practice. And at Hightex knowledge and learning were privileged to the factory manager within PIP discourse. Thus, I found that the PIP discourse was not ‘concrete and immutable’ (McCabe: 2000, p950), rather, each factory had manipulated PIP, constructing their understanding of and relationship to PIP within the context of their own history, the constructed realities of their organisational life and what they believed possible.

### ***Resistance and reflexivity***

For managers at all levels, the reflexive voice is constrained by PIP being situated and constructed within traditional and institutionalised practice. Within these discourses managers can talk technology, manage and solve production concerns, or generate new actions that fall within their sphere of control to reduce their bottom line. The affects of the discourse are not totalising however, and we saw managers engage their reflexivity in private forums (such as the interviews or one on one discussions with senior managers) giving us insight into the constraints they experience within PIP and

other aspects of their practice. However, despite their insight into the problematic aspects of PIP and their desire to affect change to a more open dialogue, they do not appear to have the forum or the agency to do this. This is resonant with Knights and McCabe's (2002) problematic view of management control in which managers do not necessarily have the power to get others (and in this case it seems themselves) to do what is required or desired. Without forums that engage manager thinking towards the power affects within prevailing discourses, the possibilities of action are encircled and constrained within tradition and production practice constructing relationships of inertia and limitation.

McCabe (2000) notes that senior managers are often mistakenly perceived by managers on the receiving end of change to collude and be unanimous on the nature and necessity for change. However, we saw that within PIP, senior managers had varying interpretations of the intention (profitability versus productivity), the success (PIP cost savings potential to compromise production performance), the long term viability (senior managers departing the company, will PIP be overtaken by lean manufacturing), the scope (stay within your sphere of control versus desire for across-factory collaboration) and the priority of PIP projects (plenty of capital available to achieve PIP project outcomes versus long time delays in accessing capital). These inconsistencies leave spaces for managers to resist the PIP by constructing pragmatic discourses (such as, why waste time on things you cannot influence?) or making claims within the productionist or traditionalist discourses (such as, what priority is there outside of production concerns? or 'changes don't stick so why invest yourself in the latest fad?').

In addition, the implementation of the PIP was not well defined or well resourced leaving room for managers to interpret the scope and intention of PIP within the prevailing discourses at their respective factories resulting in various interpretations of what was possible.

### ***Peripheries and legitimacy***

Broad based involvement in PIP is an important but not yet achieved objective of PIP. Whilst this study did not include perspectives from people 'on the manufacturing floor', some insights can be drawn from the ways in which the legitimacy of *local knowledge* is constructed within the organisation. I argued in the Hightex factory case, that learning is privileged to the factory manager and that knowledge at the center of the

organisation (ie: held by senior managers) or expert knowledge at the peripheries was privileged over practice-based knowledge held by operators. And at Lowtex, a similar situation was observed, with managers giving greater legitimacy to expert knowledge and eagerly awaiting the eminent arrival of the new process engineer (a young person recently graduated from university). This appears to construct a situation where traditionally the operator view is not 'on the mattering mat' (Yanow: 2004). From managers comments we can build a picture of an operator's world in which their influence is most likely constrained to their 'wee circle' of operation, their knowledge is insular, and traditionally they have relied on supervisors to 'fix problems' they identify. What they actually do day to day is most likely not what is defined in the procedures, and they are resistant to 'experts' with more 'legitimate' managerial knowledge telling them how it should be done. What is significant, is that this situation could just as easily apply to managers and their relationship to the wider organisation. Traditionally, manufacturing knowledge appears to be placed on the periphery of the organisation, far from more legitimate knowledge (such as strategy and future directions, PIP performance measures, customer relationships) held by senior managers and other managers with the finance, sales and marketing divisions at the center of the organisation. Thus, managers' abilities to engage their reflexivity towards wide ranging and profitable changes is constrained by the legitimacy accorded their knowledge.

Further to this, the traditional value placed on technical expertise is supportive of *productionist* thinking giving legitimacy to 'technology and production talk' creating powerful barriers to the inclusion of non-productionist ideas and concerns. This creates a situation in which the organisation gets better and better at responding with technological innovation but ignores reflexivity aimed at challenging non-productionist concerns such as organisational responsiveness or cross-factory collaboration.

### ***Summary***

In this chapter I have described the nature of the *PIP discourse* and the interplay of PIP with prevailing discourses and their productive affects upon the reflexive voice. Firstly the *traditionalist discourse* which directs reflexivity towards the status quo and creates inertia and caution around challenge and more radical change within PIP. Secondly, the *survivalist discourse* which limits the reflexive voice to defence of opinion and constrains what managers believe to be possible within the PIP. Thirdly, the *insularism discourse* which encircles and mediates action and limits the creation of new

perspectives and knowledge that could be engaged within the PIP. Fourthly, I have also suggested that another powerful discourse, the *productionist discourse*, produced by traditional institutionalised thinking and pragmatism, is given legitimacy on a day to day basis defining how managers can practice and what they can and cannot talk about in relation to PIP.

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25 The name of this factory has been changed

26 In this section, the factory names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants in the study.

27 *Interwoven* was an organisational development initiative conducted at this site in July 2002 and is referred to in Chapter 1 and other parts of this thesis.

28 The Interwoven intervention implemented team forums based around dialogue processes.

29 The legality of this action has been challenged by the union.

30 In this example, 'doffing' is the action operators take to remove the large tube of carded (loosely woven) wool from the carding machine. Usually an operator will stop the carding machine to do this but 'doffing on the run' is the action of doffing whilst the machine is still running, hence saving machine shut down / restart time.

31 Cansis is a research organisation that works in partnership with industry.

## CHAPTER 7

# Reflexive voices and the research intervention

### Introduction

In this chapter I explore the reflexive subject from two perspectives, the first being my observation of organisational practice enacted in the North Island (NI) production meeting, PIP review meetings, and the CEO briefing. In these sections, I describe the ways in which managers appear constrained and encircled by the productionist and traditionalist discourses which predominate the meetings observed. The effects of new managers who are more challenging of the status quo are described and my own reactions to the meeting practice, particularly with the PIP objectives in mind, are included in the data.

In the second perspective, I tell the story of the action research intervention in the interview and reflexive forum sections. Within this story, my own voice becomes one of many and the difficulties I experienced in creating a reflexive space, and the constraint I felt on expressing my own reflexivity, gives insight into the power affects of discursive interplays that are experienced by others.

### North Island production meeting

North Island (NI) production meetings are regular half-day meetings held each month for all NI factory managers. In June 2005 I had the opportunity to observe one of these meetings. Present at the meeting were 6 factory managers, the financial controller, and the North Island operations manager who led the meeting. An 'invited guest', from the Human Resources Group, attended part of the meeting to talk to managers about contract agreements and absenteeism.

#### *How productionist concerns mediate reflexivity*

The *productionist discourse* dominated this meeting which in itself is not surprising given that this was a regular monthly meeting to focus on production issues. The difficulty, however, is that there are no other forums in which managers can discuss issues or ideas' relating to their management practice so this meeting was important from that perspective. The meeting practice was predominantly characterised by

instruction from the operations manager, production planning, and reporting on technical and productivity issues. Managers, particularly the long term managers, loved to ‘talk technology’ and this seemed to be an area where they appeared confident and interested.

During the production meeting there were several opportunities for managers to move into a more reflexive mode around issues not directly related to production, one of these being directly related to gaining more broad based involvement in the PIP. I found these opportunities particularly noticeable as they were almost ‘meeting interrupts’, that is, when the topic was framed by the Operations Manager, this were followed by a general silence and then a statement from one of the managers which directed the conversation into a technical or production related aspect of the topic. I interpreted this as managers being firmly located in the *productionist discourse* and when presented with an invitation to reflect upon an issue not related to this needed time to interpret the suggestion and link it to the prevailing discourse. It was almost as if the internal conversation went something like ‘how is this relevant, what does he mean, how does this relate to production?’. Two examples directly related to broad based involvement of operators in the PIP highlighted this, the first example related to Start Cards (a problem reporting system where operators can report and categorise production problems):

[Ops Manager] Let's take a look at Start Cards, we have closed out 75% and 25% are in the too hard basket. Start cards are a way of getting input from the floor for the PIP ... SILENCE ...

[Peter] ... What are the category breakdowns?

[Bob] .. Safety takes up a large percentage ...

Without any discussion on how Start Cards could be used for engaging operators in PIP, managers moved the discussion to analysis of the data relating to the problem categories noted on the cards. (e.g.: safety, quality etc.) I assumed from this that managers would then use their analysis of the cards to initiate projects that they have defined and analysed without further consultation with operators or others. “Give me your problem and I will fix it’ being a typical practice within the traditional discourse. There was no challenge on the ‘too hard basket’ and what this could mean for PIP or how operators could become involved or at least acknowledged in the PIP.

The Ops Manager, who is driving the need for managers to take PIP to the floor, later took another approach to raising the topic of employee involvement in the PIP and managers had been asked prior to the meeting to prepare for this topic:

Ops Manager "We need to talk about PIP ideas for next year. This is more of an information sharing session, discussing the merits of ideas. I've assumed you have talked with your teams, and reviewed your start cards etc'.

This assumption was not verified or queried with managers. Each manager in turn talked about what they intended to do in the coming year, which included planning for gaining greater efficiency within current processes, whether they would be reducing labour, and how successful they were in the past PIP period. Some managers sought clarification on how the PIP results were accounted for from the financial controller, indicating their concern with the measures that would be used to indicate success. The reply outlined how the PI projects are accounted for financially and what cost savings managers could legitimately claim as a result of their PI projects. The discussion was firmly locked in the *productionist discourse*, and the opportunity to talk about how to gain the participation of operators in PIP or opportunities for different kinds of PIP projects was lost.

In another example of missed opportunity, one of the new managers asked a number of questions relating to how PIP projects are defined, the criteria for prioritising, the savings goals and, of particular interest to this study, whether PIP could relate to broader based projects such as creating flexible teams or work organisation. These questions could have led to a reflexive exploration of the PIP by managers, broadening its possibilities, but was responded to by 'more of the same' thinking as the manager was directed to 'use last year's plan'. The manager was determined, however, and asked if PIP was limited to savings to DMC and if it was 3% saving, what was it 3% of? Again, the response was directive and limited measurement of PIP to financial variables.

The insular nature of the operation was highlighted by a conversation relating to a problem in one of the yarn factories. The factory manager outlined the problem and I believe that traditionally managers would have discussed more fully the technical implications of this problem at this meeting. The conversation was taken up, however, by one of the newer managers...

... [New manager] 'We had the same problem and Jeff [the electrician at the

factory] resolved this by ....[outlines the solution]'

... [Long term manager] 'I'm a bit reluctant to have this 3 meters off the ground'

... [New manager] 'In relation to that, rather than reinvent the wheel, why not give Jeff a call?'

... [Long term manager] ... SILENCE ... [and there was no more discussion on the topic.]

### *The effects of new managers*

In more recent time, appointments have been made on the basis of managerial experience and expertise. This has been a strategic change and the North Island Ops Manager is convinced that bringing new people into the business will create the kind of openness needed for creating a more participative learning environment.

... the NI is going to go through radical change ...as new people come into the business there is more of an openness a willingness to exchange ideas – Frank's new to XX factory so there is going to be a new factory manager, the technical managers new, quality manager is new, the safety manager is new – key positions. We need to balance the tradition and the experience...people like [names of some long term managers mentioned] have the knowledge of the business and then injecting these new people in that are more prepared to challenge the status quo and bit more open to ideas and so on I think you are going to see that dynamic change ... you are going to see a lot more openness about sharing ideas and thoughts across the different plants. But that's a big challenge for the NI just because of the geographical location.

Seemingly in support of this, there was a distinctive difference in the way newer managers and longer term managers approached this meeting. New managers were more challenging, inquisitive, expressive and the Ops Manager who is also new to the organisation encouraged managers to participate and question. Despite this, the meeting was littered with examples of traditional and institutionalised practices. A good example of this occurred in the discussion around developing the budget for the coming financial year (which commenced the following day). Managers were highlighting the fact that they had had no input to this process so far and felt that they needed to do this. Their lack of agency to influence this process was typified by the following response from the financial controller to which there was no further response from managers.

I empathise but the reality is that if you have ...xyz [referring to staff numbers, required outputs, manufacturing costs, etc] so your budget is set and that's the way the system works ... and you can argue this but the reality is that's what it is.

I had agreed with the operations manager that my role at the meeting would be to act as an observer and, rather than sitting at the meeting table with other managers, I was invited to sit at the back of the meeting room. As an observer at this meeting, I felt frustrated at the number of times the opportunity to ‘change the rules’ of the meeting were missed. In previous discussion with the Ops Manager, he had expressed his desire for managers to broaden the base from which PIP projects were drawn and his frustration that managers had not made this happened in their factories. Yet the unspoken rules of engagement demonstrated at this meeting were don’t challenge, stay silent if challenged, keep to productionist concerns, accept that you have no agency except within the bounds of what you are given and there was no opportunity to critique or act upon this discourse. I assumed that these were also the rules for engagement at the factory level and in my previous contact with the organisation at this level this was certainly the case.

### **PIP Review Meetings**

I observed two PIP review meetings at the Midtex factory – a practice unique to Midtex and implemented by the South Island Ops Manager for the 2005 PIP year. The Ops Manager believes that past forms of PIP have been ineffective and that by taking a more team based approach to PIP they will have a greater ability to enact the potential of PIP.

... This year I think the team aspect will be a lot more effective and powerful than it has been. To a large degree those people who lead PI projects, who are on this team, are acting alone. They are reporting to the team but we need to build that team aspect a bit more, a bit more support and help and expanding that common element. I don't think we tapping into the potential benefits of sharing experiences and sharing ideas, sharing approaches and sharing our problems to overcome... I think there is a generic element there and problems are not necessarily that different from one project to the next. And that needs to be expanded.

The review meetings were predominated by project leaders presenting their progress against the planning tool - POP (project on a page). Whilst there were prompts and attempts to generate learning from the issues that arose, again the conversations seemed trapped in the *productionist* and *insularism discourses*. Where issues had arisen in projects because of lack of agency or influence of things outside of their sphere, managers seemed accepting of the situation and discussed how they could manipulate the PIP process more successfully in the future. An example of this was a cost savings

project to change the specification of one type of carpet that required cooperation and support from the Sales Team.

... [Project Leader] There is some resistance from the sales team, Betty [the sales manager] will talk to them when she gets back. This needs to go on the agenda for the meeting that Rob [GM New Zealand Operations] presents. I'm not sure why there is resistance, its just change I guess and the need to convince customers. This could be a struggle. I have sent through the demo boards to Betty.

[Ops Manager] Are there any learning points from this for next year?

[Project Leader] It was a stretch goal so we could expect some delays.

[Ops Manager prompts for more ...] Rob tells me our competitors are using it overseas.

[Project Leader.. still on the learning points] Purchasing is trying to negotiate cheaper nylon so the price could be altered.

### **The CEO Briefing**

CEO briefings are conducted quarterly in each of the manufacturing factories and are attended by the CEO, senior managers from New Zealand and Offshore, and factory personnel. I attended a briefing in March 2005 at Hightex factory. At the briefing, the CEO and others briefed staff on performance indicators and current issues in the company. At the meeting, which was after the first sets of profitability challenges from shareholders following public listing of the company, it was interesting that the issues the company was facing were only obliquely referred to and company performance was presented positively and focused on successes the company was having. I have attended other briefings in the past and the meetings are constructed in a similarly positive way. I have generally left previous briefings feeling confident about the company and happy to be associated with it. At this briefing, however, I found it incredulous that the major issues in the media had not been discussed openly or given a greater emphasis. This was unsettling and had the affect of doubt and mistrust creeping into my mind about the honesty of the CEO and senior managers and of the organisations ability to succeed. Did personnel at the factory feel the same way?

The CEO positions himself as a 'man of the people', based on his working his way up from carding engineer to CEO, and as such he 'understands' the issues facing operators and 'wants to know' about anything getting in their way of their production performance. Factory managers in this discourse are marginalised and almost posited

as ‘hindrances’ to production. At this meeting similar themes were related and operators responded by listing the frustrations they felt about a range of issues including the air conditioning. When this particular issue was raised, it gained a swift response from the CEO to the factory manager ...

Bill, what is happening here, why isn't this fixed? [Followed by an embarrassed reply from Bill] ... I'll get right onto it.

From the factory manager's perspective, the CEO briefing seems to be a ‘time of trial’. Prior to the meeting he checked and rearranged the environment in the same way you might do for a visit from your mother-in law. Marks on the wall produced by leaks were covered with carpet samples and the factory tidied. He appeared anxious that people were dawdling to the meeting or that they might be late to the meeting. Following the meeting, he was upset that his staff had raised the issue of the air conditioning and expressed his disappointment on their negative approach to the meeting and that they felt the need to do this.

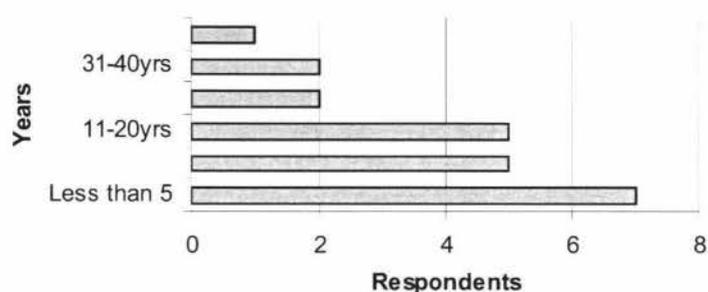
I came away from the meeting feeling I had been part of an orchestrated performance in which the reflexive voice took on all the problematic aspects of reflexivity – subversion expressed as negativity without constructive alternatives, holography denied in the lack of alternative perspectives, polyphony replaced with authoritative views of the world, and lack of space to critique power affects constructed by the meeting practice.

## **Interviews**

I began my research at the factory sites in February 2005 with a presentation to potential participants where they were invited to participate. All participants invited agreed to be interviewed and with the exception of 2 people from the Lowtex site, agreed to their interview being audio-taped. Following the briefing sessions, I interviewed 2 – 3 people per day as outlined in the methodology. The length of employment of people interviewed ranged from 3.5 months to 41 years. A large number of respondents (see figure 1) are long term employees having been with Tileco for over 20 years. This dynamic is reflective of the overall rate of long term employment within manufacturing. The conversations in the interviews produced a rich set of data for the research, but other aspects of the interview (eg: how they were arranged, whether they could be audio-taped, the motivation interpreted from what was said) were also included as data.

In the course of the research I kept returning to the dilemma that managers were highly reflexive in the 1:1 interviews but were non-participative and quiet in group forums. Their openness in interviews may have had something to do with my role as a researcher, seeing me as someone who was objective and who could reliably reflect their insights; or, because of previous interventions with this organisation where I was a conduit for raising issues with upper managers, people interviewed may have taken a more political stance, perhaps seeing the interview as a mechanism for relaying their concerns and challenges to senior managers. At times I did feel that managers were 'selling' their ideas to me and at other times I felt they were just repeating things that they had said often, perhaps without really reflecting on their response or alternative meanings. Most respondents were happy to critique the organisation or the level of adequacy of managers and past organisational responses, attributing their own lack of agency to things outside of their control, and only one or two managers reflected upon their own potential inadequacies or contributions to maintaining the 'status-quo'.

A high level of deference towards managers and experts is identified elsewhere in this study as a feature of Telecom organisational fabric. I interpreted this lack of challenging behaviour from the things managers said, or didn't say in some situations, or the ways that they behaved. For example; placing contentious issues in the 'the too hard basket', or not raising contentious issues in group forums. Relating this to the interview process, I looked for explicit examples of where I had openly challenged someone's response and their defence of this but could not find one. Thus, I realised that I had entered the 'zone of no open challenge'. Reflecting upon my own behaviour, I did not challenge because I wanted to stay 'on-side' with managers in order to continue the research. On reflection, my previous roles and in this organisation and the dissimilarities in our respective knowledge sets played a part this complicity and I was only too ready to engage with others in a manner that said: 'don't rock the boat too far or managers will not express what they are really feeling'; accompanied by 'even if I challenge, we don't have enough time and shared knowledge to make this challenge meaningful'; leading to 'I will not openly challenge your point of view or your participation in maintaining the status quo'. Reflecting on managers comments about 'picking their battles', I too seemed to slip easily into the web of prevailing discourses.

**Figure 1: Respondents number of years employed at Tileco**

## Reflexive Forums

Three forums were planned with the research participants – one at each research site and one with senior managers. Forums at each factory included all the research participants at that site and the senior manager forum included the General Manager, the North and South Island operations managers and the factory managers. This meant that factory managers attended two forums.

The intention of each forum was to feedback the initial results of the research and to engage managers with the research outcomes in the manner described in the methodology. In designing the forum, I had a picture in my mind that the forum would act as a ‘model experience’, simulating a learning forum in which managers would engage the research data in a reflexive manner. I felt that this engagement would be demonstrated by a range of behaviours including challenge to the data; inquiry about the assumptions underpinning my analysis; insights and critique that would extend our joint understanding of the power effects on the PIP; or actions that managers could take to give a greater voice to reflexive activity within the PIP. The interview process had demonstrated that a number of managers in this one on one situation were able to be reflexive about the way profitability and the PIP is practiced and I anticipated that this reflexivity would be carried into the forums. Each forum was to have four components noted in Table 9 below and I asked for 2 hours per forum, thinking that this was a minimal amount of time to achieve these objectives.

The first stumbling block I encountered was getting an adequate amount of time for each forum and in each case I was allocated only one hour for the forum. This resulted in the forums being conducted as a more typical ‘research feedback’ session rather than an interactive workshop around the results and I had the sense that managers wanted to be given answers rather than working to develop answers with me. Managers were in

the main reluctant to express their thoughts or assumptions or to inquire or challenge the ideas presented.

On reflecting upon this experience, I realised that I had not put enough effort into shaping and creating a different way of interacting with participants leading up to and during the forum. As a result, I felt the forum was constructed by participants (myself included) within the productionist and traditionalist discourses where managers expected me to disseminate the research information and, despite being encouraged to challenge and expand that information, expected not to participate and did not participate in shaping that information. Non-participation was a feature of meetings observed in the organisation prior to the forums and I felt trapped within a meeting practice that was institutionalised and powerful. We did not engage in dialogue and I felt managers were looking for ‘the answers’ or insights that would come from ‘the expert’. Although managers affirmed the analysis presented as resonating with how they understood the organisation, they didn’t express what this might mean for the organisation or for their own practice within the organisation. Managers did not question my assumptions and I didn’t explore in any depth what managers were assuming about the results or whether they initiated reflection and insight into how the results interplayed with their own practice.

**Table 9: Reflexive Forum Summary**

Forum Design	Desired Outcomes on Reflexive Subject	Actual Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frame the session by outlining the participatory role of managers in the forum and outlining the dialogue process</li> <li>• Feedback research results</li> <li>• Reflection and dialogue on the results in order to establish resonance of the data as well as generate new data for analysis</li> <li>• Feedback from managers on their experience of the forum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge and discussion of the data with participants</li> <li>• Inquiry about the assumptions underpinning my analysis</li> <li>• Shared insights and critique that would extend our joint understanding of the power effects on the PIP</li> <li>• Transformative actions that managers could take to give a greater voice to reflexive activity within the PIP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time limited to one hour per forum</li> <li>• Research results ‘presented’ rather than discussed</li> <li>• Participants affirm data is representative of the organisation</li> <li>• Limited discussion, questioning, challenge or contribution from participants</li> <li>• Only one manager provides reflexive feedback on the forum and identifies transformative action as a result of his insight.</li> <li>• Forums at factory sites more participative than the senior manager forum</li> <li>• Needed more time and different approaches to develop understanding of the concepts presented.</li> </ul>

In an attempt to recover some of this situation and gain insight into these questions, managers were asked to provide their feedback of the forum to me via email following the meeting. Only one manager did this reflecting that the forum had ‘shed light’ on the need for him to spend time thinking more strategically on the PIP and asking questions such as ‘what do we want, where do we want to be and what do we need to do to get there’. This is in contrast to their previous PIP approach which asked ‘what is easy, achievable, biggest hit for least investment’.

I was also left wondering had I connected with managers or were we talking off a different page and what were the tacit understandings they constructed from the results? I was concerned that I did not have time in the forum to develop a shared language through which we could relate to each other and understand each other. The feedback from one factory manger gave weight to this concern.

I found that I got more out of the forum yesterday than I did the first one by video conference. When considering why this was so I concluded that it was partly due to the medium. We do lose quite a lot on video conferencing. It is also to do with your tendency to use terms/labels that are not in our normal parlance and this has the effect for me of getting in the way of my understanding.

Just as I had experienced these difficulties in gaining time and having an appropriate language to develop shared understanding of learning concepts within the research, the organisation also appeared to have these same difficulties. Concepts such as PIP and more latterly lean manufacturing arrive into the organisation almost by stealth. There are limited resources and efforts dedicated to exploring the depth, breadth, appropriateness, contexts or benefits of these new initiatives and these gaps are filled either by hearsay or by ‘smart alecks’ who have appointed themselves experts in the topic or, alternatively, these are ignored in the hope that they will perhaps go away.

The second difficulty I experienced with the forums was achieving my original plan to conduct four reflexive forums – one at each research site and one with senior managers participating in the study. Only three forums were completed and I abandoned the final forum at one of the factories after having difficulty gaining a response from the factory manager at that site. This manager had failed to deliver his PIP projects for the second year running. In the current round of PIP he had taken on some substantial projects which were high risk in the sense that he was reliant on substantial funding approval via the CAPEX process and this approval had not been achieved even though he was at the end of the 12 month PIP cycle. My interpretation of his lack of response to my request

for a PIP forum was that the manager did not want to discuss this, particularly in a forum with his staff.

The 2 forums I did conduct at the factory sites were more participative than the senior manager forum and this was particularly true for the Lowtex site. This was interesting because at Lowtex, PIP had been underplayed and disliked when I interviewed participants just 4 months prior to the forum at which stage the new manager had been at the factory for 3 months. At the forum I presented my analysis of the results as in other forums, but what was different in this situation were the conversations and inquiries from participants during this presentation and the extra time the manager was willing to give to the forum (1.5hrs). Some of these conversations were around sharing knowledge that gave a broader more strategic context and meaning to the PIP (eg: relationship to lean manufacturing, PIP as investment in beneficial change rather than cutting supplier costs), all topics which seemed to be new to participants. During the forum, managers talked about the different more consultative approach of the new manager and how this has led to greater involvement in practice improvement and discussion on PIP ideas. Managers also seemed to feel comfortable affirming or challenging aspects of PIP (or other organisational practices) that they felt were positive or that concerned them. In the past 7 months, the factory manager had been focused on solving long term problems and, where once there was inertia and reoccurrence of the same problem; managers were starting to see change and movement as a result of their efforts. This movement was also occurring within PIP and the view of PIP had changed from 'something we are not interested in at the moment and that we should be doing as part of normal management practice or something not worth the effort' to 'a catalyst for achieving ideas that we have talked about for a while' and the feeling that they were 'moving toward action'. One manager commented that

... we have come up with really good stuff' for PIP this year.

We talked about the potential of the PIP to become a gateway for more participative and reflective practice across the factory. Some managers felt this was not evident at the factory and that participation was more a case of luck than skill or potential, being 'johnny on the spot', or whether senior managers 'liked your potential' or 'attitude'. One manager drew a similarity to being part of a rugby team

... the coach is subjective in picking the team, there are things the coach doesn't like and if a player can't change their attitude they don't get picked

They also talked about the need for support for initiatives once they get off the ground and a number of initiatives, such as the graduate programme, which have fallen over because of a lack of support. Aligned to this was a sense that a number of initiatives are ‘knee jerk’ or ‘flavour of the month’ changes and their reluctance to raise these issues outside of the factory walls, a theme that has been repeated elsewhere.

... Lean manufacturing is the next best thing ... it will fall over again.

## **DISCUSSION: Finding the reflexive voice within the research**

### *New managers and the production of a new management discourse*

McCabe(2000) notes in his study, that non-conformists to the *innovation discourse* were necessary to its reproduction as this created the opportunity to create a discourse around “old-fashioned approaches”. Applying this concept to PIP, we turn to the role of managers who are new to the organisation. They talk of ‘modern management’ approaches being needed in manufacturing, articulating their aspiration that PIP, knowledge sharing, external knowledge and experience and encouragement will move the organisation towards greater learning capability. The strategy to infuse the organisation with new managers is producing a number of ‘new voices’ in the company providing impetus and momentum for more openly reflexive approaches.

In the production meeting, I observed that the reflexive voice of newer managers was more public, more positively directed towards the need for change, more challenging and suffering less from the inertia of survival and tradition. This appears to be unsettling for long term managers for whom these new voices challenge existing practices and familiar relationship patterns and who respond by encircling challenge with silence, resisting or perhaps not seeing the call to change their practice and reconstitute their relationships with the organisation. Or, based on comments about ‘newcomers reported in the data, perhaps they have seen it before and are ‘waiting it out’, they have endured and learned to how to navigate the repressive affects of survivalist claims and have seen others come and go in the attempt. Productionist and other institutionalised practice also make claims on long term manager’s construction of new managers approaches, and perhaps there is a sense of ‘yes, but we know how it really works’ in their silence.

At Lowtex, managers appear to have been highly influenced by the new manager’s approach which is more consultative and, significantly, is action orientated towards

solving long term problems at the site. As a result of this, there appears to be movement towards greater public reflexivity, a feeling of greater local control and less resistance towards PIP.

Newer manager's impact on the reflexive voice is potentially a catalyst for reconstructing the truths about the organisation, how we practice, and what it is legitimate to talk about.

### *Meeting practice and reflexivity*

Meetings, meetings, bloody meetings! Managers spend an inordinate amount of time in meetings (formal and informal) and in this case study meetings are predominated by productionist issues. Meeting practices therefore are significant events in which power and control relationships are played out. In taking a closer look at the above meeting examples we can gain some insight into the nature of these affects.

At the CEO briefing, managers (including the factory manager, senior managers and the CEO) undermined their own agency to affect new ways of practicing through their failure to engage reflexivity in a constructive way. Senior managers are committed to CEO briefings feeling they are 'coming closer to the people' and perhaps building their confidence to 'capture their hearts and minds'. Thus, whilst the CEO briefing is a serious attempt to change the nature of practice and relationships in manufacturing, it in fact reproduced the power affects of prevailing discourses. Underlying what was said at the briefing seemed to be voices that said 'we will give you our problems and your job is to fix them' and 'I am prepared to listen but not prepared to take responsibility for the limited resources managers have to run their operation' or 'if you make a mistake I will publicly embarrass you causing loss of face'.

Whilst managers were reflexive in private about their concerns, aspirations and issues with the company, their public meeting behaviour did not reflect their real objectives or concerns. The production meeting is a good example of this and attempts by the Ops Manager to engage greater reflexivity towards PIP on the part of his managers fell flat against the more powerful productionist claims. Within this context, the assumption that change will occur through 'encouragement and structural redefinition' is perhaps naïve and other actions are needed to produce competing discourses related to 'new ways of doing things'. Potentially, this will only occur when legitimacy is given to: a) other forms of managerial practice that redefine manager's relationship with the

organisation (such as strategic forums); b) agency to act outside of their own sphere (such as leadership of across-factory projects) and; c) engaging other forms of non-technical or productionist knowledge (such as discussing power affects within current practice).

### ***My own voice within the research***

My aim within the research was to place my own reflexive voice alongside managers and others as one non-authoritative perspective amongst many. However, whilst the insights I presented in the reflexive forums were well received, acknowledged and affirmed by managers, and perhaps given more legitimacy than their own local knowledge. Thus, their influence was moderated by the lack of group dialogue to construct shared insights and actions with the manager group. I felt our ability to engage in dialogue about the results was also compromised by the lack of a shared language with which to express and discuss the findings of the research meaning multiple voices in the research were most often reliant on my interpretation of what was said or done by others. In the later interview sessions there was greater opportunity to explore multiple interpretations of the power affects within PIP however my own complicity in not 'rocking the boat' produced limitations on this.

Further to this, the prevailing discourses discussed in previous chapters, made various claims upon my interactions with managers in the research. My time with managers in reflexive forums was limited revealing either: the lack of priority placed on learning contexts such as group forums; or the lack of understanding of the process we were engaging for the research; or the 'flavour of the month' focus on current concerns (the reflexive forums were conducted at the end of the research period by which time other issues had replaced PIP as a priority). Manager's needs for actionable solutions to the 'learning problem' were paramount. I felt that these affects would perhaps have the affect of pushing managers interpretations insight and critique of the results underground to the realm of 'smart-alecks'. Or that the conversations and insights we did share would diminish and fade away amongst the hubbub of more powerful prevailing discourses. In these ways, I felt the research was limited in its ability to *transform and redefine* (Alvesson et al.: 2000) the researched organisation.

### *Implications*

The lack of shared knowledge of the subjects under discussion and issues with the language I used inhibited participation, challenge, and contestation of the research results. I argue that this is significant as, perhaps in the same way, manager's participation at other meetings, including meetings with their operators, is inhibited by insularism and productionist concerns producing the lack of new contexts with which to form debates and discussions leading to new insight and knowledge. In addition to this, with no opportunity (because of time or tradition) to critique the meeting rules or the new approach or existing practice (seen as negative) managers are caught within the prevailing discourses, unable to challenge them publicly, perhaps even unaware of them. To extend this even further, without the freedom to contest and develop insights into the limitation of these discourses, managers are unable to transform and redefine their experiences and organisational practice.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to investigate the social affects that free or constrain the reflexive voice within the profit improvement process recently re-instated by Tileco Manufacturing. I did this firstly by defining the reflexive voice using Harley et al's (2004) definition of researcher reflexivity and applying this to a managerial context. In chapter 5, I reviewed the history of Tileco and the lived experiences of managers during their period of tenure with the company in order to discover what was important to them and to find how reflexivity was expressed within varying social contexts. From these stories, and engaging a critical discursive approach, I interpreted two socially constructed predominant discourses. Firstly the traditionalist discourse within which insularism and survivalist concerns constructed what managers believed about the company and what they could legitimately talk about, at least in public forum. In chapter 6 I reviewed the nature of the PIP and identified the productionist discourse within which managers conducted their affairs in highly institutionalised ways constructing how they could practice and what they believed was possible within PIP. Managers' abilities to step outside of the box, to challenge the status quo, or to create the social conditions for broad based learning is encircled and mediated by these discursive affects.

Within the PIP process managers recounted shared experiences of constraints upon PIP across the factories studied. The PIP interplay with prevailing discourse was not totalising in its affect, however, and I found the response to PIP across the three sites studied varied, providing the opportunity to explore the situated nature of discourse. This was discussed under the heading of 'multiple realities of PIP' in Chapter 6. Pragmatic resistances which limited managers personal investment in PIP were constructed in private conversations and ways of thinking by managers who on a day to day basis were confronted with inconsistencies within the PIP discourse such as those outlined in the conclusion to Chapter 6. Across the sites, the history and traditions of each plant and the affects of new managers on challenging traditional approaches and engaging public expression of reflexivity were important in constructing these diverse responses to PIP.

Finally, as outlined in Chapter 7, I attempted to put the findings of the study to action through reflexive forums, finding my own attempts were constrained and mediated by the expectations of managers for tangible, 'doable', and observable results. I underestimated the power the prevailing discourses have in constructing experience and action and the importance of a shared language with which to engage reflexive conversation. The learning perspectives I presented did not appear to be given legitimacy by managers and were perhaps only picked up by one manager who provided feedback following the forums.

As we saw in these chapters, power is a force enacted in a myriad of social interactions and management practices that produce certain effects on managers', and others, constructing their experiences and their various freedoms to engage reflexive learning within PIP. I set out to find a reflexive voice and found expressions of private reflexivity in interviews, which led to more problematic public expression such as negativity without solution, subversive resistance to new practice, avoidance of risk and dilemmas, or smart-aleckery. However, the public positive expression of reflexivity as polyphonic, holographic, subversive and sceptical voices, which infers a less painful experience for managers was absent and avoided.

In investigating the discursive effects surrounding PIP, I found that relationships were contextually defined and encourage the you to see each opinion or idea expressed in this research as micro-examples of the interplay between power and learning, providing insight into the things that free or constrain people from expressing ideas and implementing changes that drive real and broad based profitability improvement. In investigating the PIP we have gained some insight into what managers hold as 'true' within the PIP discourse and how this might construct their various freedoms to engage in higher level learning practices. I personally found the challenge of navigating these 'truths', contradictions, and hidden resistances around PIP a daunting one. Like taking a stroll though the labyrinth-like house of mirrors, the results reflect a number of conflicting realities.

### **The PIP Gateway**

The PIP has the potential to operate as a *learning gateway*, opening up the future and releasing the potential of Tileco people to enact their ideas by participating in broad based and wide ranging initiatives that challenge the status quo in order to return

profitable outcomes. Structured practices and policies do not directly enhance reflexivity (Argyris: 2004a) however they can facilitate conditions in which reflexive learning can occur and there were examples of this starting to happen at Midtex and latterly at Lowtex. However, as we saw in Chapter 6, these resistances to openness and challenge were expressed in private by some managers at these sites. The actions of senior managers in discouraging open challenge and critique, which they saw as negativity, and which in a number of cases was in fact *negatively subversive*, is significant. Perhaps if senior managers took opportunities to reflect upon power effects within traditional and productionist thinking and the transformative actions that could potentially arise from constructive challenge of these effects and gave greater legitimacy to practice-base knowledge they would begin to loosen relationships towards a more openly reflexive organisation.

Whilst the PIP is a structured process, it does not prescribe what can be changed, how projects are implemented or potentially the scope and boundaries of change. Real change appears to occur when shared constructed meanings can be acted on through public reflexive activity as was observed in the Lowtex factory. Strategies observed in Chapter 6, such as the recruitment of non-technical managers from outside the company with more consultative management styles, more resource to achieve PIP and upskilling in measurement of outcomes have potentiality to support the development of a shared language and public expression of reflexivity. As such, PIP has potential to be a framework of high level learning through which managers and their people can find a voice to openly express their ideas, trial new ways of doing things, and contest current practices or ideology towards meaningful and profitable change. The challenge to this potentiality is that it will be overtaken by survivalist concerns in the latest profitability crisis, or left high and dry by the departure of senior manager or slide off the radar as managers begin to focus on lean manufacturing.

## **Experiencing Action Research**

Action research is a collaborative effort and some aspects of this action study resonated with Blacker et al.'s (2000) observation that

... Although the project began and ended with considerable expressions of goodwill, the practice of industry/academe collaboration proved precarious.(p843)

As in their study, the reflexive forums in this case highlighted differences between my expectations of joint analysis and insight and managers expectations of prescriptive lists of problems and actionable items. The precariousness of the process was also apparent in the difficulties I had in finding a common language with which to discuss and interpret reflexivity and learning as outlined in Chapter 7. This raised a question about how the critical action method could become a more effective intervention. Does non-productionist language inhibit participation by managers and in turn take away the legitimacy of knowledge produced by the research? Whilst I started the research interviews by asking participants to 'tell their story of the organisation', the insights fed back to participants were from my own perspective. Upon reflection, it may have been useful to linger within the stories told by participants and present the results from this more legitimate perspective. The initiation of the research was driven by me with managers taking a back seat and relying on me to design and define the research. Again upon reflection, I felt it would have been more effective to be more forceful about engaging managers at this early stage to define and act upon the research itself coming to a clearer understanding of what it was they wanted from their participation. A useful area of future research would be to investigate whether how the critical action method can be engaged more effectively towards creating shared understandings of the research outcome.

Further to this, with only having 6 months in effect to complete data gathering for this research, there was not enough time to adequately develop the context and relationship for meaningful dialogue and action. So it seems that the critical action method requires more intensity and time than was allowed in this study. My previous relationship with this organisation helped me to interpret the limited interaction with managers and without this I am not sure whether I could have gained enough insight within this time frame. Despite this, the moments of insight and critique (Alvesson et al.: *ibid*) were at times very powerful forces in reconstructing my perspectives on my own practice which are discussed below.

Since completing the field work in July 2005, I have had limited contact with Tileco and, with limited feedback, I wonder if the actions we undertook in the course of the research have also produced effects on manager's perspectives. Is the organisation listening more to the multiple perspectives presented by reflexive voices? Perhaps one of the difficulties with investigating organisational learning is that the story is

continuously created with historical events and other interventions playing an often anonymous role in constructing the current realities of learning. My hope is that this research is one of those interventions.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners**

I have attempted to give some insight into the discursive affects constructed by organisational histories, managers and significant events on the lived experience of managers and others within the organisation in the hope that these insights will be useful to people within organisations struggling to find expression of their reflexive voice towards learning and growth. One of the troubling biases presented in the functionalist literature is that the reflexive voice appears to only be accessible to organisational members through interventions by consultants or other practitioners. Further to this, as we have seen, theoretical literature is too removed from practical concerns to be of use to managers who are most often seeking prescriptive and normative solutions. Given the problems identified in the managerialist literature, practitioners (myself included) have a responsibility to act in ways that engages the reflexive voice beyond normative prescriptions toward revealing power affects within the discourses (such as shared vision or new PIP practice) that managers are seeking to implement. This could include spaces to challenge the appropriateness or desirability of the intervention itself or acknowledgement of the need for positive political behaviours or the limits of control managers have to reconstitute employees.

Finally, my own learning in this research has been to gain a deeper appreciation of the complexity and ‘messiness’ of social affects upon learning; development of a critical view towards the prescriptive and normative approaches I have engaged in the past to achieve organisational learning objectives; greater insight into the strengths and shortcomings of my own organisational development practices; and feeling less certain about my own, let alone managers, abilities to control outcomes from learning interventions. I encourage practitioners to reflexively engage with managers to position themselves not as the expert but as one voice amongst many; listening for and contributing to diverse interpretations of events; contributing insight into power affects constructed within and by organisational practices, conversations and the development intervention itself; and supporting insight with negotiated action.

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## APPENDIX 1: Informed consent and confidentiality

### Research overview to the research organisation



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**Research Overview: *Finding a Reflexive Voice*- ... researching the problems of developing reflexive learning within a New Zealand Manufacturing Organisation.**

#### Research Objectives

Whilst there is a large body of 'practitioner' literature about *Learning Organisations* there is a gap in the research literature supporting some of the claims made within the literature. Experience of a recent and difficult implementation of a team-based learning practice within a New Zealand manufacturing company alerted me to the need for studies which focus on how people experience learning.

The research has 2 key aims:

- 1) understand how people's experience of reflexive learning is moderated by the issues of power and control
- 2) develop greater capability for managers to engage in reflexive learning practices

This study recognises the links of learning and power. By conducting this study, we should gain some insight into how people within organisations can feel free to participate in new organisational learning practices in ways which are less painful to members and more beneficial for the organisation.

#### Research Method

I will conduct the research as a case study across three plants in the same Manufacturing organisation that sparked interest in this study. The case study will explore the Profit Improvement Process (PIP) which has recently been introduced into the organisation and which it is felt is not delivering it's potential benefits.

I will use a critical action research method for the project. This will allow me to achieve two things:

- 1) Investigate the ways in which power and control moderate participation in this new process.
- 2) Influence change towards greater reflexivity within the PIP.

The research will use a *critical action research* methodology. *Action research* is an applied method which seeks to both solve a research problem such as the one posed by this study (understand how people's experience of reflexive learning is moderated by the issues of power and control) and also to facilitate change in the research organisation (develop greater capability for managers to engage in reflexive learning practice). In action research the role of the researcher is two-fold with the researcher acting both as a change agent working with the case organisation to fulfil their needs and a researcher meeting the needs of the research community. Note: The implementation of any actions requiring change to practice are the responsibility of the participants or their agents.

The research will be conducted in manufacturing plant sites in [Lowtex, Higtex and Midtex]. The intended participants are senior managers and plant managers and some senior operating staff within one company - potentially 15 managers and senior staff. These people are the main actors in the case study and also have the ability to effect changes to the PIP process by developing new practices based on the research findings. The research will focus on three manufacturing plants within the group.

Potential participants will be recruited by invitation following a briefing by the researcher to Managers on the purpose and methods of the research.

The selection of the following methods to obtain the data for this study is based on the different requirements of both the change agent and researcher paradigms:

- 1) I will conduct interviews with managers designed to:
  - encourage managers to talk about the incidents or events that have produced their organisational experience
  - identify the inclusion and exclusion rules that produce the ways that profit improvement, learning and innovation are talked about and practiced.
- 2) Observation of practices, artefacts and interactions in a range of formal and informal contexts including briefing meetings, production meetings, team meetings, and social settings.
- 3) Reflexive Forums: Focus groups which will provide opportunities for feedback, joint diagnosis and verification of the data and joint action planning. Data will be presented in summarised form which does not identify individuals – eg: potential rules of inclusion and exclusion which produce the ways that PIP / learning is talked about; potential inconsistencies / resistances / reinterpretations of the PIP; official and unofficial views of the PIP. Professional facilitation techniques will be used within the forum to ensure a climate of inquiry, safety and ownership of the research is created. Specifically,
  - Using encouragement, openness, confidentiality and support to create a climate of safety where participants can disagree, inquire, and tension or stress is acceptable and openly processed within the group
  - Using participative decision-making to encourage cooperative inquiry
  - Agreeing ground rules relating to how the group operates from the outset.

Participants will also be up-skilled in the action research method, dialogue and personal reflection techniques and 1:1 debriefing will also be available to participants.

#### **How much time will participants have to give to the project?**

A large part of the project is observation of the practices engaged by the managers. Additional time will be required for reflexive forums and also for meetings with individual managers. An estimated 6-8 hours per person will be required over and above the observed practices.

#### **What are the possible benefits to the participants?**

It is expected that the organisation will benefit both from the insights and subsequent changes they make to their innovation and profit improvement process as part of the action research project.

#### **Is there any risk to participants in the research?**

The risk of harm is low. However there are two considerations for the research:

- 1) The practice of reflexivity requires people to confront certain conditions and practices they have a hand in creating. This can be challenging and potentially uncomfortable for individuals.
- 2) Venturing into the arena of power and control could reveal some not so desirable aspects of these relationships.

These risks will be moderated using the following strategies:

- 1) The forums will be facilitated using professional facilitation techniques including creating a safe environment (psychologically, physically and emotionally) in which to participate and being sensitive to political issues. Participants will also be encouraged to have 1:1 meetings with the researcher to discuss any issues they have with the research process / outcomes.
- 2) Participation will be voluntary and managers will be invited to participate in the research and will have the ability to cease participation in the research at any stage.
- 3) Participants will be fully briefed on the research at the beginning of the research and asked to formally give their consent to participate. Participation in the action methodology means they will continue to be informed as the project progresses.
- 4) The action research method is a very transparent methodology in that the researcher and participants work together to define, review and legitimise the research outcomes.
- 5) The names of individuals will not be identified in the research write-up. The name of the company will be kept anonymous unless they wish it to be published.

Researcher: Kaye Paardekooper

## **Letter of endorsement to research participants from the research organisation**

27 October 2004

«Name»  
«Title»  
«Plant»

Dear «FName»,

Kaye Paardekooper will be conducting a research project (Finding a Reflexive Voice) in three of our plants from the end of October 2004 through to March 2005. The research is focused around the PIP process and Kaye will be briefing potential participants in this research on «Meeting\_Time». At this briefing she will invite your participation in the research project and give you information that will help you to decide whether you wish to participate in the project.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and your participation or non-participation in this study does not effect your treatment as an employee.

Kaye is conducting the research as a requirement for attaining her Masters in Management through Massey University.

Kind regards

Ian Barbour  
TITLE

## Information sheet for participants



**Massey University**

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Kaupapa Whai Pakihi

**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**

Private Bag 11 222

Palmerston North

New Zealand

Telephone: 64 6 356 9099 x 2777

Facsimile: 64 6 350 5661

### *Finding a Reflexive Voice* Information Sheet for Participants

My name is Kaye Paardekooper and I am a Master Student in Management Studies at Massey University. I would like to invite you to participate in research into how people experience learning and innovation within an organisation. This research is for my Masters Thesis which is being supervised by Prof. Mary Mallon and Dr Craig Prichard of Massey University. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether to participate.

This study recognises that learning occurs within a social context and that there are links between learning and power. By conducting this study, we should gain some insight into how people within organisations can feel free to participate in new organisational learning practices in ways which are more positive for members and more beneficial for the organisation.

We will use the Profit Improvement Process as a case study for this research. Managers and senior operational staff who are the main contributors to this process have been selected as participants for the research. Should you agree to be part of the research, you will be invited to participate in the following:

- **Interview:** In the interview we will discuss issues relating to the historical events that have shaped your knowledge about innovation and learning practices within your organisation. The interviews are semi-structured and open-ended. As such, we do not have a set of pre-defined questions. In the event that the questioning develops in such a way that makes you feel uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question or to withdraw your responses. The interview will be audio taped with your permission. This interview will last approximately ¾ hour and Kaye will be in touch with you to arrange a time and place to complete this.
- **Observation:** Kaye will attend meetings or other day to day operations related to the PIP as an observer. This could include but is not limited to management meetings, briefings, on the floor interactions, tearoom discussions.
- **Forums:** You will be invited to attend 2-3 group forums facilitated by Kaye at which you will review the findings of the study, have the opportunity to analyse and validate these and to develop action plans to further research or practice issues. Note: Whilst the researcher is interested in outcomes related to the research topic of implementing these action plans, implementing actions related to practice issues is not part of the researcher's role. The forum may be audio taped with your permission.

The data gathered in this study will be published but any personal data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. Confidentiality of any personal information is assured. The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only I and my supervisors will have access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results depend will be stored securely for 5 years after which time it will be destroyed.

Permission to undertake this study has been granted by the New Zealand Operations Manager. This study will be conducted within the Ethical Principles of the *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human participants* developed by the Human Ethics Committee, Massey University.

Under this code you have the following rights:

1. You do not need to participate in either the forums or the interview or observation if you do not wish without having to provide a reason to either the researcher or your employer.
2. You can withdraw from the study at any time prior to final data collation (estimated to be completed by March 2005).
3. You can refuse to answer any question.
4. You can ask any further questions about the study that may occur to you during your participation.
5. You provide information on the understanding that the researcher will keep this information confidential. You will not be personally identified in any reports that are published from this study.
6. You can request a copy of your interview transcript and correct any personal information on it prior to March 2005.

7. You can request the disposal of personal tapes, transcripts or documents made available to the researcher prior to March 2005.
8. You will be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.
9. You can request that the audiotape be turned off at any stage during a forum or interview.
10. Your participation or non-participation in this study does not effect your treatment as an employee as endorsed in the attached letter from the New Zealand Operations Manager.
11. You can request a 1:1 meeting with me at any stage to discuss or debrief any issues that arise in the research.

My role in this project is as both a researcher and a facilitator of potential changes to the way the PIP process is enacted. As facilitator my role is to encourage openness, retain confidentiality and provide support to create a climate of safety where you can disagree, inquire, and where tension or stress is acceptable and openly processed within the group. We will use participative decision-making to encourage cooperative inquiry and agree a set of ground rules relating to how the group operates from the outset and you will be up-skilled in the action research method, dialogue and personal reflection techniques.

Whilst you may find some of the issues raised by this study uncomfortable, it is anticipated that the research will have mutual benefits you, your organisation and the wider community.

Whilst ownership of the research will be retained by the researcher, your needs and conventions (e.g. protection of your intellectual property or commercially sensitive information) will be given priority in the research and the contribution of participants will be recognised in the publication of results. Any sponsorship of this project does not extend to activities that may compromise its research adequacy, ethical acceptability or the freedom of the researcher to publish the research findings.

If you have any questions about my project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me at my office (04 568 4576) or by email [kaye@paardekooper.co.nz](mailto:kaye@paardekooper.co.nz).

Yours Sincerely

Kaye Paardekooper

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/142. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz).

## Consent form for participants



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS  
Kaupapa Whai Pakihi

**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099 x 2777  
Facsimile: 64 6 350 5661

### *Finding a Reflexive Voice* Consent Form for Participants

#### Consent Statement

**THIS CONSENT FORM, THE TAPE AND TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW, THE TAPE AND NOTES RELATED TO THE FORUMS AND OBSERVATIONS WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS.**

I have read this Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree / do not agree to being interviewed

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree / do not agree to be observed.

I agree / do not agree to attend the forum

I agree/do not agree to the forum being audio taped.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name - printed**

## Permission Letter to conduct research

20th October 2004

Kaye Paardekooper  
PO Box 41002  
Eastbourne  
**WELLINGTON**

Dear Kaye,

Thank you for approaching [REDACTED] for permission to undertake research on the "problems associated with learning and innovation in a manufacturing environment". We believe that the Profit Improvement Process (PIP) will be a worthwhile focus for this research. I understand that you are conducting the research as a supervised student from Massey University and that, at the conclusion of your research in December 2005, the findings will be written up and published as a Masters thesis through Massey. I would like our company to remain anonymous in any public documents.

Based on the information provided to us I feel fully informed about the nature of the research and am happy with the approach you will take to conducting the research within the plants. I also acknowledge that your role in this project is that of researcher and that whilst the research may highlight areas of our practice that it would be desirable to change, the implementation and progression of these actions are our responsibility and outside of your role as researcher.

We are looking forward with interest on the research outcomes.

Best Regards



Ian Barbour

## Authority for the release of tape transcripts



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS  
Kaupapa Whai Pakihi

**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099 x 2777  
Facsimile: 64 6 350 5661

### *Finding a Reflexive Voice* Authority for the Release of Tape Transcripts

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, *[insert name]* in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name - printed**

## APPENDIX 2: Methodology

### Interview protocol and guidelines

#### *Finding a Reflexive Voice*

#### **Interview Protocol and Guidelines**

Based on Nitin and Herve's (2003) protocol.

*“The perfect question is till to be written” – Tolich and Davison*

I will conduct interviews with managers designed to:

- encourage managers to talk about the incidents or events that have produced their organisational experience
- identify the 'implicit' and explicit rules that organize the ways in which the profit improvement scheme, and other innovative practices are talked about and practiced.
- innovation are talked about and practiced.

The interviews will be open-ended and conversational in nature. A set of interview questions have been prepared to provide some direction to the interview. I will use critical incident and life history techniques to provide some structure to the interview.

#### **Before starting the Interview**

1. **Setting up the Interview Meeting.** Contact the manager by phone / email to arrange a time and place for the interview. Restate the voluntary nature of the interview.
2. **Preparation.** Make sure I have all the paperwork and equipment and check that a new tape is in the cassette, test the battery (take some spares) and the recording level.
3. **Introduction.** Introduce myself in the research role and go over the information sheet and the goal of the research again
4. **Complete the Consent Form.** Talk the informant through the consent form checking that they understand our mutual commitments and voluntary nature of the interview.

#### **Conduct the Interview**

5. **Conduct an interview** with the informant lasting no longer than one hour unless longer or shorter by mutual agreement. With their permission start the tape recorder and check that it is working.
6. **Start with general questions** that will provide some context for the interview data. Treat this part of the interview as an opportunity for the person to start talking and to establish an informal conversational interaction. Starting with easy questions will build both our confidence. Example Questions:
  - Check their full name, their position, how long have they been in this position?
  - Years of service with this organisation, their employment status?
  - If they are a manager what is the span of their control? How long have they been in this management position?
7. **Life Histories** Ask the informant to give some history of themselves and the PIP that they feel is relevant to this study. Keep this conversational and open ended. Example Questions:

- You have been a manager here for xx years now. If I were to write a book about this organisation and your history here, what would I say?
8. **Focus the Interview Process.** Outline the *Performance Learning Experience* triangle. Let the informant know that
- I am most interested in their "learning" and "experience" aspects of the triangle in relation to the PIP.
9. **Keep focus on the informant.** Even though the interview is being recorded it is important to make notes about my impressions of their emotions, what they give importance to (repeated themes), their body language, whether they are telling me something factual or giving an interpretive explanation of the event, questions that I want to return to, things I want to verify. Examples of probing questions:
- You have mentioned this a few times, is this something that you feel is an important part of the PIP process?
  - You seem to be feeling uncomfortable with this question / subject? Are you happy to explore this further? What do you think makes you feel uncomfortable?
  - Were you present at this event?
10. **Establishing the Chronology of Events during the interview.**
- a. Use a sheet of paper with double headed arrow drawn through the centre to help them do this. Ask the informant to mark "here and now" and then describe how they currently experience the organisation. What is it like working here?
  - b. Then work back year by year and note the critical events that relate to their experience of this organisation.
  - c. Get them to select 3 critical events - two positive and one negative. Take account of the informant's frame of reference here- ie: they may see all the events as positive or all as negative. It is important to work from their viewpoint.
  - d. Ask the informant to recount each of these events in detail. Use probing questions / rephrasing to make sure I have an accurate account of these events.
  - e. I will want to go back later and verify some of these events. It is important to make sure I have what they said actually happened, their feelings about this and the sequence of events clear in my own mind.
11. **Debrief the Interview.** Let the informant know that their interview will be transcribed and coded and added anonymously to the data gathered for my thesis. The timetable for completion of data collection is mid-2005 and they are able to contact me at any time before then if they wish to withdraw their interview from the study. Give them my contact information and thank them for their time.

12. **Interview Questions**

<p>1) If I were to write a book about Tileco what would I say, what would I include?</p>	<p>What are the main concerns people have with regard to reflexivity about their current work practices? How do people talk about Tileco and their experience of Tileco? What is important to people?</p>
<p>2) What does the PIP involve? E.g.: Development, implementation, 1:1 meetings, memos, planning cycle, monitoring, sign-off, team meetings, reporting activities. 3) Who is involved in this?</p>	<p>What subjects personify the learning discourse (potentially subjects like profit, innovation, improvement, star-player awards, budget, collaboration, teamwork, self-reflection etc?)  What are the practices within the</p>

	organisation for dealing with these subjects?
<p>4) How do you approach and implement the PIP?</p> <p>5) How is the PIP viewed by managers at all levels of your organisation? Probe to see if there are differences / similarities.</p> <p>6) What is the PIP designed to achieve?</p> <p>7) Is the PIP the best way of achieving this?</p> <p>8) How do you typically initiate, plan or implement ideas for profit improvement. How does this relate to the PIP process?</p> <p>9) Are all senior managers in support of the PIP process?</p>	How is the learning discourse contradicted or inconsistent leading to spaces for resistance such as reinterpretation, official/unofficial discourse, or pragmatic discourses?
<p>10) Describe innovation here in the plant / in the wider organisation?</p> <p>11) How are PIP goals set?</p> <p>12) Do you / how do you give input to these goals?</p> <p>13) Can you challenge these goals? How is this done?</p> <p>14) What value does the PIP process add to your organisation?</p> <p>15) What kinds of ideas / projects are given priority? How is this done?</p>	Who defines ideology / vision around learning, innovation, PIP?
<p>16) Whose opinion counts within the PIP process?</p> <p>17) How do you see yourself in the PIP process?</p>	How does knowledge about subjects relating to these discourses acquire authority?
<p>18) When we talk about learning, profit improvement and PIP what words / phrases come to mind?</p> <p>19) Innovative processes like the PIP often require people to be critical of their current practices ... how do you achieve this?</p> <p>20) Are there any aspects of the PIP (or generally other innovative learning processes) that are difficult to talk about either with your colleagues / senior managers/ employees? Probe why these are difficult. Do you / how do you overcome these difficulties?</p>	What are the rules of inclusion and exclusion which produce the ways that profit improvement plans (PIP) and learning are talked about?
<p>21) Have you always practiced innovation / knowledge sharing in this way?</p> <p>22) How has innovation / profit improvement happened in the past?</p> <p>23) How would managers have talked about profit improvement 5 + 10 years ago?</p>	How has the learning discourse emerged over time?
<p>24) In the past 5 -10 years, has anything changed in the way things are done that has an impact on PIP or other learning / innovation processes?</p> <p>25) Over this time, can you think of 3 critical events that you feel changed your view of learning and innovation processes or the organisation for the better or the worse?</p> <p>26) Establish a chronology of events (see item 10 above for how to).</p>	What has contributed to the emergence of the new discourse and the decline of the old one?
<p>27) What resources are provided to achieve the PIP? Who provides these?</p> <p>28) What do you / others do to create time / knowledge /</p>	Is priority given to creating learning spaces? Who gives this?

<p>ideas for profit improvement?</p>	
<p>29) If you could do anything or change anything here at the plant or in the wider group to create a more profitable business.. what would you change? Can you make this happen? How would you do this / Why couldn't you do this?</p> <p>30) Who do you talk to about your ideas? Where or when do you do this?</p> <p>31) If an idea / innovation requires change outside of your span of control how do you achieve that change?</p> <p>32) Who do you talk openly and freely to about how you feel about the PIP process?</p> <p>33) Does the PIP lead to major changes to operational practice within your span of control? Probe examples.</p>	<p>How does the enactment of power interact with reflexive practice? e.g.:          how much freedom to act on the boundaries of social interaction?          Democratic behaviours?</p>

**Following the Interview**

13. **Expand my field notes.** It is important that I sit down as soon as possible after the interview to reflect on the interview and expand my field notes. Allow time between interviews to do this in order to avoid forgetting items or mixing up different informant's replies. Ask: What were my impressions? What did I observe before and after the interview? Is the interview working – does anything need to be adjusted (e.g.: interview strategy, timing, introduction)
14. **Code and administer the Interview Data.** It is intended that I will personally complete all the interviews for this thesis. The interviews will be conducted across several plants. Create a code for the interview using the following system: <YYMMDD> <2 letter plant code><INT> <informant code> . Code and file the consent form, cassette tape and my field notes. Note: the consent forms will be stored separately to the data. Write protect the cassette tape and file in the tape box.
15. **Transcribe the interview.** Create a complete transcription from the cassette and store electronically using the interview code.
16. **Say thank you.** It is a privilege to gain access to an organisation for research purposes. Send a thank you note to the informant. Keep any promises I made to the informant about sending information.
17. **Update my interview Guide and Protocol** based on *two directional analysis* and things that did and didn't work (e.g.: time, length, equipment).

## Interview Sheet

### Interview Sheet

Name:

Location:

Yrs with organisation

Employment Status

Position:

Time in this position

Span of control

	Repeated items (what they give importance to, Fact or interpretation, were they there?)	Body Language / Emotions / areas of discomfort .. explore
If I was to write a book about this organis'n and your history here, what would I say?		
Critical Events timeline ...		
Organisational Practices + Terms used to describe PIP, innovation, practices, processes		
Defining ideology and vision		

	Repeated items (what they give importance to, Fact or interpretation, were they there?)	Body Language / Emotions / areas of discomfort .. explore
Contradictions inconsistencies leading to resistance		
Knowledge acquiring authority		
Rules of Inclusion and Exclusion		
Emergence of learning discourse		
Priority for learning spaces		
Power to enact reflexive learning?		

## APPENDIX 3: Research Data

### Reflexive Forum: Presentation slides

**Finding a Reflexive Voice**

Developing Reflexive Learning within a New Zealand Manufacturing Organisation

**The Research**

- Background
  - Large body of practitioner literature about Learning Organisations
  - Gap in the research literature supporting some of the claims made within the literature
  - Experience of a recent and difficult implementation of a team-based learning practice within a New Zealand manufacturing company alerted me to the need for studies which focus on how people experience reflexive learning within organisations
- Focus of this research: Case study on Profitability Improvement Process (PIP)
- Research Question: What are the social forces that constrain or free managers' participation in the PIP?

**What has happened so far ...**

- 22 one-hour interviews with plant managers, the GM Operations NZ, Manufacturing Managers Woven - NI Plants, and other senior technical and operational personnel involved in PIP
- Observation of PIP meetings, CEO briefing, production meetings
- Review of some historical (published) information
- In most cases, the interviews were audiotaped and the main themes of the interview transcribed resulting in a set of rich data...

**Finding the Reflexive Voice**

- Research Goals:
  - To develop greater capability for managers to engage in reflexive learning practices
  - To understand how people's experience of reflexive learning is moderated by the issues of power and control
- This study recognises the links of knowledge and power. By conducting this study, we should gain some insight into how people within organisations can feel free to participate in new organisational learning practices in ways which are less painful to members and more beneficial for the organisation

**What is Reflexivity?**

- Reflection leading to insight: „Accessing what you didn't know that you didn't know.“
- Depth of conversation through a willingness to reveal personal beliefs and assumptions
- Searching for your own 'mental models' – what is my story about the world? Ability to challenge your own thinking.
- Honest self assessment, and recognition that your current personal or organisational capabilities may be a hindrance the future: „Seeing how we contribute to our own problems“
- Accessing tacit knowledge or 'know how' in self and others

**Critical Action Research**

- What it means to be critical: to look at ongoing social reality from new perspectives and provide inspiration to change things that dominate our thinking and lead to constraints in human decision making.
- Research Approach:
  - How do we do things around here?
  - How do we talk about ourselves, the organisation and profitability?
  - Our framework of knowledge about these questions is tied to our power to get things done
  - Creating spaces for managers (and myself) to construct, contest, inquire about assumptions, express diverse viewpoints and challenge whether prevailing knowledge sets and organisational activities related to profit improvement, the PIP and the research itself are relevant or useful.

### Today's Forum

- **Insight:** new ways of seeing, researcher's insight is just one view
- **Critique:** revealing dominating viewpoints, exploring alternative perspectives
- **Transformational Re-definition:** insights leading to inspiration for new responses to the current situation

Finding the Reflexive Voice

### Today's Forum: Questions

- How am I responding to this theme?
- Why am I feeling / responding this way?
- What are the values / assumptions in this set of knowledge?
- Why are managers making particular claims, or adopting particular attitudes / responses?
- What are the dominant viewpoints on this? Who holds them?
- Are there any inconsistencies / conflicting viewpoints / breakdowns in practice in relation to this? How do we fix these?
- How could we look at this differently?
- What are we paying the most attention to (measurable / quantifiable knowledge or more subjective knowledge)?
- What are some potential courses of action to give greater power to enact profitable activity?

Finding the Reflexive Voice

### Your Experience of this Forum

- This forum is itself part of the research process
- At the end of the forum, I will ask you to take a few minutes to write down how you experienced this forum

Finding the Reflexive Voice

### The PIP

- Seen positively by most managers interviewed
- The PIP operates alongside normal business activity – is an add-on
- Support provided for achieving PIP has increased this year (its working fully)
- PIP operates differently across different sites
  - PIP is seen as important for some sites
  - Developed / reinforced / not yet managed / central / limited knowledge of PIP by some people interviewed
- Differences in views on profitability and the role of PIP
  - PIP is what managers should be doing anyway
  - PIP is cost cutting / cost profitable / doing well in PIP does not necessarily mean doing well with profitability
  - PIP is to: work in regular way, done and whatever, seen to improve profitability
  - PIP is not designed for profitability in PIP is merely 'not doing anything to improve profitability'
  - PIP is to encourage / have not / have seen it as more people at the business do / consider
  - PIP is good business practice and we should do it in the business as a whole like this
- More focus on accountability and measurement / or attempting to measure savings generated by each initiative
- Focus on PIP has come and gone over the years – has been in existence for 2 years?

Finding the Reflexive Voice

Research Theme (1)

### PIP as an 'Emerging Gateway'

- PIP is a framework, set of techniques, system of control and monitoring that can be utilised and is attractive because it provides 'clout' to achieve ideas where managers feel they have not had this before.
- Potential to open up the future because it does not define what needs to be done but has the potential to encourage people at all levels to enact an endless array of forward thinking, wide ranging ideas for profit improvement.

Finding the Reflexive Voice

Research Theme (1) PIP as a gateway

### Contradictions, Disjoints

- Getting blood out of a stone – cost cutting thinking
- Working into the Process – low hanging fruit, focus on projects that are feasible within current resources (time, knowledge, expertise)
- Pragmatic Resistance – The money has always been there – Managers have been self-limiting in accessing it – We would have probably done it anyway – Managers should be doing this anyway – (not my job?)
- Robustness of the Evaluation Process – Defining measures is difficult
- Limitations on idea generation – brainstorming big projects, big ideas what is currently known, insanity: small numbers of people inputting to process
- Limitations on Resource – Money (some respondents), time, knowledge, expertise
- Non-strategic – limitations on pay back period, emphasis on short term fixes, no real helicopter view, working hard to stand still
- Planning cycle (PIP is add-on / short lead times)

Finding the Reflexive Voice

## Template Project on a page (POP)

### PROJECT ON A PAGE

Month:  **Status:**

Project:  **Site:**

Project Leader:

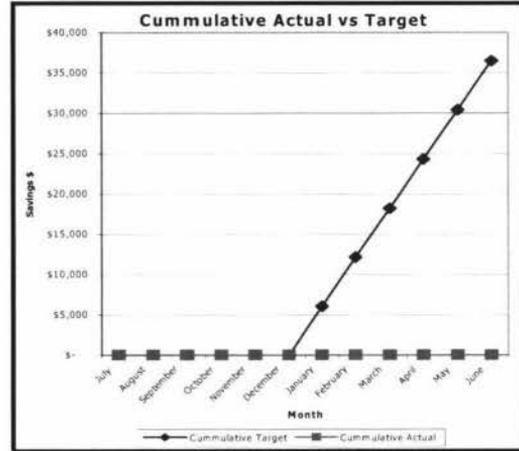
Savings start date:  Plan 05 savings:

Capex cost:  Savings/month:

Capex submitted:

Capex approved:

Phasing:			
Month	Cummulative Target	Actual	Cummulative Actual
July	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
August	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
September	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
October	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
November	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
December	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
January	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
February	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
March	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
April	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
May	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
June	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -



Key progress for the month:	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	

Key obstacles encountered for the month:	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	

Key activities for next month:	

### EXAMPLE: Edited notes of the North Island Production Meeting: 30/06/2005

For the purposes of anonymity, the names of managers at this meeting have been removed and replaced with the following:

- LTM (long term factory manager)
- NM (new factory manager)
- (OM) NI operations manager
- TM (technical manager)
- FC (financial controller)

Actions / topics / what was said	Insight / notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferred Supplier for doctor</li> <li>• LTM 'Most accidents happen on the weekend'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed opportunity to discuss this issue more fully</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LTM feedback on brass innovation – questioned by yarn plant managers on technology – questioned by OM on yield.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Again love to 'talk technology' only Scott focused on yield managerial outcome of the technology.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break – rugby discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LTM, PA</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LTI discussion - targets, performance, need to focus on LTI, understanding measures – feeling that these are incorrect (hard work to put in but no results showing this)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge to figures made by OM – others did not contribute.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site safety plans review – needs to use it – site H+S committee responsibilities made clear, input issue etc to plan</li> <li>• Handed back to plant managers to work through with OSH committee – legal obligations under the act. NM – 'our people have no idea regarding emergency responses in some area' – handed to NM to address this at his site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Again missed the opportunity to look at empowerment?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start Cards – Performance numbers (75% closed out, 25% too hard basket. Inputs to PIP connections made by OM – getting input from the floor. Type of start card discussed (eg: how many safety issues)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on move to floor diverted into areas that managers feel more comfortable in this case data analysis. (scientific management planning)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazard Id –Process investigation – is it easy to manage the system? Midtex have redeveloped the process – explained their approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional / Information giving</li> <li>• 'Sell' by ops manager</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge on applicability of Midtex approach (LTM + NM)</li> <li>• Other experiences and ideas suggested (NM)</li> <li>• "That was a good discussion, we put it out there, let's get some more detail" (OM)</li> <li>• "I feel that if I don't drive it, it doesn't get done properly" (NM)</li> <li>• Suggests we set up a pilot (NM)</li> <li>• "Maybe we are not there yet, maybe we need to go through the pain ourselves" (OM)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance to learning from others experiences worked through by discussion.</li> <li>• Long term managers said nothing. (Why?)</li> <li>• Encouragement to challenge, participate from ops manager.</li> <li>• Reflexive .. sense of being on his own. Similar theme around need for a 'driver'.</li> <li>• Looking for solutions / action orientation</li> <li>• Reflexivity around how they need to operate and make sense of their world</li> </ul>
<p>PIP Plant updates by site</p> <p>Each factory manager talked to their update report (very technically detailed) issues and initiatives in relation to safety, quality, productivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making suggestions for improvement on managerial practice</li> </ul>
<p>NM talked about streaky carpet issue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example of silo operation?</li> </ul>

<p>NM gave example of high efficiency and related to lean manufacturing (regarding tex).</p> <p>NM called on "know how" from one LTM who has history - how we actually do it differs from SAP specs / misunderstandings still happening.</p> <p>Low productivity per person – why? – went through analysis of whys. "How do we control that" – "Its got to come by the plan – need to talk to the planner</p> <p>The way in which planning process creates bottlenecks (i.e. recovery of labour)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert, conversations.</li> <li>• Issues of control over process – trialling.</li> <li>• Disjoint between SAP (computer system managing the planning and supply process) and how things really happen put on the table but not explored</li> <li>• Emphasis on planning as way to achieve change</li> </ul>
<p>Departure of staff ... 'know how' going – things we didn't know we did</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No discussion on this. Where do they talk about these things?</li> </ul>
<p>LTM identifies opportunity to fine tune logistics identified through process engineer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LTM bringing in external focus</li> </ul>
<p>Discussion around supply chain / lean ie: info out of SAP, what we need – dismissed by problems "Oh yeah, but you only need a spinning frame to break down" etc.." lets park it with the planner"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too hard basket?</li> </ul>
<p>References back to lean manufacturing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergence of lean, discourse? How does this relate to the PIP What has driven this?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Manager came in to talk about individual contract agreements and absenteeism.</li> <li>• Contract Agreements - Questions around absorption of resource by plant to run performance review of people on individual contracts</li> <li>• Need for managers to manage LTI</li> <li>• Absence Management – "I need your feedback guys"- (NM). Discussion and then the decision "more thinking is needed"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR manager and was invited to attend this part of the meeting</li> <li>• Asked by NM – shared assumptions / views? 'How do we see this as a company' was not expressed.</li> <li>• Apparent concern for people but more concern for \$'s.</li> <li>• Didn't ask why or how came up with ... who consulted ... how designed etc .. what are people using that is working.... giving things</li> </ul>
<p>PIP ideas for next year "This is more of an information sharing session, discussion the merits of ideas .. I've assumed you have talked with your teams, start cards etc" OM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framed the conversation. Managers had been advised by email that this process was going to happen.</li> </ul>
<p>LTM went first</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was an underachieved PIP form last year</li> <li>• No labour reduction</li> <li>• Margy highlighted whether flow-on effect? Manager did not include this in calculations - explored</li> <li>• PIP combination of daily stated goal – reduce 3% DMC ops stuff and investment projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was this reviewed?</li> <li>• PIP project cost cutting gets rolled into standard way of operating in subsequent years.</li> <li>• All [long term manager] projects based in the known – gaining greater efficiency in the current process (except beam waste)</li> <li>• PIP is silo'ed and isolated into separate projects ie: it is summed up in terms of total savings but no reference to budget overall.</li> </ul>
<p>NM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a lean focus [OM] contirbues "at the end of the day if shareholders are investing money they want a return"</li> <li>• Labour reduction</li> <li>• Logistics substantial savings from utilised truck runs – additional suggestions made. [LTM] from another factory "It's our truck so its our PIP"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This sounded threatening.</li> <li>• Competition between plants?</li> </ul>
<p>LTM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 projects only just starting because of CAPEX not coming through</li> <li>• \$3986,000 investment will save 3% yield giving \$474,000 over 10 months</li> <li>• [LTM outlined a problem]</li> <li>• NM replied "In relation to that LTM, rather than</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I'm a bit reluctant to have this 3 metres off the ground" – closed to other's suggestions.</li> </ul>

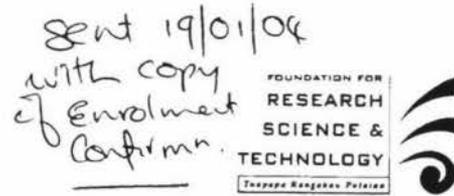
<p>reinvent the wheel give [name] a call"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no response from LTM</li> </ul>	<p>Is [LTM] feeling the heat as a long term manager? How does he feel about NM's comment?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OM - "There is a danger in these systems that we don't reconcile both sides of the equation eg: savings and investment such as reallocation of staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance to reduction in head count when talking about savings – tend to talk about reallocation of staff</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions from NM around 'what is a PIP project?'</li> <li>• [NM] What is the criteria for prioritizing projects? Work organisation – flexible teams? Can we have an indicative \$# ...what is the \$ goal? Easy to do and delivery of best savings?</li> <li>• Answer from FC – Can use last years plan.</li> <li>• NM persists 'Is PIP limited to DMC (direct material cost)? 3% reduction is part of this year's performance management – but what is this? 3% of what? How do we measure this?</li> <li>• [FC] Answer - labour, Material, Utility combination of some sort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this an example of the 'profitability discourse'?</li> <li>• Disjoint between lean strategy and financial accounting system?</li> <li>• 'More of the same' thinking?</li> <li>• Integration issue of PIP outcomes into these variables.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues around development of the F06 budget – no input into this so far.</li> <li>• [FC] "I empathise but the reality if you have ....x,y,z ... and that's the way the system works ... and you can argue this but the reality is that's what it is'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No buy-in of managers?</li> <li>• Isn't this creating inflexibility ... encouraging more of the same?</li> <li>• Lack of agency to influence the budgetary process – you will get what you are given is at odds with the aspirations of PIP...</li> </ul>
<p>Other insights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Language used predominantly</li> <li>• Long term managers very quiet and low key in the meeting.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 4: Administration

### Research timeline

Category	Task / Milestone	StartDate	EndDate
<b>Ethics Approval</b>			
	Ethics Committee Application Deadline	7/9/2004	7/9/2004
	Proposal finalised	26/8/2004	10/9/2004
	Ethics Committee Meets	21/9/2004	21/9/2004
	Ethic Approval - estimated	5/10/2004	5/10/2004
	Reworked Application to Ethics Committee	25/10/2004	25/10/2004
<b>Access to research site activities</b>			
	Set up research meeting NI Manager	13/05/2004	13/05/2004
	Phone meeting SI manager	4/06/2004	4/06/2004
	Set up research meeting NI Manager + NZ Ops manager	21/06/2004	21/06/2004
	Phone meeting SI manager	11/11/2004	11/11/2004
	Set up research meeting SI Manager	19/11/2004	19/11/2004
	Site 1: Research Briefing Session	19/11/2004	19/11/2004
	Phone meeting NI Manager	21/11/2005	21/11/2005
	Set up research meeting NI Manager	1/2/2005	1/2/2005
	Site 2 Research Briefing Session	17/2/2005	17/2/2005
	Set up research meeting NZ Ops Manager	21/2/2005	21/2/2005
	Site 3: Research Briefing Session	3/3/2005	3/3/2005
	Research insights meeting SI manager	19/07/2005	19/07/2005
	<b>Data collection planned but deferred</b>	1/11/2004	23/11/2004
	<b>Data Collection: Interviews</b>	1/02/2005	11/04/2005
	SI Manager Interview	9/02/2005	9/02/2005
	Site 1: Interviews	9/02/2005	11/2/2005
	Site 2: Interviews	1/3/2005	1/3/2005
	Site 2: Interviews	2/3/2005	2/3/2005
	Site 3: Interviews	3/3/2005	3/3/2005
	Site 3: Interviews	4/3/2005	4/3/2005
	NI Manager Interview	10/3/2005	10/3/2005
	NZ Ops Manager Interview	11/4/2005	11/4/2005
	Financial Accountant Interview	11/4/2005	11/4/2005
	<b>Data Collection: Observation of Meetings</b>	1/4/2005	1/4/2005
	PIP Review Meeting Site 1	19/11/2005	19/11/2005
	PIP Review Meeting Site 1	9/2/2005	9/2/2005
	PIP Review Meeting Site 1	11/3/2005	11/3/2005
	CEO Briefing to employees	3/3/2005	3/3/2005
	NI Production Managers Meeting	30/06/2005	30/06/2005
	<b>Data Collection: Reflexive Forums</b>		
	Reflexive Forum Senior + Factory Managers	30/06/2005	30/06/2005
	Reflexive Forum Site 2	1/7/2005	1/7/2005
	Reflexive Forum Site 1	19/07/2005	19/07/2005
	<b>Scholarship</b>		
	Scholarship Application	10/12/2003	10/12/2003
	Scholarship Approval	31/2/04	31/2/04
	Scholarship - First Report Completed	1/2/2005	21/2/2005
	Meeting between supervisor, student and company sponsor	4 meetings (as arranged)	
	Scholarship - Final Report Due	31/1/2006	31/1/2006
	<b>Supervision and Administration</b>		
	Supervisor Meetings		ongoing
	Deadline for Carry Fwd of Postgraduate Registration	31/01/2005	31/01/2005
	PHD Study Group	2/04/2004	2/04/2004
	Massey Research Day 2004	22/06/2004	22/06/2004
	Massey Research Day 2005	28/06/2005	29/06/2005
	Thesis Report Deadline for Submission	16/12/2005	16/12/2005

## Scholarship approval letter



File: ENT 1563

9 March 2004

Ms Kaye Paardekooper  
52 Waitohu Road  
York Bay  
EASTBOURNE

Dear Ms Paardekooper

### ENTERPRISE SCHOLARSHIP

**Application No:** 1563  
**Title:** Finding a reflexive voice - identifying the social moderators that free or constrain employee reflexivity.  
**Degree:** Masters  
**Host Organisation:** Massey University  
**Enterprise:** Paardekooper and Associates

I am pleased to advise that the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology ("the Foundation") has approved your selection as an Enterprise Scholar upon the recommendation of the Enterprise Scholarship Reference Group.

Your application was considered and evaluated in accordance with the Scheme's criteria. The Reference Group had the following feedback on your application:

Although the Reference Group commented that the project appeared somewhat obscure it was found to be appropriate for funding in this round.

The scholarship is being offered part-time for the period of 24 months, with a budget of \$20,000.00, \$10,000.00 from the Foundation and \$10,000.00 from Paardekooper and Associates.

The budget consists of a total stipend:  
\$10,000.00 in year one  
\$10,000.00 in year two

The Foundation and Paardekooper and Associates will make payment of the annual stipend, via Massey University at monthly intervals.

The scholarship you are offered is to commence at Massey University within thirty working days from the date of this letter (**unless otherwise arranged with the Foundation**) or the scholarship will lapse.

The Scholarship is granted on the terms and conditions set out in the Notes for Applicants and your particular attention is drawn to the following points:

- *Reporting*

- (a) Every year you must provide a report to the Foundation, outlining your progress.
- (b) On completing the Scholarship you must submit to the Foundation a final report endorsed by your mentor, that meets the final report criteria, on the results on the study and research.

A set of reporting guidelines will be forwarded to you upon your acceptance of the Scholarship.

- *Suspension and Termination*

The Foundation for Research, Science and Technology may agree to a suspension of a Scholarship in circumstances as follows:

- a) Ill health
- b) Parental leave
- c) Compassionate leave

In cases where a suspension is granted, an agreement will be reached between the Scholar and the Foundation regarding recommencement of study and scholarship payment.

The Foundation for Research, Science and Technology/Tertiary Education Commission may terminate a Scholarship in circumstances as follows:

- a) The Scholar does not comply with the conditions of the Scholarship
- b) The Scholar fails to pursue the agreed programme of study and research
- c) The host Tertiary Education Institution is not satisfied that the scholar is diligently carrying out the agreed programme of study and research
- d) The Tertiary Education Commission is unable to provide funds for the scholar's agreed programme of study and research

If your Scholarship is suspended and/or terminated, you may be required to reimburse the Ministry of Education for any funds you received under the Scholarship.

- *Personal and Research/Study Details*

The Foundation may release your name, Host Tertiary Education Institution, Enterprise Name, Academic Mentor and Research Title on the Foundation website and in written material for the purposes of promoting the Enterprise Scholarships, and the Bright Future Schemes.

You have **fifteen working days** (from the date of this letter) to inform the Foundation of your acceptance of this offer (otherwise the Scholarship will lapse). Such acceptance is to be made by you countersigning this letter acknowledging that you accept the Scholarship and understand and agree to be bound by the terms and conditions of the Scholarship as set out in the Notes to Applicants. The date on which your course will or did start for the qualification sought, and therefore your Scholarship, is to be given in the space below. Further, you have **fifteen working days from the date of formal acceptance of the Scholarship** (unless otherwise negotiated with the Foundation) to provide the Foundation with certified evidence that you have full-time admission to your proposed academic course.

Should you have any other awards, which provide a stipend, and would run concurrently with your Enterprise Scholarship you must, prior to the commencement of the Enterprise Scholarship, relinquish such awards.

Please return your acceptance to:

The Foundation for Research, Science and Technology  
(Enterprise Scholarships)  
PO Box 12 240  
WELLINGTON

Should you have any queries please contact Lana Timperley in the first instance on either 04 917 7862 or lana.timperley@frst.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



Helen Gear  
**Acting Manager, Environment and Society**

cc. Ms Miralie Thomas Vincent, Massey University  
Mr Luke Paardekooper, Paardekooper and Associates  
Dr Craig Prichard (Mentor)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kaye Paardekooper

15/3/04  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date on which qualification will start or has started.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date on which Scholarship will start (if at 10 December 2003 you had commenced your degree course, the Scholarship will commence from 1 January 2004)