THE MBA EXPERIENCE BY DISTANCE EDUCATION:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

by

Dale M. Holt, BCom, DipEd (Melb), GDipDistEd (SACAE)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia.

August, 1992
I certify that the thesis entitled: The MBA Experience by Distance Education: An Ethnographic Study of a Professional Development Program, and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed

Date 12/3/93

Signature Redacted by Library
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to record my thanks to the following:

The MBA participants who allowed me to observe them at work in their study groups and during the residential schools and who also participated openly and enthusiastically in informal discussions and end-of-year interviews on their professional development experiences. I thank them for their good humour, good grace and honesty. It was a privilege to be allowed to see and interact with such a dedicated group of distance education students at work. They represented the major source of inspiration and motivation for this thesis. They convinced me of the value of distance education in meeting the continuing education needs of professional people.

My colleagues - John Viljoen and Stanley Petzall - from Deakin University’s Faculty of Commerce who participated in the collaborative research on the MBA experience. This study provided a strong foundation for the thesis.

My supervisor - Terry Evans - who provided timely, detailed and constructive feedback on various draft materials throughout the preparation of the thesis. This he did, with great energy and commitment.

Margaret Grace, who recently received her PhD in the field of distance education, for comments on draft material.

Roy Walshe - senior graphic designer - and Lyn Sceney - word processing operator - for their help in the production of the thesis.

My wife Lise and my two sons - Erik and Ben - for their understanding and patience throughout the lengthy fieldwork process. Many nights were spent away from the family, a mutual sacrifice cheerfully borne by us all.

Deakin University for providing me with the resources and opportunity to undertake such a major piece of research. The University’s commitment to the professional development of its own academic staff could not be questioned. I sincerely thank all of those people within the University who were so helpful in providing me with the assistance and services required to undertake the thesis.
# CONTENTS

**PART I: BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A conceptualisation of the research aims</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A specific conceptualisation: the interaction network</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of the research</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ethnographic study of the professional development experience</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The collaborative research on the MBA experience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory building and core statements</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2</th>
<th>THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: DEAKIN UNIVERSITY'S MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection criteria</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic and geographic characteristics of participants</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientations to study</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying by distance education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of management</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about management</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional response to the nature of the student clientele</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The MBA mission statement</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program structure and curriculum</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An introduction to the MBA interaction network</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning materials</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential schools</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study groups</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-participant relations, including the roving tutor scheme</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal assessment requirements</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sharing responsibilities between the institution and the student clientele in the MBA experience | 32 |
| Learner requirements | 32 |
| Institutional support | 34 |
### Chapter 3  LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY  

**LITERATURE REVIEW**  

35  

Research on the experience of undertaking management education  

35  

The United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) Study Methods Group research on the experience of learning  

37  

The contexts of learning  

40  

Research on how adults and professional people learn  

42  

Critical reflection, experiential learning and action learning  

42  

Further insights into the contexts of learning  

45  

THE INTERPRETIVE TRADITION  

46  

Research biography  

49  

Persons  

49  

Places  

52  

Times  

53  

Recording, organising, analysing, interpreting and writing up the data  

54  

### PART II:  INTERACTION THROUGH THE STUDY GROUP AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL  

57  

### Chapter 4  THE STUDY GROUP EXPERIENCE OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT: CULTURAL CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO GROUP ASSIGNMENTS  

59  

The new educational demands  

59  

Changing patterns of action  

60  

Learning how to approach group case studies  

60  

Group organisation  

60  

Learning about the cases  

63  

The nature of group leadership  

65  

Complex forms of interaction  

70  

Changing patterns of group norms  

71  

Group consensus making  

72  

The strengthening of individual obligations toward the group  

74  

Incongruity between individual action and group norms  

77  

Changing patterns of group values  

80
Study groups as learning communities

The importance of self- and peer-assessment skills
The peripheral role of the teacher during study group visits
The emergence of the study group as an autonomous learning community
The socially constructed role of the teacher in Operations Management

Chapter 7 MANAGEMENT POLICY, THE FOURTH YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL AND PARTICIPANT EMPOWERMENT

Defining empowerment

Study Group B: the genesis of political activism

Encounter with the course team chair of Management Policy: agendas, dilemmas and covert assistance

Expanding the network of political action: consensus, disagreement and uncertainty

The fourth year residential school

Juxtaposing experiences: encounters with the Dean of the Faculty and the University's Acting Vice-Chancellor
Participants' response: negotiating a plan of action for the future

Events subsequent to the residential school: participants' reflections on the outcomes of political activism

The fusion of MBA learning, management experience, critical self-reflection and participant activism

Implications for distance teaching institutions

PART III: INTERACTION WITHIN PARTICIPANTS' WORKPLACE AND PERSONAL WORLDS

Chapter 8 THE SEARCH FOR PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION WHILE COPING WITH PERSONAL STRESS

The search for professional integration

The Integrators
The partial integrators
The low integrators
Conclusions on participants' professional odysseys

Coping with personal stress

Initial expectations
Coping with the new reality
Strategies for accommodating the demands of the MBA program
Priority setting
The contingency-based approach to priority setting
Strategy one: compromising study standards
Strategy two: finding time in and around work
Strategy three: studying more efficiently and effectively
Participants' responses to the size and nature of the side bets
   Attitudes to responses
   Applicability of the concepts of commitment and perspective adjustment

Summary and conclusions

PART IV: THE HOLISTIC NATURE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

Chapter 9 CHANGING CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF MANAGEMENT: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FROM THE MBA EXPERIENCE

Empowerment revisited

Personal theorising on the nature of management work: a transformational process

Learning as personal transformation
Broadening management perspectives: developing a strategic view on the organisation
Deepening management perspectives: the importance of leadership, teamwork and the development of subordinates
Learning the language of management and management-related fields
The connections between conceptions of management, individual self-confidence and job performance and career opportunities

The problematic nature of the theory-practice relationship

The theory-practice problematic
   Pre-existing management conceptions and practices as the evaluative benchmark
   External validation of the usefulness of MBA learning
   The internalisation and use of MBA learning
   'Objectification' versus 'subjectification': balance achieved through a reformist approach to the selection and use of MBA knowledge

Participant empowerment through learning

Awareness of opportunities for professional growth
Pursuing opportunities for professional growth
Empowering others through theories in action

Participant disempowerment: social constraints

Summary and conclusion
Chapter 10 CONCLUSIONS: THEORISING ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

The key dimension of 'distance' to be negotiated in professional education at a distance

The roles of the teacher and learner in professional development programs by distance education

The social construction of roles in the educational experience
The role of the teacher: from centre stage to periphery
The role of the participant: from periphery to the centre stage

The nature of assessment in the professional development process

The consequences of teacher-determined assessment in the MBA program
The special significance of self- and peer-assessment skills

The implications of participants' learning agendas and frames of reference for professional curricula and pedagogies

The study group as a type of leaderless work group

Conclusion

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

A Participants' biographical notes

B Demographic, geographic, academic, intellectual and management characteristics of participants who entered the MBA program in 1988

C Schedule of visits to study groups and timing of residential schools

D Schedule of interviews with participants

LIST OF TABLES

2.1 Reasons for studying the MBA by distance learning

2.2 MBA participants' entry-level conceptions of management: the ARC framework

2.3 A student learning framework for the Deakin MBA program
9.1 Relationships between nature of job, degree of integration, stage of empowerment, empowerment strategies and barriers to empowerment 220
10.1 Characteristics of effective study groups 244

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 Conceptualisation of the MBA experience 8
1.2 Specific conceptualisation of the MBA interaction network 11
2.1 The Deakin MBA structure 24
3.1 A holistic view of the experience of learning 39
SUMMARY

The author's ethnographic study of a professional development program for managers and aspiring managers taught at a distance intends to make a substantial contribution to both the theory and practice of continuing education for professionals. The study focused on a group of Deakin University Master of Business Administration (MBA) participants and their experiences of the final two years of the program. Theorising on the professional development experience was based on data gathered from the direct observation of participants working in their study groups and at residential schools. Moreover, data drawn from end-of-year interviews with participants and discussions with MBA teachers also contributed to the theorising process. Theorising spanned a broad set of interactions encompassing participants' formal educational, professional and personal worlds.

The thesis is devoted to two aspects of the professional development experience, namely: participants' interactions in their study groups and at residential schools; and participants' attempts to grow and develop as competent professional practitioners during their MBA studies.

Interactions with key learning contexts orchestrated by the teaching institution (i.e. study groups and residential schools) are grounded in an analysis of the changing group cultures observed to accommodate the different educational demands of the program. Group interaction on a broader scale is also analysed in the context of the residential schools. The residential school provided a powerful forum for the development of participant activism over the future development of the MBA program. The analysis of the study groups in action led the author to identify the key characteristics of effective educational work groups. The implications of the success of these essentially egalitarian and leaderless groups for the formation of self-managed groups in the workplace is examined.

On the matter of professional development, the author reveals the relationships between the nature of participants' jobs, their search for professional integration, their stage of professional empowerment, the strategies they pursued either to empower themselves or others in their organisations and the barriers which were encountered in the pursuit of empowerment. Dramatic examples of professional disempowerment are analysed indicating that interaction between formal off-the-job learning and professional practice in the workplace is not necessarily a smooth and positive experience. The group of
participants studied are seen to be heterogeneous in relation to the above factors characterising professional development.

The implications of the theorising are considered in relation to professional pedagogies, assessment strategies and distance education. Distance education is seen to socially construct the roles of both teachers and students in the educational process. Specifically, teachers are seen to be somewhat marginalised during the program in use whereas the participants are located at the centre of the educational experience. The primacy of participants in the educational process is highlighted through the growing reliance on self- and peer-group assessment skills as participants progressed through the program. It is argued that the teaching institution should encourage and maintain the development of these skills as they represent a major learning outcome of the professional development experience, i.e. the ability to engage in the process of critical self-reflection and informed action.
PART I:

BACKGROUND
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES A background to the study, conceptualises the research aims in terms of an illumination of the interaction network embodied in the MBA experience and outlines the nature of the research - ethnography - including the methods of data collection. It also indicates the author's intention to develop 'micro' theorising on the case under investigation as well as 'macro' theorising from the case to other research which has been undertaken on the professional development experience.

BACKGROUND

In 1981, Deakin University's School of Management launched the first Master of Business Administration (MBA) program by distance education in the world. The fundamental aim of all MBA programs is to educate people for general management positions in a variety of different sectors, industries and organisations. Traditional MBA programs, like Deakin University's, are generalist in nature, with a strong focus on educating people to be more effective professional practitioners.

The number of MBA programs in Australia has increased from 16 in 1988 to 29 in 1990. While Deakin University held a monopoly over the provision of MBAs by distance education from 1981 to 1989, there are now five MBA providers which offer programs either completely or partially through distance education. Furthermore, there have been dramatic developments in the offering of MBA-level management education in other Western countries during the 1980s. As of 1991, nine overseas institutions located in the United Kingdom (7), South Africa (1) and Canada (1) are offering MBAs by distance education. More overseas institutions are planning to follow suit in the near future. A number of these institutions are offering their programs internationally, especially in South-East Asia. The market for MBA programs generally, and MBAs by distance education in particular, has become highly competitive at both national and international levels. There is every reason to believe that the 1990s will continue to witness rapid growth in the opening up of educational opportunities for management by open and distance learning.

Why has this impressive growth taken place in the 1980s? Open and distance learning for managers has been spawned by the dramatic growth and interest in distance education
which began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It has gone hand in hand with the offering of a wide range of award and non-award courses in professional and technical areas in the 1980s, i.e. the provision of opportunities for mid-career technical and professional retraining. It has also been part of the rejuvenated open learning movement which has attempted to push back further the barriers to educational opportunity for adult learners (Paine 1988).

Evidence gathered in the United Kingdom suggests that a large untapped, but dormant demand for off-campus education had probably existed for some time (Forrester 1986). While organisations made adequate provision for the training of their employees at lower level management and supervisory levels, they always looked to the business schools located in tertiary institutions to educate people for middle and senior management positions. There were too many people missing out on this education given the limited provision of traditional management education. There was an opportunity to develop a more flexible form of educational provision to meet the needs of this formerly ‘forgotten species of learners’ (Holt & Northcott 1987). The flexibility of distance education has led to the discovery of this forgotten species of learners. This observation applies equally to Deakin University's experience with its off-campus program in Australia.

This study seeks to analyse and explain the experience of studying an MBA by distance learning principally from the students' perspectives. In particular, the study focuses on a group of students' experiences of studying Deakin University's MBA. It is an ethnographic piece of research (see Chapter 3). No such study of this nature has been undertaken previously of the professional development experience of students participating in either conventional part-time or full-time MBA studies or open and distance learning MBA programs.

A CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE RESEARCH AIMS

The study will explore the interactions both within and between the professional, formal educational and personal worlds of a select group of students studying Deakin University's MBA by distance learning. The intention of exploring these worlds, and their interactions, is to:

1. Theorise about the professional development experience by describing and analysing how the MBA program influences the learning of a group of aspiring and practising managers as they progress through the final stages of the course.
2. Examine the practical implications of this theorising for professional development pedagogies, and assessment and distance education strategies.
The study analyses the process of professional development in terms of the patterns of and value attributed to significant interactions which are either embodied in or influenced by the MBA program. Patterns of interaction represent the types, frequency, flow and range of interactions which students experience while undertaking the program. Value conferred by students on the various forms of interaction represents, to them, the quality of learning derived from such experiences. Interactions can lead to shared understandings between students on the demands of the educational conditions within which they learn, that is, to the development of joint meanings ascribed to the purposes of interaction. The development of these shared understandings, and the concomitant establishment of common norms, values, rituals and courses of action, broadly constitute culture. Norms, values, rituals and courses of action (i.e. the interplay between attitudes and behaviour) represent the intangible manifestations of culture. Culture can also be manifested tangibly in the form of various culturally constructed artefacts. Culture is, therefore, enacted, not spoken. The entwined notions of interaction and culture represent important analytical perspectives which the author has brought to bear on students' conceptions of the MBA experience. An exploration of the multi-faceted notion of interaction is an enduring theme throughout the author's study, while culture comes to the fore in the author's analysis of MBA study groups in action. The MBA study group is arguably the most significant form of interaction in the students' formal educational world.

As is evident in the research aims, the author intends to develop theory on the professional development experience which is ' usable for theoretical advance as well as for practical application' (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p.76). Using the different categories of theory enunciated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, pp.204-6), the author will develop 'micro-substantive' theory on a small-scale educational experience and will use this to make a broader contribution to the development of 'macro' theory on the process of professional development in general, and management development in particular.

To research the experience of being a student in Deakin University's MBA program one needs to explore the worlds, and interactions between these worlds, within which students experience their professional development. (Worlds are defined as the different social realities within which students conduct their lives.) These worlds are, in part, constructed by students, but are also shaped by factors outside the immediate control or influence of students. The extent to which students can actively construct formal educational, workplace and personal worlds which enable professional development is a key aspect of the study.
Little is known about the personal and formal educational worlds of managers, however, a considerable body of research has developed over the last twenty years on the professional world of management, i.e. the nature and context of managerial work (Mintzberg 1973; Stewart 1967, 1982; Livingston 1971; Kotter 1982). The contemporary research done by management researchers on management work has fallen short of developing detailed strategies on the content, teaching methods and assessment approaches required to improve the formal educational world of managers. The evaluation work done, albeit sparse, on management students' perceptions of the usefulness of formal educational studies to the professional worlds within which they must live has failed to explore fully, and capitalise on the need to strengthen, the work/study interface. Finally, the personal world of the manager has hardly been considered at all, particularly as it relates to his or her professional practice and formal education.

This study can be conceptualised diagrammatically at a general level as in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1 Conceptualisation of the MBA experience study**

![Diagram](image-url)
The study, in attempting to explore the professional development processes of MBA students, will explore the interactions within and between these worlds. The shaded area in the diagram identifies the overall focus of the study. It is where the three worlds of the manager-as-learner overlap.

**A specific conceptualisation: the interaction network**

There are a number of more specific interactive dimensions which exist within the personal, formal educational and professional worlds of MBA students. The formal educational world is either controlled or strongly influenced by the institution and contains the following learning contexts: the learning materials, residential schools, study groups, roving tutor visits and other forms of interaction with teaching staff through individual and group telephone contact, and feedback on assignments. (These various learning contexts or interactive dimensions are examined further in Chapter 2.) There are, at the micro level, important interactions which occur both within and between these interactive dimensions which influence the professional development process.

Moreover, collectively these learning contexts interact with the students’ work environments. Students’ work settings are also characterised by a complex set of interactions between students and their jobs, their departmental and organisation-wide environments, including relationships with their subordinates, management peers, superiors, technical experts (accountants, lawyers, economists) whom they rely on for advice, internal clients/customers and competitors. (The range, nature and value of these work-based relationships are examined in Chapters 8 and 9.) The interactions which take place within students’ professional worlds are shaped directly by their organisations as well as indirectly by the broader economic, social, demographic, natural, technological and political environments within which organisations must operate and adapt to in order to survive. The various learning contexts located in the workplace are not so amenable to the influence of the educational institution. The individual student must take ultimate responsibility for his or her own professional development as it applies to improving work practices on the job. Whether the workplace is conducive or not to MBA learning can have a significant impact on students’ career aspirations and the quality of learning from the institutionally-orchestrated learning contexts.

Professional and study commitments must also be considered in relation to students’ personal worlds which comprise for most MBA students a (female) spouse, children, relatives and friends. These people-centred interactions must be located within a physical environment at either work or home which may influence the quality of students’ professional development. Interactions which occur within students’ personal worlds
are more difficult to penetrate, however, they play a significant role in either supporting or impeding students' professional development (see Chapter 8).

These specific interactions are incorporated into the general conceptualisation of the research in Figure 1.2.

The study will show that the patterns of interactions depicted in Figure 1.2 are characterised by complexity, diversity and variability. In addition, patterns of interaction can be self-reinforcing, complementary or contradictory. Not all patterns of interaction necessarily lead to quality learning. Moreover, for one reason or another, students do not always engage with the range of opportunities available for beneficial interaction. The complex web of interactions at the micro level coalesce to form the three worlds within which students must live, work and study. The total environment for professional learning represents an amalgam of the interactions between these three worlds. Theorising about professional development must attempt to explain the nature of these interactions and the part that each plays in students' professional learning. Any deconstruction of the total learning environment must, in turn, be mindful of the need to reassemble the interactive dimensions and recognise the learning synergies, either negative or positive, which flow from such a holistic view of the professional development process. In concurring with Burge's (1991, p.4) view of the need to adopt a holistic approach to research in distance education, the author is attracted to her 'spaghetti' metaphor as a way of portraying 'the tangled, multiple, context-bound threads of interaction amongst people and between people and material resources' which characterises the MBA experience.

THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

An ethnographic study of the professional development experience

Hammersley (1990) provides a distillation of the features which characterise ethnography as a method of social research:

(a) People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher.

(b) Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

(c) The approach to data collection is 'unstructured' in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for
Figure 1.2 Specific conceptualisation of the MBA interaction network

Professional world of the MBA student

- Economic
- Social
- Technological
- Political

External environment

Organisational environment

- Superiors
- Subordinates
- Management peers
- Learner as manager or aspiring manager
- Internal clients/customers
- Competitors
- Technical experts

A nexus of interactions which constitute the MBA experience

Personal world of the MBA student
- Spouse
- Manager as person
- Learner as person
- Others
- Children

Formal educational world of the MBA student
- Other study groups
- Study group
- Learning materials
- Manager or aspiring manager as learner
- Teaching staff
- Outside experts at residential schools
interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.

(d) The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale. In life history research the focus may even be a single individual.

(e) The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (pp.1-2)

Consistent with the features enunciated by Hammersley, the author's research is an ethnographic study of a group of fifteen Deakin University students' experiences of the final two years of the MBA program. (The Deakin MBA is usually completed over four years of part-time study. Chapter 2 outlines the length and structure of the program.) The students completed the final two years of the program in 1990 and 1991 respectively. The final two years of the MBA program are devoted to units of a functional and integrative nature which most centrally bear on the practice of management at an operational and strategic level. The author believes that the process of change and development among students will accelerate and be most pronounced in those years of the program centrally concerned with the task of management. Therefore, the study focuses on the professional development of the students in these final two years.

The author has gathered a range of mainly qualitative data throughout 1990 and 1991 using: overt participant observation of students functioning in their study groups and at residential schools; informal interviews and discussions with individuals and groups of students in and around study groups and residential schools; in-depth interviews at the end of each of the final two years of MBA study; and documentary sources (e.g. unit evaluations and residential school evaluations, information on program application forms and student assignment submissions and assessor feedback forms). The observation and interview data have been gathered in natural settings where students normally study the MBA program and/or carry out their professional duties. The observation of students functioning in their study groups and at residential schools provided valuable insights into how they experience these important aspects of the program as well as providing the opportunity to understand students' perceptions of and responses to the MBA curriculum, pedagogy (including assessment) and mode of delivery and support (distance education) more generally. The scope of the observational work undertaken by the author in the final two years of the MBA program is documented in Chapter 3. In addition to the data collected from the students' perspective, the author informally discussed with MBA Deakin teaching staff their experiences of actually interacting with the group of students
involved in the author's study during study group visits, residential schools and through assignment marking and feedback.

The interpretive methodology employed to research the professional development experience, and within which ethnography falls, is substantiated in Chapter 3.

The collaborative research on the MBA experience

Running concurrently with this ethnographic research, was a collaborative research project undertaken by the author and two staff members of Deakin University's School of Management. Eighteen students located in Melbourne were chosen from the 1988 intake (total intake of 72) to participate in a study of the MBA experience. The study involved the in-depth interviewing of these students on enrolling in the MBA program and at the end of each of the four years of the program. Most of the interviews have been conducted in face-to-face settings as the Melbourne-based students have been easily accessible to the researchers.

This study is based on the framework of the original collaborative research on the MBA experience. However, it both deepens and significantly extends the collaborative research by using additional forms of data collection such as direct observation, more continuous informal discussion with students and documentary evidence. The present research represents both a significant contribution to knowledge in the field and an original approach to understanding the relationship between management distance education and the professional and personal worlds of the managers/students.

From the eighteen students involved in the collaborative study, thirteen students were chosen to be involved in the author's ethnography spanning the final two years of the MBA program. In addition, two students residing in provincial towns in the Australian States of Victoria and New South Wales respectively were included in the author's study to provide a perspective on the MBA experience from the viewpoint of the more geographically remote student. Thus, there were, in total, fifteen students who participated in the study, thirteen of whom the author had background information on through the collaborative research interviews on what these students brought to the MBA program and their experiences of the first two years of study of the program.

Biographical notes on each of the students who were involved in the research are set out in Appendix A. A series of publications on what students brought to the MBA in 1988 and their experiences of the first two years of the program in 1988 and 1989 respectively have emanated from the collaborative research group (see Holt et al. 1990a; Holt et al. 1990b; Holt et al. 1990c; Viljoen et al. 1990a; Viljoen et al. 1990b; Viljoen et al. 1991).
These publications are drawn on extensively in Chapter 2 where the research context is described in greater detail.

Theory building and core statements

The author intends to develop 'micro' theory on the interaction network which characterise the Deakin MBA experience by distance education. Moreover, at a broader level, the author intends to make a contribution to the development of theory on professional and management development. Here the emphasis is on generalising from the ethnography to build 'macro' theory. The author's 'macro' theorising will build on existing research in the field of professional development. Chapter 3 briefly covers the literature on learning relevant to the author's work. Chapters 9 and 10 integrate this literature with the author's own research findings in order to further the development of macro theorising in the field as well as drawing out the practical implications of the theoretical work for professional education at a distance. Specifically, this theorising leads to the formulation of a set of core statements which are developed in the thesis:

- 'Distance', in a professional development program, can be conceived as the disjunctions between students' current and desired states of professional empowerment.

- Professional development requires that participants empower themselves by negotiating a myriad of relationships with key actors in their professional and personal worlds.

- The forums for negotiating these empowering relationships exist outside the direct influence or control of the teaching institution.

- The nature of the educational program, as determined by the teaching institution, tends to pre-construct the roles of the teacher and learner in the educational experience. These roles tend to be constructed before the course is experienced by students studying by the distance education mode.

- Teachers can exert the greatest influence on student learning in distance education programs by constructing appropriate roles for the teacher and learner in the educational experience.

- The construction of an appropriate learning environment (i.e. curriculum, pedagogies, assessment strategies, media and communications technology for curriculum delivery and support) by the teaching institution can foster the development of self-sustaining, tutorless peer groups which collectively maximise their members' learning from a professional development program.

- The construction of an appropriate learning milieu demands a philosophical and practical commitment to provide the opportunities for valued forms of interaction between students, and students and teaching staff.

- The development of self and peer assessment skills can both augment and, ultimately, largely substitute for institutional assessment. The development of these self-assessing
skills allows students to locate themselves within an interdependent set of learning interactions which gives full expression to their self-determining capacities.

- The capacity to derive value from forms of institutionally-orchestrated interactions helps students to develop strategies for the empowerment of themselves and others in their organisations and to enable them to cope with instances of personal disempowerment.
Chapter 2

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: DEAKIN UNIVERSITY'S MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES THREE interrelated perspectives on the nature of the MBA program which illuminate the context within which the research study is located: the nature of the student clientele; the institutional response to the perceived educational needs and circumstances of the student clientele; and the allocation of student and institutional responsibilities for dealing with the educational needs and circumstances of the student clientele.

THE STUDENTS

Selection criteria

Deakin University, through rigorous selection procedures, has control over who undertakes the MBA program, a situation quite different to many distance education programs offered at the undergraduate level where entry is more open and less strictly controlled. The guiding philosophy in selecting participants to undertake the MBA program is an assessment of their intellectual ability and their fitness to undertake a successful career in management (MBA Brochure 1990, p.12). The Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), which is a mathematical and verbal aptitude test set by Princeton University (USA) and a requirement of all leading graduate management schools in the world, tests prospective participants' intellectual abilities, while personal references from present or past employers and/or teachers, and a self-evaluation report of why participants want to do the MBA are used to judge applicants' potential for management. The educational requirement for entrance to the MBA program is a degree granted by a recognised tertiary institution or an equivalent tertiary-level qualification.

About 5000 inquiries are received from prospective participants each year which translate into approximately 500 official applications. From 1981 until 1988, only an initial intake of 60 places were available in the program, however, this number doubled to 120 in 1989. Overall, there is a high degree of competition from a large pool of well-performed applicants to gain a place on the program. As a consequence of the quality of the selected
group, the dropout rate of about 10% for any given intake is low by normal distance education standards.

**Demographic and geographic characteristics of participants**

The demographic and geographic characteristics of participants who entered the MBA program in 1988 (72 participants) and the participants (18) selected for the MBA collaborative project, and from which the author's sample of participants (13) is drawn, is set out in Appendix B. Key data for the total population of participants who were offered places in the MBA in 1988 are summarised below:

Geographic
- 88% of participants reside in Australia and 12% reside overseas
- 24% reside in Melbourne (Victoria); 18% in Sydney (New South Wales); 8% in country NSW; 10% in country Queensland.

Demographic
- 86% male; 14% female
- 76% employed in the private sector; 24% employed in the public sector
- 76% aged between 30-39, with the average age being 34
- 65% have first degrees in sciences and engineering
- 52% are in middle and supervisory management levels and 43% are still in technical positions with no significant managerial responsibility
- 64% are in the top 10% of GMAT test scores worldwide.

The demographic profile of participants provides some insights into their reasons for undertaking the MBA, although it provides little idea as to what qualitative conceptions of management (and learning about management) participants bring to the program.

**Orientations to study**

The concept of educational orientations to study was used by the UK Open University Study Methods Group in their studies of the experience of learning at a distance. Taylor et al. (1981a) define study orientation as follows:

> By orientation we mean all those attitudes and aims that express the student's individual relationship with a course and the University. It is the collection of purposes which orients the student to a course in a particular way. Orientation, unlike the concept of motivation, does not assume any psychological trait or state belonging to the student. It is a quality of relationship between student and course rather than a quality inherent in the student. (p.3)
The Group identified four main types of orientation to study:

- **Vocational**, which relates to the concern to get future jobs.
- **Academic**, which is to do with continuing education.
- **Personal**, which is to do with developing as a person.
- **Social**, which is to do with enjoying the freedom of university life.

Each type of orientation to study was further differentiated by interest - either intrinsic or extrinsic - in a course, with intrinsic interest being where a student is interested in studying a course for its own sake while extrinsic interest relates to student interest in studying as a means to an end. In the former case, the reward for study is seen to reside within the learning task, whereas in the latter case the 'end' represents a reward which resides outside the learning task.

Holt *et al.* (1990a, p.19) have found that MBA participants, on entering the program, have a strong vocational intrinsic orientation to study which rejects an interest in the MBA as nothing more than a means towards the end of credentialism. There were, however, important differences in emphasis in what participants hoped to gain from the MBA within the vocational/intrinsic category. Thus, participants were looking for different things from the curriculum ranging from an entrée to the field of management (technical specialist agenda), skills to run an organisation more effectively (senior manager agenda), knowledge of strategic management in anticipation of running an organisation (middle manager agenda) and competencies in managing more effectively (project manager and technical specialist agenda). Different participants had different agendas on what type of managerial knowledge they wanted to acquire (functional or strategic or both) and what purposes they wished to use it for (to improve individual, divisional or organisational performance).

**Studying by distance education**

It must be recognised that the generic educational needs outlined above can be satisfied through a number of different modes of educational delivery, i.e. full- and part-time on-campus, off-campus, mixed mode. This begs the question as to why participants choose to study the MBA program by distance education. Holt *et al.* (1990a) found that a mixture of educational, employment and geographic reasons shape participants' decisions to undertake the Deakin MBA. These reasons are summarised in Table 2.1 below.
Table 2.1 Reasons for studying the MBA by distance learning

Geographic
• Located in remote country areas or regional centres or on the fringes of major metropolitan centres and therefore geographically isolated from Business Schools.

Employment
• Avoid high opportunity cost associated with taking substantial periods of time off work (i.e. lost remuneration, career opportunities, work contact, and so on).
• Regular travel demands in current position.
• Possibility of job mobility within or between organisations (this could lead to geographical isolation from Business Schools or study disruption if attending on-campus MBA).
• Nature of current job unpredictable/erratic.

Educational
• Preference for independent study.
• Integration of study and work.
• Flexibility to schedule study and work.
• Deakin's MBA has a good reputation as an educational program.
• Study time consistent with career plans.
• Mode of delivery avoids stress on participant, family and job.

Source: Table adapted from Figure 3 in Holt et al. 1990a, p.21.

Conceptions of management
Holt et al. (1990b) have developed an analytical framework - the Attributes, Roles and Choices (ARC) framework - to describe MBA participants' entry-level conceptions of management (see Table 2.2). To MBA participants entering the program, management is an amalgam of highly personal choices:

• about how to use their accumulated talents;
• about the need to work with subordinates;
• about how to deal with specific constraints and the demands of their jobs; and
• about choosing an approach to their managerial activities with which they feel comfortable.
Table 2.2 MBA participants' entry-level conceptions of management: the ARC framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Conceptual categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'What I have'</td>
<td>• personal attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• human skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'What I do with others'</td>
<td>• teamwork and leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• facilitating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'What I give to others'</td>
<td>• developing and managing subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'What I have to do' (general)</td>
<td>• crisis handling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• job content activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• goal setting and achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• problem identification and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• working within constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'What I have to do' (specific)</td>
<td>• strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• organisational development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'How I do things'</td>
<td>• applies to each role (above)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Holt et al. 1990b, p.169.

The conceptual categories and methodology used to develop the ARC framework are described in Viljoen et al. (1990a) and Holt et al. (1990b). Viljoen et al. (1990a) also compare and contrast the ARC conceptualisation of the nature of managerial work with other existing management theories.

The analysis showed that while some MBA participants, usually those in middle and senior management positions, had a deeper and broader appreciation of the nature of management work compared with those participants in purely technical positions, most participants were able to articulate fairly thorough conceptions of management and
demonstrate an ability to use past experience to form a grounded theory of management. Those participants with little direct management experience were able to do these things presumably on the basis of analysing the management they have received or observed within their respective organisations.

Learning about management

Holt et al. (1990a) report that participants on entering the MBA program struggled to define what effective learning, particularly in a management context, meant to them:

However, what they tended to say on this matter could be categorised into either one, or both, of the following two groups: focus on outcomes (i.e. action orientation) and focus on means (i.e. knowledge orientation). Participants who focused on outcomes tended to relate effective learning to learning which could be used either immediately or over time to improve job satisfaction and productivity. On the other hand, participants who focused on means tended to relate effective learning to acquiring, either critically or uncritically, an existing theory/body of knowledge. As noted above, some participants' comments embraced both foci, i.e. effective learning being the acquisition and application of theory in order to improve professional practice. ...

What we can conclude from many participant comments on the issue of effective learning is that there appears to be a theory/practice dichotomy embodied in their views. Something external to them - formal management theory - exists which must be got at, mastered and applied to practice. Some would argue that this represents a reproductive view of learning. Having said this, a few participants when commenting on the nature of their work as managers provided clear evidence of being able to link knowledge within action or, to put it more formally, theorise about their own managerial practices. These participants would never define effective learning in these terms, but there is no doubting their ability to develop powerful personal knowledge/theory about different aspects of their own managerial work. (p.24)

At the end of participants' first year of study of the program, Holt et al. (1990b) note:

...that participants appear to have a good understanding of how they are learning - of how to use the learning infrastructure provided by the MBA program to achieve their individual learning agendas. In a distance learning program this represents the critical step from simply reading to living out the materials. (p.173)

The relationship between MBA study and participants' organisations is an important focus of the author's research. The workplace represents arguably the most important learning context within which participants ground their MBA studies. An organisational context conducive to applying MBA learning can nourish and reinforce managerial competencies. On the other hand, an organisational environment which is not conducive to the transfer and application of MBA learning, indeed, it may be possibly hostile to such learning, could potentially lead to job dissatisfaction and a desire to search out a more supportive workplace context. Clearly, the study/workplace interface has significant
implications for participants' career development. Thus, the learning context of the organisation can potentially stimulate or impede the development of professional learning.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NATURE OF THE STUDENT CLIENTELE

The MBA mission statement

The MBA mission statement articulates the fundamental educational purpose of the program. The purpose of the MBA does not exist within itself, but is located within the student clientele it is attempting to serve. The 'value' of the program can only be examined within the context of students' learning perspectives and worlds. The mission is reproduced below:

The Deakin MBA program adopts a learner centred view of management studies by giving recognition to the attributes and experience which participants bring to the program, by encouraging participants to learn from each other and by allowing them to learn within the context of their own work requirements.

The mission of the Deakin MBA program is to facilitate the development of general management knowledge, skills and attitudes in our participants.

This mission embraces:

- the development of proficiency in all of the basic analytical tools of management and in each functional area of management;
- the development of an overall perspective of organisations and the ability to understand relationships between the component parts of organisations;
- the development of a strategic perspective in order to manage an organisation within the context of its competitive and sociopolitical environment;
- the enhancement of participants' managerial ethics within the context of competent managerial performance;
- the development of a future orientation which encourages continued learning and habitual receptiveness to new ideas and new ways of identifying and dealing with opportunities and problems (MBA Brochure 1990, p.5).

The program's commitment to 'a learner-centred view of management studies' is embodied in the opening paragraph of the MBA mission statement. The inclusion of the opening statement on the need to recognise participants' competencies and create opportunities for student-student and workplace interaction has only recently been included in the mission statement yet the learner-centred view has existed from the
beginning of the MBA program, although a practical commitment to this ideal has evolved over time to the extent that it now occupies a central place in the mission of the program.

The mission statement provides an insight into the competencies that the program desires to develop or enhance in participants (i.e. curriculum concerns) and the educational philosophy underlying the acquisition of these competencies (i.e. pedagogical and distance education concerns). The issues of what is taught and how in the off-campus MBA program are now examined.

Program structure and curriculum
The structure of the Deakin MBA is reproduced below:

Figure 2.1: The Deakin MBA structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGERIAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building the foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Financial Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT |


The MBA requires participants to complete 16 semester units over a minimum of 4 years part time. Most participants, including all participants in the author's study, take a half load of 2 units a semester and 4 units over a complete academic year. Participants must
complete 13 compulsory core units and 3 electives from a choice of 11 to complete the degree. The 3 electives are studied in the third and final years of the program after the completion of all discipline-based and most of the functionally-based units. From the MBA structure it can be seen that the discipline-based units represent the foundation building blocks for the MBA experience and are completed in the first and second years of the program. The functional units, which develop management expertise, begin in the second year and span the final two years of the program. These units, however, are concentrated in the third year of the MBA. The integrative units which are designed to draw together discipline and functional competencies are primarily located in the fourth year of the program.

The major content emphases of the three different phases of the MBA program are outlined as follows:

The first two years of the four year part time MBA program emphasise three primary aspects of management: the ability to analyse problems, to weight alternatives, and to make decisions. This implies a significantly broader framework than that necessary to train for a specialised career. This part of the curriculum provides a knowledge and skill base relevant to a broad range of management problems and includes Economics, Organisational Behaviour, Legal Studies, Accountancy, and a variety of quantitative methods (including Statistics, Decision Sciences, and Computer Methods). Avoiding emphasis upon technical detail, the program seeks to develop a familiarity with fundamental theories and concepts and an ability to adapt them to diverse and changing decision contexts.

The final two years stress the functional fields of Management (Marketing, Finance, Operations, Personnel Management and Industrial Relations), and emphasise management policy. These are the major integrating courses in the program, pulling together skills gained in both the basic disciplines and in the functional fields.

During the final two years, participants may also choose to study various elective units which they feel support their particular learning requirements. The program allows three electives to be studied, one of which may be a specific project selected by the participant. Some electives are designed to fulfil functional specialization objectives while others are intended as integrative units (MBA Brochure 1990, p.16).

The structure of the program and the sequence of study are quite rigid. Participants are required to study all core units in a prescribed pattern at set times. There are no flexible entry or exit points and other than meeting the strict requirements pertaining to advanced standing, no opportunity exists to gain exemption from the 13 core units. While some specialisation is allowed through the choice of electives in the final two years of the program, the Deakin MBA is relatively inflexible in providing participants with major choices on the nature of the curriculum to be studied. Participants are compelled to study a range of subject areas which the School believes is consistent with a generalist
management education credential. While the scope of the MBA and pacing of the study may be considered to be relatively closed by those strongly supportive of more open forms of learning in the curriculum area, the fixed nature of the curriculum does create stronger opportunities for participant interaction through the local study groups.

**An introduction to the MBA interaction network**

Viljoen *et al.* (1990b, p.7) identify five key opportunities for interaction which the MBA program provides participants (see Table 2.3). These interactive dimensions help to intellectually challenge and stimulate participants, and generally get them actively involved in the learning experience.

**Table 2.3: A student learning framework for the Deakin MBA program**

```
Efficient learning interaction
Opportunities for interaction with the learning materials
Opportunities for interaction with the workplace
Opportunities for interaction through the study group
Opportunities for interaction with teaching staff
Opportunities for interaction through the residential school

Involvement in the learning experience
```

Key opportunities for interaction are briefly examined.

**The learning materials**

There are four key issues worth exploring in the area of learning materials development in the MBA program: the nature of the materials developed; the processes undertaken to develop the materials; the key influences which shaped the educational philosophy underlying the materials; and the range of contributors to the units.

From the beginning, heavy reliance was placed on the development of print materials: study guides and textbooks. Because few, if any, textbooks are written specifically for
MBA participants, study guides are usually substantial documents carrying many of the functions of both a 'tutorial-in-print' and 'lecture-in-print'; the study guides were designed to lead participants selectively and efficiently through the prescribed texts. The aim was to produce a self-contained package of learning materials which would not demand MBA participants spending significant time searching for additional references outside the provided resources. Consistent with the mission of the program, the development of library search skills was not seen as a high priority teaching intention. The focus of the program was to be the application of material to meet the demands of formal assessment, with a heavy emphasis being placed on the mastery of case studies, and to the workplace to improve professional competencies.

The printed materials have been supplemented by audio and video cassettes, and computer packages in subjects like statistics, economics and accounting. While audio cassettes were used extensively in the first editions of many units, this use has diminished. With a determination to keep the MBA content current, many of the study guides have been revised annually. This has placed considerable pressure on teaching staff and the University's centralised production services. It is the major reason why the School has been loath to invest time developing sophisticated multi-media packages which could only be justified with longer use. The School has been committed to the production of the highest quality material.

MBA units were developed by course teams. While the overall responsibility for the academic integrity and educational effectiveness of the program rested with the Foundation Dean who was also the MBA Coordinator, the day-to-day responsibility was delegated to course team chairs who were responsible for the academic and educational aspects of particular units as well as ensuring that their courses were produced on time and within budget. The course teams included teaching staff, research assistants and educational developers experienced in instructional design in distance education and the administrative and course production aspects of off-campus studies.

The major force in the shaping of the educational philosophy underlying the MBA program was the senior instructional designer/educational developer who was appointed to work on the initial development of the MBA in 1979. He had had extensive experience in developing materials at the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) and participating in innovatory on-campus programs in Australian tertiary institutions. The senior instructional designer's views on the nature of sound learning material are summarised by him below:
Our aim is to prepare challenging, clearly written, relevant and stimulating study guides. We try to avoid writing "textbooks" or "manuals" but rather self-instructional materials that encourage our MBA students to read questioningly, critically, reflectively and apply what they read to their employment. To this end the course teams are at great pains to select and sequence topics in the study guides carefully and to use in-text questions and review questions. The study guides have three main segments: preview; main body of text and summary; and review... Learning aids are incorporated within this framework and the teaching role and functions of these three segments are carefully delineated and integrated (Northcott 1982, p.16).

Expert outside consultants have made a significant contribution to the development of the Deakin MBA. Their contributions have been promoted as a great strength of the program. As well as preparing course materials, outside consultants have advised on course content, assessed draft materials and actually taught MBA units and provided evaluations, in these circumstances, of the courses-in-use.

Residential schools

While MBA residential schools were highly recommended, they were not compulsory between 1981-1988. The residential schools, however, have always been perceived to be an important learning context in the MBA program by participants, and this has been reflected in high attendance during the period when they were not compulsory. As of 1989, attendance at the residential schools has become a compulsory requirement of the MBA, with participants being required to attend: a weekend school in March of the first year; a weekend school in May of the second year; a week long school in September of the third year; and a week long school in October of the fourth and final year. All schools are held at the Institute of Educational Administration (IEA) in Geelong. The IEA is located in central Geelong, whereas the Geelong campus of Deakin University is located on the south-western outskirts of the town.

While each residential school tends to have its own unique educational aims, the underlying philosophy of all schools is that they provide opportunities for student-student and staff-student interaction. The schools have never been seen as remedial exercises where the 'real teaching' in the MBA program should take place. Consequently, traditional lectures and tutorials have been actively discouraged by school designers, and where such strategies have inadvertently crept into the school program, they have been strongly disapproved of by participants. The course team chairs of the four units that participants study in any particular year usually make the strongest contributions to a given school, with a School Director being appointed from these staff members to coordinate the development of the school academic program and to ensure that the school runs smoothly. Other Deakin MBA staff not associated with the units being covered at a
particular school are also encouraged to attend school social functions on an ad hoc basis in order to mix informally with the participants. This is a particularly useful exercise for those staff who are allocated to teach participants in future units in the program. As with the learning materials, outside consultants are extensively used at residential schools.

As Holt et al. (1990c, pp.127-8) state:

Arguably, the most important school is the first year one, which is held soon after the commencement of the academic year. At this school, participants are organised into study groups and the study groups are set to work on a number of case studies, including experiential learning exercises which are part of the first year organisational behaviour course, in order to foster their development. Participants' initial experiences with their study groups, at the first year residential school, are absolutely crucial in determining whether the groups survive and prosper throughout the duration of the MBA program. Study groups must be seen to work, and work well at the first year school, to ensure their on-going viability.

Administrative staff in the School of Management compile participant directories for each MBA intake and for all participants enrolled in the MBA program. The purpose of the directories is to enable networking among participants in order to enhance study and professional careers. The directories are particularly helpful in facilitating networking at the residential schools. The directories contain personal and employment profiles and photographs of each participant. Furthermore, participants are categorised by Australian state and territory (there are also some participants located overseas) in the year of intake directory. The composite directory has additional information on year of enrolment, industry categories and employers.

Study groups

The most tangible aspect of distance education is the learning material which is open to public scrutiny. Consequently, key quality criteria in distance education often relate to this public face of the educational enterprise. Student interaction, without a tutor presence, in face-to-face and non-face-to-face study groups is one of the more inaccessible, but important quality considerations in distance education. This is particularly so with the MBA where the study group was always seen and promoted as a crucial ingredient in the quality of the program.

The study group remained an important, but poorly understood learning context in the MBA until the advent of the MBA collaborative research project. Holt et al. (1990b, pp.164-5), based on participants' experiences of face-to-face study groups in the first year of the program, summarise the outcomes of study group processes as follows:
• **Better Learning** - the combination of different skills, and the generally high aptitude levels of group members, were felt to be important features in improving problem-solving ability, and the rate at which learning occurred.

• **Motivation** - group meetings were seen as a means of re-establishing enthusiasm for study.

• **Productivity** - group membership provided the opportunity for division of labour and specialisation. Thus, the group was both time-saving, and had a positive effect on output. This can been seen as a particularly important outcome given the pressures on study time.

• **Support** - the ability of group members to empathise and to give support and encouragement to each other, especially in periods of stress (times of high workload, receipt of unanticipated negative assignment feedback, social and professional commitments) was of great benefit to participants.

• **Benchmarking** - participants were generally able to compare their performance (in terms of assignment marks, understanding of materials, stage of progression through study guides, managerial issues faced at work) against others in the group.

• **Formal performance** - improvement in performance of individual members of the group was seen to occur as a consequence of the sharing of ideas, through discussion of assignment issues, and members' ability to pick each others' brains on work-related problems.

While it is extremely competitive to obtain a place on the program, the institutional commitment to the study group is fundamentally a commitment to collaborative group-based learning as the best way of maximising value from the MBA. Holt *et al.* (1990c) explore some of the group dynamics at work which led to the group outcomes listed above. In particular, they examined the purpose of group meetings, the nature of leadership demonstrated during the meetings, the communication patterns adopted by participants, the emergence of a group culture and the forces of collaboration and competition which operated in the groups. While yielding useful evidence on MBA study groups at work, Holt and others' work, based as it is on end-of-year interviews, does not provide a complete picture of how the groups go about the task of interpreting and adjusting their cultures to meet the changing educational demands of the MBA program. This is the major emphasis of the author's ethnographic research on the MBA study groups in action.

**Staff-participant relations, including the roving tutor scheme**

Participants interact with teaching staff in a number of different contexts: residential schools; roving tutor visits to study groups; group-based telephone tutorials; individual telephone contact; and through written correspondence on assignment submissions. Holt
et al. (1990b, p.167) report that a good staff-participant relationship is characterised by participants in terms of the ability of staff to:

- come down to the students' level and to see the subject matter from their perspective;
- address student problems, not their own teaching interests;
- feed ideas into group discussion in order to enrich the cross-fertilization of ideas among group members;
- freely volunteer information to help clarify assessment requirements rather than students needing to 'extract information out of a person'.

Holt et al. (1990c, p.129) note that the roving tutor scheme plays an important role in supporting the development of study groups:

Staff visits to study groups provide a tangible recognition of the importance the program places on promoting the study group concept as a viable option for collective learning for those who choose to use this mode of study. While tutors in different subjects, with different teaching styles, tend to perceive the purposes of study group visits in different ways, the fundamental commitment to visit the groups, and engage, even if momentarily, with the life of the groups, helps to legitimate the concept and value of learning communities.

**Formal assessment requirements**

Assignment profiles in the MBA program have principally been designed by the individual course teams, with little outside influence in the form of School-based assessment policies. A minor exception to course team autonomy in the assessment area was a prevailing view that first year units, with the exception of organisational behaviour, should have a significant examination component to protect the credibility of the program. As one progresses through the program, a greater percentage of marks are allocated to the assignments. There are no examinations in any of the elective units. There are four major types of assignments used in the MBA: case studies to provide actual contexts for applying management theory and developing decision-making skills; work-based projects requiring participants to explore course concepts in the context of their own organisations or ones with which they are familiar; general project work not necessarily tied to familiar contexts; and traditional academic essays, which sometimes require participants to draw on their participation in experiential learning exercises conducted at residential schools and in study groups.

Participants interact in their study groups to prepare individual and group assignments:
For study group assignments, the program recommends that the study group elects a different chair and secretary for each group assignment. It is the responsibility of the chair to direct and control the discussion. The secretary is responsible for the record of the group’s recommendations for the particular assignment. The group assignments involve the development of problem-solving skills through case study analysis. The chair and the secretary are responsible for documenting the case analysis and for presenting it to the group for final approval or alteration. After the secretary has written up the final report, the chair and group must assess the contribution of each member and award him or her a percentage mark. For example, if each member has made a full contribution and is awarded 100% by the group, then each member will receive an identical final mark for the assignment. If one member is awarded 50% and the others 100% each by the group, that member will receive half the final marks of his or her peers for the assignment (Holt et al. 1990c, pp.128-9).

Holt et al. (1990b, p.165) note that the most important point of contact, as is the case in most distance education programs, between teaching staff and participants is feedback on assignments. Participants, in deriving maximum value from this exchange, stress the importance of:

- advanced guidance on ways of approaching the assignments and the criteria to be applied to their marking;
- timely feedback which can be used as a basis for future assignment and examination preparation;
- constructive feedback which indicates where marks were lost and provides a positive way forward in improving performance;
- consistent marking of assignments both within and between different program units;
- congruence between a quantitative mark for an assignment and accompanying qualitative comment explaining that mark;
- congruence between the breadth and depth of answers provided in course material activities and the demands of formal assignment submissions (this relates to the point on the need for advanced guidance).

SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN THE INSTITUTION AND THE STUDENT CLIENTELE IN THE MBA EXPERIENCE

Learner requirements

The MBA demands a substantial time commitment of notionally 15-20 hours a week to complete the program in the usual four year period. Participants are counselled at the beginning of the MBA to take a quarter load if they are unsure whether they can make the necessary time commitment. They are also encouraged to discuss the time commitment with their families before undertaking the program as inevitably such a commitment, in
the context of people with already well-established personal and professional lives, has the potential for great social dislocation and personal stress. While participants are aware of the likely sacrifices required to complete the program, the real and full costs of study do not really become apparent until participants start working through the program. The high opportunity cost of participants' time is reflected in participants' desire for an efficient and effective learning experience. On interviewing participants at the end of the first year of the program, Holt et al. (1990b, p.175) concluded that some participants had indeed underestimated the strain which the MBA would impose on their personal lives, and that both the participant and spouse had experienced guilt surrounding the demands placed on the family lifestyle. Those participants with younger children experienced the greatest difficulty in adapting their personal lives to meet the demands of the program. Participants appear to be involved in a continual process of attempting to reconcile job, family and study commitments. Participants' desire to excel at everything they attempt means that they find it frustrating to compromise or to accommodate conflicting demands on their limited time. While a number of patterns of accommodation to this conflict were contemplated by participants, 'it is clear that no perfect solution was likely to be found to the problem of balancing the demands of the participants' professional, formal educational and personal worlds' (Holt et al. 1990b, p.177).

In terms of more tangible costs, as of 1991, participants pay a fee of $425.00 per semester unit (or $1700 p.a.) direct to the University. This fee is in lieu of the Federal Government's Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) charge which is administered through the taxation system and which all Australian tertiary students are liable to pay. While the MBA fee is higher than the HECS charge, the fee's attraction is that it is a possible tax deduction for participants and that the money flows directly to the University and the School of Management to improve the MBA program. Other direct costs involved with the MBA include: prescribed textbooks; mailing costs on material returned to the University; a general service fee; library charge; and travel, accommodation and meal costs for residential schools. On the latter point, the School of Management subsidises part of the full cost of running the residential schools for participants. Participants are also required to have access to a computer to undertake the program, but this requirement adds no additional cost to undertaking the MBA for most participants as they usually have access to computers in their work or home environments on entering the program. Most participants receive, through standard organisational staff development policies, complete or partial reimbursement of the direct costs of the program. Moreover, such standard support usually contains provisions for time off to study for examinations. Holt et al. (1990b, p.174) note that a large majority of MBA participants, 'commented that time off from work, whether in a formal sense of whole
days off for study, or in a more informal sense, in terms of flexibility to study during work hours, was what they most needed for the MBA.

The degree of intangible support provided by the organisation for participants remains problematic. Intangible support is typically moral support and encouragement from superiors to undertake the program, perhaps involving promise of advancement on successful completion. Consistent with the decision of participants to undertake the MBA being a personal rather than organisational initiative, 'support from higher level managers was not seen as particularly important, in terms of the progress of their studies, provided forms of tangible support were forthcoming' (Holt et al. 1990b, p.174). Clearly, organisations do not see the Deakin generalist MBA as an integral part of their staff development and career management strategies.

Institutional support

The institution is sensitive to the demands placed on participants in the program. MBA regulations enable participants, who may receive promotion and thus substantially increased work commitments during their study of the MBA, to defer their studies, the only proviso being that the program must be completed in eight years. Self-contained instructional material of a high quality and extensive student services which have already been examined are all designed to allow participants to derive maximum value from the limited amount of time they have available to undertake the program. The School of Management has also made a financial commitment to pilot projects in the use of electronic mail and telephone conferencing in order to allow remote participants to operate in non-face-to-face study groups (see Holt et al. 1990c, p.146).
Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THE theoretical and practical issues underlying the research and the literature which informed its initial development. The first section outlines the substantive literature which shaped and informed the analysis of the aims of the study. The second section locates the author's ethnographic research within the interpretive tradition or the naturalistic paradigm. Practical issues relating to the conduct of the ethnography are then considered in the form of a research biography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section briefly covers the literature on management, professional, adult and distance learning that informed the initial development of the ethnography. Since the genesis of the research the author has immersed himself in a range of literature relevant to the emerging issues surrounding the conduct of the ethnography. Thus, as the study group, as a cultural entity, grew in importance during the research so too did the author's interest in social anthropology, small group research, adult learning groups and the management literature on participating in and leading autonomous groups in the workplace. The impact of the MBA experience on participants' personal worlds led the author to explore sociological writings on, amongst other things, social alienation. More generally, the emergence of the notion of the interaction network as a means of conceptualising the ethnographic analysis, interpretation and write up led the author to examine the writings on interaction, independence and autonomy in higher education. The literature examined since the genesis of the study is not dealt with in this section.

RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCE OF UNDERTAKING MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

The impact of management education on students' professional performance has been side-stepped by management educators in the past. Porter and McKibbin (1988) provide a wide-ranging review of the current state, and possible future directions, of management education and development in the USA. Yet, for all its comprehensiveness, the study does not consider students' self-perceptions of the quality of the management education
they are receiving and using from the providing institutions. In fact, the assumption seems to be that students entering an educational program should be considered as 'inputs' which are 'transformed' by the faculty into effective graduates - the 'output'. (Porter & McKibbin 1988, p.88). The possibility of the 'inputs' being actively involved in shaping their own transformation with, rather than by, faculty and thus controlling their own 'output' (or 'self') appears foreign to the thinking underlying the Porter and McKibbin study. It seems that management educators, particularly in the United States of America, the home of the MBA, have failed to develop an understanding of their programs-in-use from the students' perspective. The market for management graduates appears to be used as a proxy for determining the quality of many conventional (i.e. full- and part-time, on-campus) management programs in the USA and other Western countries.

One useful study on the student experience of a conventional MBA program is reported by Baynes (1988). Her research involved a follow-up study of a group of fourteen MBA students, interviewed at length five years after the completion of a one year, full-time program at the Cranfield School of Management, United Kingdom. During the course of the one year program these students were part of a larger group who were tested and interviewed by the researcher to establish their aptitudes, interests and personality characteristics and to discuss their career aspirations following completion of the MBA program. The study was conducted after graduation when students were in a better position to judge the usefulness of their past formal management education in the light of their current managerial experiences. The study provides evidence of the impact that a formal educational intervention can have on shaping, reshaping and fulfilling the expectations that students bring to a learning experience. Given the full-time nature of the program, and the method of data gathering - retrospective directive interviewing - the study does not illuminate the immediacy of the dynamic interaction between the educational program and work from the perspective of students.

The paucity of research on the experience of undertaking conventional forms of management education from the students' perspective also exists in the field of open and distance education. There is, however, a greater opportunity to undertake such research as the vast majority of distance learning students are in full-time employment and therefore pursuing their studies over a number of years. These students are in the advantageous position of being better able to reflect upon the usefulness of their study in the context of their own work environments. Hodgson (1986) is one researcher who has conducted a longitudinal study of students' perceptions of the 'relevance' and 'effectiveness' of open and distance learning for management education. The study
looked at seven different open and distance learning programs for managers in the United Kingdom. Students in these programs were interviewed at the beginning, during and after completing their respective courses. Hodgson concluded:

All the evidence from the study does suggest that distance learning can be an effective method for management education. 'Living with the course' over a period of time was seen as a valuable characteristic of distance learning which contributed particularly to experiencing a course as relevant to work. Not having to attend weekly classes was seen as a positive characteristic, as many believed their work demands would make weekly attendance virtually impossible.

A number of important aspects were identified that can contribute to a particular programme being experienced as more or less worth while [i.e. learner readiness, education institution or organisation recognition, programme core, study patterns, programme flexibility, resource availability, assessment, tutors and tutorials]. Some of these aspects would apply to most education programmes, some are more specific to distance learning programmes. In addition there are a number of aspects identified that either contribute to encouraging students in the direction of dissemination-orientated learning, or in the direction of development-orientated learning. Awareness of these different aspects can thus help management educators to utilise distance learning to more effect and, if they so desire, to move the direction of a given programme away from the dissemination orientation most generally associated with distance learning programmes towards a development orientation more associated with management education (Hodgson 1986, p.21).

The evidence presented in the final report fails to consider the participants' individual and collective professional development as they progressed through the course under investigation. There is also no mention in the Hodgson study of the students' interactions with their workplaces while studying the courses. The Hodgson study did, however, present some useful evidence which indicated that inappropriate assessment strategies, particularly relating to the flexibility and timing of assignments, coupled with heavy workloads, pressured students in some courses to adopt a dissemination orientation despite their belief in the need to adopt a development orientation. The institutionally-determined task demands, in these circumstances, clearly influenced students to adopt an impoverished view of learning.

THE UNITED KINGDOM OPEN UNIVERSITY (UKOU) STUDY METHODS GROUP RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING

There has been a growing interest in studying the experience of learning from the learners' perspective, at the tertiary level, in both conventional and distance learning settings, using qualitative research methodologies. The aim of this work, which has taken place in Sweden, Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States of America, has
been to describe and conceptualise how learners learn from their own perspective. A pioneering research program which was undertaken by the (then) UKOU Study Methods Group in the field of distance education, at the undergraduate level, provided the initial inspiration for the author's ethnographic study. The Group's work owed much, in turn, to the longitudinal research undertaken by Perry (1970) on the forms of intellectual and ethical development of American students in their college years and the research of the Swedish-based Gothenburg group (Marton and others) on the students' experiences of learning.

In order to develop a holistic view of the world of the learner, the UKOU Study Methods Group attempted to integrate the following learning constructs in the experience of learning field:

- educational orientations to study which were described in Chapter 2 (see Taylor et al. 1980; Taylor et al. 1981a; Morgan 1991);

- conceptions of learning drawing on the work of Perry 1970; Säljö 1979a, 1979b, 1979c; Marton and Säljö 1984 (see Gibbs et al. 1980; Taylor et al. 1981b; Morgan et al. 1981);

- approaches to learning drawing on the work of Hudson 1968; Pask and Scott 1972; Miller and Parlett 1974; Marton and Säljö 1976; Svensson 1977; Entwistle and Hanley 1978 (see Gibbs et al. 1982a; later work by one member of the group - Morgan 1988);

- learner outcomes drawing on the work of Dahlgren (1984) (see Taylor et al. 1981b; Morgan 1984);

- the contexts of learning drawing on the work of Miller and Parlett 1974; Ramsden 1984.

While those of the above authors who were not members of the Study Methods Group, focused on the logical linkages which existed between some of the learning aspects and learning outcomes, the Study Methods Group attempted to demonstrate the logical connections between all of the learning constructs in a holistic way (see Gibbs et al. 1982b; Gibbs et al. 1984). Thus, logical linkages were found to exist between students' orientations to study, their conceptions of learning, their approaches to learning tasks and the outcomes of learning. Moreover, the Study Methods Group attempted to track change and development in a small group of students as they progressed through their undergraduate studies in relation to their orientations, conceptions and approaches to study, and their ability to take control of their own learning more generally through a growing state of independence and autonomy (Gibbs et al. 1984; Taylor 1985; Taylor & Morgan 1986) A holistic view of the experience of learning is presented
diagrammatically in Figure 3.1. Holism is symbolised by the concentric circles surrounding learning outcomes.

**Figure 3.1 A holistic view of the experience of learning**
The work of the Study Methods Group provides a strong grounding for the author's ethnography. Consistent with the research of the Group, the author's ethnography is longitudinal and is primarily concerned with exploring the change and development in a particular type of learner - managers or aspiring managers - in terms of whether they are more confident and competent learners, who can exert greater control over their current and continuing professional education, on conclusion of their studies.

THE CONTEXTS OF LEARNING

Emanating from both inside and outside the experience of learning literature is a concern for the quality of the learning context in enabling effective conceptions of and approaches to learning, and learning outcomes. Knowles (1984, p.117), a theorist and practitioner in the field of adult education, remarks that, 'Just as we have witnessed in the past decade a growing concern for the quality of our environment for living, so during the same period there has been increasing concern among educators for the quality of environments for learning'. The following aspects of the learning environment have been identified by those researchers active in the experience of learning field as having a significant influence on the quality of student learning:

The learning context


- Students' perceptions of whether the learning task is threatening, with an absence of stress, anxiety and cynicism, and the consequent confidence which exists in students, affecting the overall quality of learning (Northedge 1987; Marton & Ramsden 1988; Biggs 1988a, 1988b).

The teaching context

- Students' perceptions of individual lecturers' approaches and styles of teaching in the on-campus situation, including their perceptions of the attitudes and enthusiasms of teachers (i.e. teacher commitment), teachers' ability to appreciate the difficulties that students experience with new topics, teachers' ability to pitch material at an appropriate level and to provide help to students to aid understanding (Ramsden 1984). Other key factors include student perceptions of the quality of learning materials and teaching aids provided, the determination of appropriate workload, lecture structure and lecturing pace, and the amount of assignment feedback, the availability of resource materials and study skills support (Newble & Entwistle 1986; Entwistle 1987; Entwistle & Tait 1990).
Students' perceptions of assessment demands and the influence of different assessment demands on student learning (Miller & Parlett 1974 building on the research of Becker et al. (1968); Morgan 1976, 1983; Gibbs et al. 1982c; Lockwood 1986).

The extent to which students can understand and engage with the teacher discourse embedded in distance learning course materials and supported through appropriate student services (Gibbs et al. 1980; Morgan 1988; Northedge 1987, 1988).

The departmental context

In on-campus education, at the tertiary level, it has been found that the influence of academic departments and their different curricular, pedagogic and assessment demands affect student perceptions of the learning process and thus the quality of student learning (Entwistle & Ramsden 1983; Coles 1985; Biddle et al. 1985; Newble & Clark 1986; Newble & Entwistle 1986; Ramsden 1984, 1987a, 1987b; Ramsden et al. 1988, 1989; Roth & Anderson 1988; Boud 1990).

The institutional context

The institutional climate influences students' perceptions of the learning task and therefore approaches to learning (Ramsden 1984; Watkins & Hattie 1985; Bowden 1988; Biggs 1989). Differences are also apparent between students' learning strategies in different tertiary education sectors consistent with the educational policies of those sectors (Ramsden & Entwistle 1981; Biggs 1988a, 1988b).

This previous research on students' interactions with different learning contexts has taken place at the undergraduate level in either on- or off-campus settings. The key learning contexts identified as significantly influencing students' conceptions and approaches to learning and learning outcomes have been located in the students' formal educational worlds, as students in these studies have no access to the professional world of work. The interactions between the educational and workplace worlds which are of crucial importance in revealing the quality of a postgraduate professional development experience are missing from this body of knowledge. Furthermore, and this is, quite frankly, surprising to the author, the experience of learning literature focuses on the interaction between the individual student and the various learning contexts and fails to take account of the ways in which students collectively make sense of the demands of the learning experience. Thus, students collectively can develop conceptions of and approaches to learning which influence student learning outcomes, and that these collective negotiations are often located within students' personal worlds which may or may not revolve around tertiary education life. Peer group interaction which is commonplace in on-campus educational settings appears to be a neglected area of study in much of the experience of learning research. Becker et al. (1961), in their study of the student culture in a medical school in the US, highlight the ways in which medical students collectively develop a perspective (i.e. organisations of ideas and actions), through cooperative work groups, on the level and direction of their efforts to learn. The seemingly subterranean nature of
broader student learning context, which is an important aspect of the author's ethnography, is revealed in the Becker et al. study.

RESEARCH ON HOW ADULTS AND PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE LEARN

Critical reflection, experiential learning and action learning

Mintzberg (1973, p.193) identifies introspection as a key skill required to be a successful manager: 'The manager should thoroughly understand his (sic) job; he should be sensitive to his own impact on his organisation; ...'. To achieve this, Mintzberg concludes, a manager must know how to learn from his or her experiences. Mintzberg does not devote much time to how the skill of introspection can be developed because his research was primarily concerned with theorising on the reality of managerial work using direct observation of managers at work. Insights into the development of introspective skills, in the context of management learning, have been provided by Kolb and Fry (1975). The experiential learning model presented in this work contains four phases, viz: concrete experience; observations and reflections; formation of abstract concepts and generalisations; and testing implications of concepts in new situations. The introspective skills that Mintzberg refers to are clearly relevant to the second phase (observing and reflecting) of the circular learning pattern. One of the implications of the experiential learning model is that different people may have different approaches to learning within the cycle, i.e. some may be more action-oriented while others may be more reflective. Mumford (1980) argues, however, that while different managers may have a strong preference for types of learning in different stages of the life cycle, to be a truly proficient learner a manager would need to master effectively all phases of the experiential learning model. The mastery of the styles of learning associated with different stages of the experiential learning cycle leads to a higher order learning state which Kolb (1984, pp.144-5) terms 'integrative development'. The next section highlights the role of social context in enabling or impeding the enactment of the experiential learning cycle. Action learning, based on the learning cycle of action, observation, reflection and planning (Revans 1983), has been presented as a powerful means of accelerating the natural learning processes of managers and therefore their professional development (Casey 1983).

1990; Mousley & Rice 1990) have all explored the experiential learning cycle, or adaptations or extensions of the cycle in their own educational settings. MBA participants in the author's study all have a strong basis for the experiential cycle: concrete experience in the workplace of either managing or being managed by others or both. Chapter 2 reported how many of the participants, on entering the program, have a strong personal knowledge of management; one of the explicit aims of the program is to develop experiential skills in management to make participants future oriented and habitual learners. Starting from participants ongoing and existing workplace experiences, there are a number of positive and negative learning processes which could be pursued:

- The task of critical self-reflection and observation. The invitation to reflect critically on experience may not be considered or even rejected. Jarvis (1987) notes that rejection may be caused by, some would believe ironically, the existence of strong accumulated past experience which rather than providing a basis for reconceptualisation actually leads the learner to believe that he or she has nothing more to learn; that they have all the answers to life's problems. Evidence of non-engagement or tentative engagement with critical pedagogy in education courses by distance education has been found by Evans (1987) and Harris (1987). In the case of the former situation where critical self-reflection may not be considered, Schön (1983) notes that a great deal of professional practice can become habitualised where practitioners' knowing is to be found tacitly in their actions. In this state, professionals may be unaware of their espoused theories and their theories-in-use, and the possible incompatibilities between the two, and between them and the behavioural world (Argyris & Schön 1974). However, when practitioners come across unique situations this can stimulate reflection-in-action. Hence, a learning opportunity is provided where the professional consciously thinks about what he or she is doing or, rather, thinks about his or her knowing-in-action. A unique situation for MBAs would be external theoretical insights provided in their formal educational world, and which would hopefully provide a stimulus for thinking more critically about their own professional practices in the workplace. A potential learning blockage at this stage would be for learners to engage in selective reflection of an essentially uncritical kind.

- The task of forming abstract concepts and generalisations, i.e. theorising on professional practice. Schön (1983, p.56) argues that reflection-in-action involves the practitioner undertaking a simulated conversation with the situation where, 'reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the
action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action. Thus, much
knowing-in-action can be redescribed as knowledge-in-action or theories of
action (or a science of action). At this stage, theorising may validly reinforce
and strengthen existing theories of action or lead to new theories of action to
replace the older inadequate knowledge base which guided the learner's actions
or a combination of outcomes may occur where existing and new theories of
action occur (Forster et al. 1985). Selective reflection of an uncritical kind
leading to biased theorising, on the other hand, may merely reinforce existing
beliefs and prejudices. Working through the process of reflection and theorising
may, therefore, be a defensive exercise in justifying one's own pre-existing
professional practices.

- The task of testing implications of concepts in new situations, i.e. putting
theorising into action. Schön (1983) argues that reflection may lead to on-the-
spot experimentation and a new theory of practice which provides a solution to a
problematic situation. The professional becomes a researcher of his or her
professional practices; theory is something which can evolve from within
practice, not something which is external to the practitioner and is passively
applied to practice. From Schön's observations, experience, reflection,
theorising and action are a closely integrated set of activities which occur in an
iterative fashion. Boud et al. (1985) emphasise the difficulties of translating the
recognition and desire for change on the one hand, with actually undertaking
change on the other. It is one thing to be an 'armchair critic', it is quite another
to believe in one's ability to take concrete action. Furthermore, if a commitment
to action can prove a stumbling block at the individual level, strong deterre n ts to
action can also be found in the wider social environment (the social context of
MBA learning is considered further in the next section). An acknowledgement
of these broader social constraints on action, and the need to take collective
action to change them, is recognised in the work of Mezirow (1981), Mezirow
and Associates (1990) and Carr and Kemmis (1986). For instance, Mezirow
(1981, pp.6-7), defines the nature of perspective transformation, which
embraces all the phases of the experiential cycle, as a, 'process of becoming
critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions
has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships,
reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating
integration of experience and action upon these new understandings'.

Distance educators have highlighted the importance of dialogue, and its potentially serious neglect by an overriding emphasis on the perfection of mass-produced, monologic learning packages, in the development of the processes of critical self-reflection (Evans & Nation 1988, 1989a, 1989b). Evans and Nation argue that genuine dialogue among learners and teachers in education at a distance will only occur if learning materials are seen as a starting rather than ending point for such dialogue, and if traditional power relations between students and staff are renegotiated more favourably towards learners. The equality of dialogue, it should be added, also needs to be extended to interaction among learners themselves, and between learners and significant others in their professional and personal worlds.

It appears that distance educators confront some unique problems in attempting to engage learners, through the course materials and student services, in critical inquiry about their own professional practices. In this respect, Smyth (1989) notes that dialogue is the key to enabling students to question the 'what' and 'why' of their taken-for-granted professional practices. Dialogue, however, between students, and students and teaching staff, is constrained by the geographical isolation of the parties, although self-dialogue with oneself and one's professional situation can be encouraged by the use of journals. While the curriculum ideal, in Smyth's course, was to help students break out of a 'culture of individualism', the course pedagogy and mode of delivery undermined the achievement of this ideal by limiting the amount of critical debate between the parties.

FURTHER INSIGHTS INTO THE CONTEXTS OF LEARNING

Knowles (1984), in emphasising the importance of establishing a climate conducive to adult learning, identifies three key environments which must be considered: the physical environment (which is basically beyond the control or influence of distance education organisations, but is an often ignored aspect of distance learning research); the human and interpersonal environment (which spans the MBA's three macro-worlds and is particularly relevant to the learning interactions orchestrated by the institution); and the organisational environment (which relates to the extent that learning can be applied and reinforced on the job and which is in turn influenced by an organisation's human resources development policy, management philosophy, structure, financial resources and reward system). Knowles emphasises two important points in the education of adults: the importance of the organisational environment and the pivotal role of learning communities in the educational process (see also Rogers 1983), the significance of which, as has already been mentioned, appears to be missing from the work of most of the researchers involved in the experience of learning movement in on-campus settings.
Jarvis (1987) argues that adult learning is not just a psychological process which can easily be divorced from the social context in which a learner lives. Learning is intertwined with social context and affected by it. Thus, one cannot necessarily equate reflective learning with behaviour change as learning in action may be constrained by social context. Learners may learn - i.e. reflect critically on experience and personally theorise about such experiences - but be loath to practise what they learn or test the implications of their theorising given a socially unsupportive or threatening environment. In fact, the very quality of learning may be compromised by a hostile social context which dissuades students from thinking critically about their professional experiences in the first place. Students, as social actors, play an important role, along with the educational institution, in constructing a formal educational world conducive to individual and collective learning. What becomes more problematic for MBA participants is the extent to which they can shape their professional worlds to maximise their learning. The aspects of the organisational environment, as identified by Knowles and the author in Chapter 1, are to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the managerial level and role of the individual, outside the direct control or influence of any individual MBA participant. The larger social systems existing within and beyond the organisational environment are, in a sense, 'givens' to the individual participant doing the MBA program, and it is the success of the individual 'fit' between work and study which strongly influences the quality of the professional development experience.

THE INTERPRETIVE TRADITION

Qualitative research methodologies have been advocated by some researchers as a useful way of developing theory in distance education (Morgan 1984; Minnis 1985; Burge 1988, 1991). Qualitative research is located within the interpretive or naturalistic paradigm. Maclean (1987) describes qualitative research as:

...an umbrella term that refers to certain research approaches that have a number of common characteristics. The term generally refers to interpretive studies designed to investigate human experience and to do so in ways that both reveal its complexity and reflect its historical and situational contexts. The goal of qualitative research is to take the insight and wisdom of people and give it precise expression and logical grounding so that complexity and dynamics of human behaviour can be better understood. (p.132)

An important perspective located within the interpretive approach is that of phenomenology. Phenomenology is in turn grounded within a particular philosophical tradition (Heidegger 1962; Husserl 1965; Schutz 1972) and has recently been used by sociologists (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Luckmann 1978). Spillane (1987, p.5) elaborates the basic assumptions underlying the phenomenological perspective as follows:
What all [phenomenological] approaches have in common is an emphasis on the function of perception in guiding human action; a concern with "here-and-now" experiences; subjective experience accepted as the basic datum for analysis; an assumption that people are generally aware of their experiences; a belief in the possibility of rational action: a concern for researchers to attempt to understand (or empathise with) the frame of reference of the subject; the attribution of a measure of personal responsibility for personality change.

The phenomenological perspective, in the context of student learning, seeks to develop, 'an empathic understanding of what is involved in student learning from students' descriptions of what learning means to them' (Entwistle 1984, p.13). Marton (1981) distinguishes between two autonomous and complementary perspectives on human behaviour: the first-order perspective which aims to describe the world as it is; and the second-order perspective which aims to describe people's experience of various aspects of the world. Marton's research on the experience of learning, as reported in the literature review section, focuses on the second-order perspective and thus embraces a phenomenological orientation.

In contrast to the positivistic research paradigm which attempts to describe, explain, predict and control physical and social phenomena through the belief that all phenomena are governed by universal laws which merely await discovery, the interpretive view rejects the idea that an objective social reality exists. Instead, 'the crucial character of social reality is that it possesses an intrinsic meaning structure that is constituted and sustained through the routine interpretive activities of its individual members. The "objective" character of society, then, is not some independent reality to which individuals are somehow subject. Rather, society comes to possess a degree of objectivity because social actors, in the process of interpreting their social world, externalise and objectify it. Society is only "real" and "objective" in so far as its members define it as such and orient themselves towards the reality so defined' (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.84). Thus, social reality is not something which is received, but socially constructed through human interaction. Individuals both shape and are shaped by social forces, with the focus of the interpretive view being an understanding of the social forces which produce a social reality. An understanding of these social processes can only be achieved by exploring the subjective realities of individuals, that is, how individuals both construct and act upon their meanings of what they experience and how these actions, in turn, help create a social reality which impacts on their own and others' subjectively formed meanings and actions. In this ethnography, social processes are researched using forms of cultural analysis. Cultural analysis reveals the social processes embedded in the study groups and within the residential schools. The adaptation of the groups' culture, through the changing external demands of the educational program's pedagogy, and, by
implication, the social processes embodied in group culture is a key focus of the author's study. The location of the participants' professional development experiences within the broader context of their professional worlds of work highlights how social processes beyond the immediate influence of participants' experiences can shape their attitudes toward their formal educational worlds.

Parallels can be drawn between the author's research of MBA study groups and the anthropologically-influenced work undertaken by Charlesworth et al. (1989) which studied the sub-culture of a group of scientists, technicians and associated staff at a prestigious Australian medical research institute. This research community had 'a distinctive "life-world" - a complex set of beliefs, attitudes, practices, relationships, and networks which make science possible. It is also, of course, a part of the larger culture or world of Science...' (Charlesworth et al. 1989, p.3). The MBA study groups have their own distinctive cultural characteristics which make professional development possible; the groups also belong to the larger formal educational world of the learners and, beyond that world, to the personal and professional worlds in which participants live.

The interpretive view does not attempt, 'to provide causal explanations of human life, but to deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way that it is' (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.90). This ethnography is not concerned with merely describing the MBA participants' experiences, but also aims to theorise about the professional development experience with specific attention being paid to the interaction network in which the experience is located. Thus, it aims to provide, 'a deeper, more extensive and systematised knowledge and understanding of the actor's own interpretations of what they are doing' (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.92). This requires that the author go beyond participants' descriptions, to the development of descriptive categories, or abstract concepts, which help to describe and explain their experiences. Marton (1983, p.13), in distinguishing between the researcher's and participants' perspectives in the conduct of qualitative research, makes the point that the participant, 'is describing his (sic) lived experiences of a specific...event, the ...(researcher) is making explicit and general statements on the basis of his analysis of other's accounts of their experiences...'.

There is a distinction here between the researcher's conceptualisation of the participant's experience and the experience itself as described by the participant. Marton (1983) states that:

... the distinction between conceptualisation and experience is not entirely clear-cut, but basically, the former refers to the result of the process of abstraction, to the fact that we
may have a generalised idea of something which we knew from our experience of its innumerable instances. Experience, on the other hand, is something concrete, something lived. It is linked with a particular situation and a particular content.

In attempting to theorise the MBA experience, the author has identified the commonalities and differences which exist among the participants in the ethnography. While the first step in identifying commonalities and differences which existed across the participants, both at the individual and group level, was to examine individual experience in isolation, as a case study in itself, this only represented the first step of the analysis phase. Descriptive categories were constructed by looking at commonalities and differences between individual case studies. In fact, Marton (1983, p.22) argues, 'that it is first after having gone beyond individual differences that we can study individual differences in a meaningful way'.

RESEARCH BIOGRAPHY

Ball (1990) states that

Few published ethnographies in education seem to deal with the implications of naturalistic sampling for the reading of the research. A great deal is left to be taken on trust. I use the term "naturalistic sampling" in a simple and straightforward sense to refer to the dispersal of the researcher's time and energy in the organisation by places, persons, and times. (p.162)

The problems of conceptualising qualitative research increase when data, and the analysis and interpretation of data, are separated from the social process which generated them. In one respect, the solution is a simple one. It is a requirement for methodological rigour that every ethnography be accompanied by a research biography, that is, a reflexive account of the conduct of the research which, by drawing on fieldnotes and reflections, recounts the processes, problems, choices, and errors which describe the fieldwork upon which the substantive account is based. (p.170)

A research biography on the author's ethnographic study of the MBA experience follows.

Persons

In Chapters 1 and 2 it was mentioned that fifteen participants were involved in the author's ethnography, thirteen of whom were also involved in the MBA collaborative research project. Two more geographically remote students, who have no opportunity for direct face-to-face contact with other participants or teaching staff other than at residential schools, were added to the author's study to provide a different perspective on the MBA experience. In 1990, these fifteen participants were organised into two study groups: Study Groups A and B. Study Group A comprised eight members who met face
to face in the centre of Melbourne, the capital of the Australian state of Victoria. Study Group B comprised five members who met face to face in an inner suburb in Melbourne and the two remote participants who were linked into the face to face group through the telephone. One remote participant regularly participated in study group meetings, while the other participated intermittently. In addition, both remote participants had been involved in a remote study group where all members were linked together, again, via the telephone. In 1991, the composition of Study Group B remained unchanged. On the other hand, the composition of Study Group A changed with two members of the group taking up new employment in a provincial town in New South Wales and Brisbane, Queensland respectively. The Brisbane member joined the local study group based in Brisbane, while the NSW member engaged with the Melbourne group through the telephone and occasional visits. Thus, only six members met face to face in Study Group A in the first semester of the final year of the MBA program. In the second semester of the final year the NSW-based participant moved back to Melbourne and rejoined the group’s face-to-face meetings. The perspectives of both these participants, were seen by the author as important to retain for the ethnography. The perspective of the remote NSW participant, who had previously had access to a face to face group (but was required to interact with the group through the telephone for a semester), unlike the existing two remote participants in Study Group B, provided a unique opportunity for the participant to compare and contrast the two different experiences. The perspective of the Brisbane participant provided the opportunity to explore the experience of attempting to integrate with a new face-to-face study group well into the MBA program. Just as the MBA’s mode of delivery and support allows mobile participants to continue with their studies, so it was seen by the author as imperative that these participants remain in the ethnography to tell of their experiences of studying the MBA program during a period of discontinuity in the nature and place of employment.

It was certainly more convenient for the author to deal just with those participants meeting face to face in Melbourne, and not the remote participants. As was indicated in Chapter 2, while a significant number of MBA participants (42%) are located in the large capital cities of Melbourne and Sydney (this number would be well over 50% if numbers located in the smaller Australian capital cities were taken into account), a sizeable number of participants are located in provincial towns and remote country areas. The author believes that the experiences of more remote participants need to be taken into account to provide a balanced ethnography. Nevertheless, it must be said that the experiences of extremely remote participants are not extensively represented in the research. The author did make an effort to talk with some of these participants at the two residential schools and their
experiences have been included in an attenuated form in parts of the account of the MBA experience.

On the issue of gender, while three women were part of the collaborative research, only one woman participated in the author's study - the other two had completed their studies before the author started his fieldwork. The low participation of women in the author's research reflects the low participation of women more generally in the Deakin MBA program, in fact, in all MBA programs irrespective of the mode of delivery. (See demographic characteristics information in Chapter 2 on Deakin MBAs. A study undertaken by Sinclair and Hintz (1990, p. 612) on MBA graduates from Melbourne University supports the claim of low participation rates among women by concluding that, 'People who undertake an MBA are likely to be male,...'). This low participation of women in management education programs ultimately reflects the low participation of women in middle and senior management positions in the workplace.

The author has been confronted by a problem in conducting the ethnography not dissimilar to participants who undertake the MBA program; that is, how to maximise the value of one's efforts given the scarcity of time and energy. In response to the problem of scarcity, I have deliberately chosen to spend the vast majority of my time and energy attempting to study the experience of the MBA from the MBA participants' perspectives. There are other perspectives which could be usefully considered on the MBA experience, not the least being the teachers' experiences of the program. I allocated some time in attempting to understand the teachers' perspective, although my dealings with various staff members involved in teaching units in the final two years of the MBA were variable and depended on the personal rapport that I had developed with various staff in past course development work. So, for example, there is quite extensive citing of the teacher's experiences in Chapter 4 because this teacher was one of the members of the MBA collaborative research project. I can only say that while the voices of the MBA teachers do emerge periodically in this study, more research awaits to be done on the experiences of teaching at a distance. Moreover, other parties who could have been included in this study include spouses, and key players in the participants' work worlds. The fact that such perspectives are missing from the study indicates, in part, the constraints on the author's time and energy and also the concern that the drawing of other possibly unwanted parties (from the MBA participants' perspectives) into the ethnography could have jeopardised the involvement of the participants themselves, particularly in the case of work-based parties who were perceived by some participants as not being totally supportive of their decision to undertake the MBA. MBA participants appeared to be very sensitive to and open about the sacrifices their families had to make to
allow them to complete the MBA, therefore, the author does not believe that the fact that
spouses were not directly involved in the study necessarily provided an inadequate or
distorted account of the impact of work and study on participants' personal worlds.
There were, however, a couple of occasions where participants were not prepared to
discuss the full reasons why they left their particular organisations which tends to indicate
that they were only human in not revealing every traumatic aspect of their experience of
doing the MBA. Charlesworth et al. (1989, p.7) note in respect of their own
ethnographic research that, 'It is ... a necessarily selective and partial account in that it is
simply not possible to deal with everything and everyone in that group'. The same can be
said about the author's study, although deliberate decisions about where to place the
author's time and energy, as explained above, have been made by him to achieve the
research aims.

Places

Interaction with MBA participants, whether it be through direct observation of them
working in study groups or at residential schools or informal discussions with individuals
or groups in these settings, always took place in natural settings where participants
normally engaged in such work. This was done in an attempt to ensure that participants'
actions were authentic and undistorted by the author contriving a set of experimental
circumstances to observe participants at work. The need to observe the participants
working in their natural study group settings, in their own pre-determined times, required
that the author engage in regular travel from the provincial city of Geelong to Melbourne
where the two study groups met - a round trip of about 180 kilometres on each occasion.
Furthermore, most study group meetings were held at night, after participants' work
hours. The frequency and duration of these study group visits for both years of the
fieldwork are presented in Appendix C. The author made nineteen visits to the study
groups during the third year of MBA study in 1990, and thirty-three visits to the study
groups in the fourth year of MBA study in 1991. Participants were more accessible for
direct observation at the final two residential schools which were held in Geelong.

While participants could be observed relatively easily in their study groups, with the
exception of the remote participants, and at the residential schools, it was impossible to
observe participants in more private forms of individual study in either the home or at
their workplaces. Furthermore, participants often engaged in private discussions with
each other outside the normal study group meetings that the author attended, these
meetings of sub-groups of participants before, after and between group meetings being an
important form of interaction spin-off from the full group interaction. The established
study group meetings and residential school activities are events which represent the more
public side of distance education study, and are therefore more amenable to direct observation. On the other hand, individual learning and sub-group networking in natural surroundings represent private forms of interaction which are almost impossible to penetrate using direct observation techniques. The author relied on discussion with participants to discover the nature and scope of interaction taking place in the private domains of distance learning.

Times

The times that the author visited the two study groups over the final two years of the program and the timing of the third and fourth year residential schools are set out in Appendix C. Furthermore, the times that the participants were interviewed on their experiences of the final two years of the program are listed in Appendix D. Time is an important factor for the author's study in three respects: the ethnography, by definition, is longitudinal in nature and attempts to provide an understanding of what participants brought to the program (see Chapter 2) and how they left the program in terms of their professional understandings (see Chapter 9) and the processes which led participants from the entry-level point of development to the end point of development on exiting the program (see Chapters 4-9); the focus on the evolving nature of study group cultures in response to the changing educational demands of the program over the final two years required the author to give some sense of the timing of these changes (see Chapters 4 & 6); the timing and nature of the residential schools had important implications for the ways in which the study groups operated and therefore participant approaches to the various learning contexts (see Chapters 5 & 7).

The demands on the author's time in observing the study groups was very much determined by the passage of time and accompanying cultural change within the groups as they negotiated new educational demands made on them by the MBA program. For instance, Chapter 4 provides an insight into the unfolding events surrounding the groups' first experiences of engaging with group assignments. Initially, the author was merely going to sample what he believed would be a short representative period of study group meetings on group assignments. He found, however, that group assignments proved to be a difficult new experience for the groups and that the groups, particularly Study Group A, spent most of the semester adjusting their processes to cope with the new demand. There was no representative series of meetings; the author was obliged to sit in on all meetings during that semester to understand the changing interactions in the groups which led to preferred ways of adapting to the new educational environment.
The timing of changes in study group cultures, the impact of the residential schools on these changes, and the overall professional development changes over the duration of the MBA program have been significant influences in writing up the ethnography. The chronological approach has been used to shape the final record of the ethnography. In particular, Chapters 2 and 9, the before and after views of the professional development experience, and Chapters 4 to 7, on the development of the study group cultures and the location of the residential schools, have all been ordered in a chronological fashion. The structure of the ethnography has also be shaped by the concept of the interaction network where a super-structure embodying key interactions in the MBA experience overlays the chronological ordering of a number of events. Thus, material on study groups and schools is grouped under the heading of interaction with these two learning contexts, while interaction within participants' workplaces and personal worlds is considered in Chapter 8. The author has attempted to marry both a thematic and chronological approach to the writing up of the ethnography.

Recording, organising, analysing, interpreting and writing up the data

Extensive note taking was undertaken on the following aspects of study group meetings and residential schools: the physical setting of the learning sites; the people involved in the activity; who said what, when and for what apparent reason; the time devoted to key activities in particular learning sessions; the learning objectives of the groups at each learning session; and the attitudes of participants involved in the sessions, including what appeared to be reasonable and unreasonable behaviour during the gatherings. These data provided insights into the culture of the study groups; that is, how individuals in the groups thought and behaved, what individuals in the groups collectively wanted to achieve, what was perceived to be acceptable behaviour (i.e. group norms) and what the group aspired to be (i.e. group values). While note taking could take place in the presence of group activity, data on informal individual and group discussions in and around the study groups and at the residential schools tended to be recorded after the event so as not to interrupt the flow of interaction between the author and participants. This was also the case with data gathered from teaching staff.

Note taking was essentially descriptive in nature, although explanation of the phenomena being observed was sometimes attempted. These notes were summarised the day after the observed event where further effort was made to draw out key issues and themes for future observation work. The analysis of the data began in earnest after the completion of a discrete and major stretch of fieldwork. The documents generated immediately after the major stage of fieldwork attempted to summarise the mini-episodes of observation of
learning events. These documents were descriptive-cum-analytical in nature and formed the basis for the final write up of many of the chapters in the study (particularly Chapters 4 to 7). The full emergence of the theoretical framework within and between these documents, which is embodied in the final chapters, came much later when all the fieldwork and accompanying documentation had been completed. It was only then that the author was able to develop an overall perspective on all of the key episodes in the MBA experience. The ultimate writing task was the completion of the final two chapters, with the final Chapter 10 being the link between the ethnographic study of the Deakin MBA experience and other relevant research in the field of professional learning. As has been noted by a number of ethnographers (Ball 1990; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983), ethnography demands reflexivity where the researcher is involved in a continual process of moving back and forth between the tasks of data recording, organisation, analysis, interpretation and writing-up. These tasks take place at a greater level of abstraction as the researcher searches for theoretical insights.

The author has found the analysis and interpretation of data in the ethnography more difficult than in the MBA collaborative research. Analysis and interpretation can be internally validated in a collaborative research team, i.e. by the process of triangulating by different researchers. With the author being the sole researcher in the ethnography, fellow researchers do not exist as a basis for internal validation. The author has had to rely on respondents to validate his interpretations of the MBA experience. One of the reasons for including teaching staff in the ethnography was to solicit their views on the way they believed participants were experiencing their units. This was in addition to them providing their perceptions of the experience of teaching the MBA program. Teaching staff provided one source for validating the author's interpretive account and therefore represented one form of data-source triangulation. The second major source of validation through data-source triangulation is the MBA participants themselves:

Some ethnographers have argued that a crucial test for their accounts is whether the actors whose beliefs and behaviour they purport to describe recognise the validity of those accounts. ...At the same time, it is important to recognise the limitations of respondent validation. Thus, we cannot assume that any actor is a privileged commentator on his or her own actions, in the sense that an account of the intentions, motives, or beliefs involved are accompanied by a guarantee of their truth. ...In short, while actors are well-placed informants on their own actions, they are no more than that; and their accounts must be analysed in the same way as any other data, with close consideration being given to possible threats to validity (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, p.195 & p.196).

It is here that I confronted a dilemma. On the one hand, I believed that participants had the right to know the results being yielded from both the collaborative research and the
ethnography, on the other, I along with my fellow researchers in the collaborative study were concerned that the dissemination of findings would unduly influence participants' accounts of the experience and their actions in the study groups. In a sense, there was a concern that an exposure to the researchers' conceptualisations would influence participants' natural, uninhibited accounts of the MBA experience as well as distorting their actions in the study group and at residential schools. I was concerned that such intervention would disturb the natural worlds of participants. Still, the participants were naturally curious about the results that both studies were yielding, and this curiosity translated itself into requests for published findings. I was often asked, on the basis of my research, whether the study groups were 'good groups' and how a particular group compared with others in the same year. It should be stated, at this point, that participants were informed from the beginning of the aims of the collaborative research and the ethnography; they had a clear idea of what I was investigating in my visits to the study groups.

The dilemma outlined above is not easily resolved. I and my fellow researchers on the collaborative research decided that participants had the right to know at an appropriate time and that this was at the end of the MBA program, i.e. the beginning of 1992. This decision was made and carefully explained to all participants at the end of their study of the third year of the program, i.e. 1990. At the end of the program, participants were sent copies of all published work on the MBA experience. The decision to delay the dissemination of written findings was reinforced by the views of one of the MBA participants who was sent a copy of an article written on the first year experience of the study groups in action (Holt et al. 1990c). The participant found the article extremely interesting, but immediately sent it back to the author. He phoned the author to explain his actions. The participant believed that he was too close to the group experience to reflect on it critically, and he did not want the authors' work to influence his relationship with the life of the group nor did he want it to colour his views of the MBA experience. He supported the suggestion to disseminate results after the program was completed. Participants, however, were not oblivious to results of both pieces of research. Research agendas and lines of inquiry were openly declared and implicitly revealed in much of the formal questioning and informal discussion which took place in and around the study groups and at the residential schools.
PART II:

INTERACTION THROUGH THE STUDY GROUP AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL
Chapter 4

THE STUDY GROUP EXPERIENCE OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT: CULTURAL CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

THIS CHAPTER ANALYSES THE ways in which study group members negotiated shared understandings and pursued joint action in response to the demands of group assignments in MBA 832 Marketing Management (see Chapter 2 for more details on the unit). Group assignments constituted the sole form of continuous assessment in the unit and dominated the groups’ attentions during the semester. (Participants were also required to sit an examination in the unit. Preparation for the examination is not included in this analysis.) The chapter highlights the need for cultural change to accommodate the new educational demands of group assignments. Specifically, this cultural change was characterised by changing patterns of group action (i.e the attitudes and behaviour of group members), group norms (implicit rules of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour), and group values (i.e group aspirations and beliefs). Study Groups A and B managed to negotiate the changes required to cope with group assignments, although the process of cultural change was characterised by uncertainty and some degree of tension. Underlying these cultural changes was the development of more intense and diverse forms of interaction among study group members.

THE NEW EDUCATIONAL DEMANDS

The three assignments which constitute the continuous assessment component of the unit are case studies. The case studies required participants to relate marketing knowledge to written accounts of actual Australian marketing experiences in order both to appreciate marketing knowledge and to develop decision-making skills. The unit implicitly requires all those participants who can attend a study group to submit group assignments. For those participants who cannot participate in a study group due to geographical isolation or other circumstances, individually prepared reports are still accepted. The study guide states that, 'Such reports do not need to be as comprehensive as group reports. However, they should still cover the main issues and indicate, if appropriate, the type of further analysis you would have conducted if you were part of a group'. Different standards of performance are therefore broadly outlined for group, as opposed to
individual, submissions. The study guide argues that 'a high standard of work is expected' in group assignments and, by implication, that the quality of individual work may not necessarily reach the standards expected to be achieved through the group. These differing expectations of performance are, in turn, reflected in differential marking schemes being applied to the two forms of submission in the unit. Responsibility for these marking schemes rests with Vic Jaques - the course team chair of the Marketing Management unit.

Details of the three case studies follow:

- Assignment 1 Sydney Symphony Orchestra (SSO) The groups were expected to explore the special marketing problems confronting the SSO and recommend short and longer term marketing strategies to deal with the problems. The case covers basic marketing concepts.

- Assignment 2 Heinz Calorie Controlled Soup (Heinz) The case involved the groups in the study of a new product development. No detailed questions accompanied the Heinz case. In addition to an understanding of basic marketing concepts, the groups were required to draw on material dealing with marketing planning, product life cycle and new product development, and product, brand and service decisions.

- Assignment 3 Eastside Australia Pty Ltd (Eastside) The groups were required to develop and support new marketing strategies for Eastside, with the case covering a wide variety of marketing issues, although a special emphasis lay in the area of distribution and promotion problems.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF ACTION

Learning how to approach group case studies

Group organisation

Two different forms of work organisation were adopted by the groups in responding to the demands of group assignments. Study Group A (8 members) adopted what could be described as a 'specialist' approach to organising its work whereas Study Group B (6 members, including 1 remote participant linked in via the telephone) adopted a 'generalist' approach. Colin Brice explained Study Group B's approach as follows:

[Study Group A] operates under one method we're the other one, where they divide up an assignment into chunks and each person goes away and does the chunk and one or two people then put the whole thing together and our study group has rejected that concept. We might be forced to apply it next year, but if we do it will be a sad day. Because what we prefer to do instead is to each do the assignment and then amass everyone having done it together. Then we have two people that amass everyone's attempts together, which means that we feel that the individuals get more of a broader
perspective about what the assignment's about and the various areas of the assignment, rather than a very focused perspective on a particular section of the assignment... (comment made at end of third year).

Colin Brice's assessment of the way Study Group A approached group assignments was based on participation in this group for a group assignment in an elective unit. While the group did adopt a very specialised approach to the organisation of its work in this elective assignment this was not indicative of its normal approach to group assignments in marketing management. Specialisation was certainly evident, but not to the extent described by Colin Brice. In the final two assignments, members of Study Group A were expected to develop a general perspective on the cases through private study; specialisation followed when the group became more deeply involved in preparing the submissions. Nevertheless, Colin Brice does articulate the reasons why Study Group B adopted the generalist approach and broadly what that approach entailed in terms of group organisation.

Both groups had tended to adopt a generalist approach to the organisation of their work in previous MBA units. Study Group B continued with this practice, while adopting a leadership structure for each of the group assignments. Members of Study Group B were never concerned with the efficiency of the group's work and therefore saw no need to change dramatically the way they organised their work. Study Group A, on the other hand, was deeply concerned with the efficiency of its work on the first assignment. The group had adopted a specialist approach and also continued with a contingency style of leadership (the changing nature of group leadership styles is examined in more depth in the next section). As a consequence, the group spent three meetings working on the development of the SSO submission. This provoked a minor crisis in the group and much critical introspection on the value of group assignments and the best way of organising the group's resources to undertake them efficiently.

Study Group A's critical reflection on the organisation of its work took place in its fifth meeting before the group's initial discussions on the second assignment. However, the groups' concern about how it was organising itself in undertaking group assignments surfaced as early as the group's review of the first draft of the SSO case (Meeting 3). The group's dissatisfaction with its approach to the first assignment is evidenced by the following comments made during the third meeting:

- We need an answering methodology.
- We have consensus on the points we want to make, but not on where we put them.
- The group is too big; we have no discipline for this type of project.
How do we do this? We need to get an answer given the time constraint. Time for pragmatism!

The group's review of its less than satisfactory processes embodied in the SSO submission in its fifth meeting provides a fascinating example of how a group of professional people engage in a collective process of critical reflection to identify problems and negotiate solutions. Frank Dickson identified the problem as being one of inefficiency. He was satisfied with the quality of the group's work on the SSO, but was concerned with what he described as the 'hideous amount of work' involved in preparing the submission. Frank attributed the group's inefficiency to the fact that members had spent too much time preparing for the case in group meetings rather than before meetings. Moreover, the group had failed to develop adequately at the beginning of their deliberations of the SSO an appropriate structure for the assignment. As a consequence, an inordinate amount of time was consumed in attempting to locate good ideas in a poorly conceptualised structure. Other group members concurred with Frank's analysis of the problems. While radical modifications to the group's approach, including the possibility of rejecting outright the option of doing group assignments, were canvassed within the group, these more negative responses to the problems identified gave way to a renewed commitment to making the group work better on group submissions. The renewed commitment, while recognising the benefits of the group approach, however, embodied the need to avoid the 'anarchy' approach of the past. The new organisation of the group's work was strongly influenced by Frank Dickson and William Grant. Frank Dickson emphasised the need to adopt some systematic project management methodology in attempting the next assignment, while William Grant highlighted the need to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the case study chair and secretary (the style of leadership demonstrated in the group during this meeting is analysed further in the next section). It was decided that the group would only run two meetings on the next assignment, that activities would be clearly designated in advance for these meetings and that group members would be allocated specific tasks. Moreover, the group decided to formalise a leadership structure for the assignment. The chair and secretary for the Heinz case were not to be allocated a particular aspect for specialist study. They were expected to develop an overview of the case which would help the group to synthesise the specialist contributions from each of the other members.

It can be seen that Study Group A's highly organised approach grew out of its dissatisfaction with the approach adopted on the first assignment, although the group did adopt a rather haphazard approach on the SSO case. The group's inefficiency problem can be partly seen as a function of the size of the group. The uncoordinated specialist approach, coupled with the lack of leadership structure, failed to allow the group to
achieve a desired level of quality in an acceptable period of time. In contrast, the smaller size of Study Group B, coupled with a commitment from the beginning to construct a leadership structure for each group assignment, meant that its members did not experience the problem of group inefficiency.

Moreover, the highly organised approach adopted by Study Group A was to some extent a product of the group members' desire to maximise their learning from the cases and to achieve a good result from the assessor for their efforts. The more organised approach was time-consuming, however group members were prepared to make this time commitment to achieve high quality work. One could conclude that Study Group A aspired to a higher level of quality in their work compared with Study Group B and therefore adopted more sophisticated forms of group organisation to achieve this objective. This conclusion is supported by Michael Valenti, a member of Study Group B, in his assessment of the different standards of performance achieved by the two groups:

I know that in [Study Group A] there was a tension at one stage because they were getting together at weekends to work and by and large our group has also, there's ...value conflict which hasn't been anywhere near a bad on this, but we reckoned that the level of meetings and work rates we've got suits most of us [the exception is examined in the section on group norms] and most of us aren't prepared to put that much more into getting higher marks which is possibly another reason why we're not the quality of the other group because we're not prepared to work as hard and we're prepared to live with that as a group (comment made at end of third year).

As indicated above, the approach to the organisation of work adopted by the groups had important implications for how they approached the study of case studies.

**Learning about the cases**

The study groups were continually searching to identify the right problems and structures for presenting these problems in their deliberations. Both groups initially saw these activities - idea generation and structuring - as discrete, and scheduled separate meetings to deal with them. The initial view was to find the right ideas first and worry about the presentation of ideas later. The separation of group activities devoted to idea generation and structuring caused both groups considerable problems. As already indicated, Study Group A, in particular, went through a protracted period of struggle to integrate the ideas of the group with the questions accompanying the SSO case. The group treated the SSO case questions as non-negotiable for the structuring of their submission, and also for the division of tasks among members of the group. A tension developed between the way the group was making sense of the case and the demands of the questions to structure the
group's thinking in a fragmented rather than a holistic way. The group needed to discover another structure to present their ideas. This search, however, was strait-jacketed by the group's belief in the requirement to answer the specific questions.

What became more evident as the groups progressed through the case studies was that the structure of case reports is not constructed after the idea generation stage, but is embodied in the individual and collective learning approaches of the group during the initial phase of case analysis. It is the frames of reference, or ways of making sense of the cases, which participants adopt in approaching a case, which eventually transform themselves into concrete structures of presentation, that powerfully influences the process of idea generation. These frames of reference are located in the unit's learning materials and participants' professional experiences. They represent theories, models, frameworks and concepts of marketing management. The extent to which the individual in particular, and group in general, immersed themselves in these marketing frames of reference, and started to think, act and feel like marketers, significantly influenced the quality of the final reports, particularly in the eyes of the unit teacher - Vic Jaques. However, the choice of appropriate marketing frameworks required a certain amount of individual and collective idea generation and evaluation. Therefore, what comes first: idea generation or the seeds of structure - appropriate frames of reference? It can be concluded that the two are closely intertwined indicating that the starting point for any good group submission is sound individual study of the learning materials.

The major breakthrough in recognising the importance of discovering appropriate frames of reference early, as a basis for structuring the assignment, occurred with Study Group A on the Heinz case. The group, during two mini-brainstorming sessions which had, among other things, as their objective the allocation of the labour of the group on the bases of key topics and case study issues, discovered the product development model as an appropriate way of thinking about the Heinz case. This is a good example of how the discovery of appropriate frames of reference is an integral part of the idea generation process, and how individuals in a group, who are well prepared, can quickly validate a particular framework as the most suitable for shaping further study of the case. This discovery was helped by the highly organised approach the group had adopted to the structuring of its initial brainstorming meeting. The important point was that the framework was discovered early, it guided further idea generation and determined the structure of the final report. Study Group A progressively locked itself into the product development model as the most suitable way of conceptualising and responding to the Heinz case. Based on the smoothness of the group's own subsequent processes relating to Heinz, and the final grade the group received for their submission from Vic Jaques, the
choice of the product development model was an appropriate one (the group's response to Vic Jaques's feedback on the submission is analysed later in the chapter).

Study Group A's approach can be contrasted to that of Study Group B which did not discover an agreed upon frame of reference for the Heinz case. The group's struggles with the case were the product of two interrelated factors. First, group members had not systematically investigated the learning materials to locate a framework which could be used as a coherent basis for generating and structuring ideas on the case. Second, the generalist approach used to organise the group's work led to the independent generation of the same or similar ideas on the case, and a lack of depth of study of any particular aspect of the case or learning materials which could have unearthed a suitable frame of reference for structuring the group's thinking on Heinz. The eventual structure of the group's report represented a compromise amalgam of views from various group members. Vic Jaques was to confide to the author after visiting the group during its deliberations on the case that, 'Study Group B had adopted a frame of reference which put them in the position of outsiders looking in on the problems of Heinz, rather than locating concepts which actually put them on the inside where they could more adequately see the reasons for the product's failure' (comment made after meeting 3).

While the specialist approach may cause problems of coordination, agreement to adopt this approach does focus the group's attention on the need to identify a unifying structure as a basis for allocating work among group members. Specialisation also yields the potential to find new structures if the old are proving inadequate as a basis for understanding the case. The lack of a suitable structure and means (i.e specialisation) to discover a better frame of reference was to impede Study Group B's efforts in coming to terms with the Heinz case. It is not imperative that a group discover a suitable frame of reference for making sense of a case early in the analysis phase. Debate on a suitable structure could be suspended until later in the process of group deliberations. The risk of such suspension of decision making on structure, however, is that group members are not working within a specified framework during the initial idea generation phase. The greater risk, as evidenced by the experience of Study Group B, is that the group may never identify a suitable way of making sense of the case.

**The nature of group leadership**

Leadership of individuals and groups is a much researched subject in the organisational behaviour literature. Several different leadership schools of thought have developed over this century, with the more contemporary theories adopting a contingency or situational perspective (Fiedler 1967; Vroom & Yetton 1973; Hersey & Blanchard 1969, 1988).
Leadership theories in the organisational behaviour literature tend to cast the leader and follower in a superior/subordinate relationship. The leader is seen as somebody who is separate from either the individual subordinate or group of subordinates and who formally holds authority and control over his or her followers. The leadership of work groups, or what has become known as the course team, has been a lively point of discussion in the distance education literature (Newey 1974, Gough 1978, Northcott 1978, Crick 1980). In the sphere of distance education, it has been argued that course team chairs need to demonstrate leadership skills in three areas - academic, organisational, pedagogic - to develop and maintain learning material packages effectively (Northcott 1978, p.23). These skills need to be demonstrated in essentially egalitarian groups of professional peers, although Crick (1980) makes the point that institutional hierarchies of power can undermine the democratic structures of course teams even in university settings. Thus the leader in these settings is located within the group and normally relies on moral suasion rather than the leverage of formal authority and control to orchestrate group activity. The course team chair is, therefore, expected to adopt a participative style of leadership. Overall, the literature on leadership and work groups emphasises the importance of somebody accepting formal responsibility for demonstrating leadership during the life of the work of a group. Leadership theories 'tend to ignore situations in which a formal, legitimate leader is absent, thus making their application to SMTs [self-managed teams] somewhat difficult' (Barry 1991, pp.33-34).

Holt et al. (1990c) explain the nature of leadership, as practised in the context of individual assignment submissions, in the first two years of the MBA program:

The study group structure was somewhat unusual in that, by conventional measures, no regular formal (or informal) leader existed. It is apparent that by mutual (probably tacit) agreement amongst participants, groups adopted a contingency approach to leadership. This enabled the rapid establishment (and retirement) of a 'leader' contingent upon the specific task facing the group and the particular skills, experience, knowledge and subject preparation of each group member. (p.133)

The contingency approach to leadership in evidence in the first two years of the program is not the same as contingency theories of leadership found in the organisational behaviour literature. In the latter case, formal leadership effectiveness is seen to be contingent on matching leadership traits or styles of leadership with different facets of the organisational environment. Thus there is no definitive set of traits or styles of leadership which characterises good leadership in every conceivable circumstance. Within the contingency or situational theory school of thought different theories have emerged. Fielder (1967) argues that leadership traits are difficult to change and therefore leadership effectiveness can only be improved by changing certain features of the situation within
which the leader attempts to lead. On the other hand, Vroom and Yetton (1973) and Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1988) argue that leadership styles can be adapted to meet the changing needs of the situation which the leader is attempting to manage. Hersey and Blanchard's theory is of particular interest because it specifically looks at the leadership of groups. Leadership style, they argue, must be adapted to the level of maturity/readiness of the group of followers. The focus of attention is the maturity level of the group as a collective, not on the maturity level of individuals within the group. Groups with a low maturity level need increased leader direction and are therefore highly dependent on the leader. Groups with a high maturity level do not require strong leadership direction and are, therefore, relatively independent of the leader.

As already indicated, these theories of leadership assume that the leader has formal authority and control and cast the leader in a role external to the individual or group which he or she is attempting to manage. This is still the case in Hersey and Blanchard's model which identifies a role for the leader, as group outsider, even for a group with a high level of maturity. Hersey and Blanchard's model could be usefully applied to illuminate what leadership style a tutor should adopt when dealing with study groups with different levels of maturity in distance education. It does not, however, capture the characteristics of a fully mature group that requires no outside leadership influence to operate effectively. In the case of the study groups in the first two years of the MBA program, no member was officially designated as leader and nobody was prepared to create and occupy such a position. (The groups did appoint coordinators who accepted responsibility for a number of organisational matters surrounding the work of the group, e.g. organising meeting times and venues, contacting staff members about academic or administrative problems that the group could not resolve.) Moreover, nobody was prepared to allow any other member of the group to occupy permanently a dominant leadership role. These group norms in relation to leadership pertained to overall group matters and group work on particular assignments and examination preparation.

As one group member said, the group would not allow one person to dominate because 'I don't think any of us are that immature to be led by the nose'. Yet another commented: 'I think there was about ten of us in the group initially; I think there were ten leaders. We all seemed to take turns at different times and it worked though. It sounds crazy but it worked.

...It is evident from an analysis of performance criteria that the contingency approach to leadership does not imply an inadequately functioning study group. The fact that every meeting was called to accomplish a very specific task in which every group member had a vested interest encouraged co-operation, tolerance and a desire to both make and receive contributions. This appears to have negated the need for a traditional formal leader to control input, guide discussion, introduce changes of direction and to generally orchestrate the approach and contribution of others. Simply, the highly-motivated,
task-orientated, goal-driven study group perceived little value in formalising the leadership issue (indeed, some feared strong negative effects from formal leadership) (Holt et al. 1990c, p.134).

In the first two years of the program, group members saw themselves as a community of equals where leadership responsibilities were evenly distributed across the group and discharged informally based on a matching of the task the group confronted and the available resources or competencies located within the group. The distributed and informal nature of group leadership was highly valued by both groups. Note, however, that group leadership was valued as being important to group effectiveness. The groups were not anarchic organisations. What differed in the way the study groups worked, compared with the explanations of leadership behaviour in the various schools of leadership thought, was the nature, distribution and demonstration of leadership skills throughout the group. A recent theory of leadership, called substitutes to leadership, which diverges from the contingency school, does appear to reveal more realistically the nature of leadership demonstrated in MBA study groups. Howell et al. (1990, p.23) define substitutes for leadership as, 'attributes of subordinates, tasks, and organisations that provide task guidance and incentives to perform to such a degree that they virtually negate the leader's ability to either improve or impair subordinate performance'. The authors note that substitutes to leadership can be found in closely knit teams of highly trained individuals. In such groups, leadership clearly comes from within the group and not from some outside formal leadership source. While Howell et al. (1990) do not explore the nature of leadership as practised within these types of teams the theory itself is most useful in attempting to understand the role of leadership in the MBA study groups.

The *Marketing Management* study guide foreshadowed the need for the study groups to adopt a structured approach to the preparation of group assignments. The guide recommended that the groups appoint a chair and secretary for each case study submission, with the chair and secretary adopting the traditional roles of shaping and controlling meetings and recording the key points and decisions taken by the group respectively. The need for a chair and secretary for each submission was readily accepted by Study Group B, although the roles of the participants occupying these positions tended to change somewhat over time. On the other hand, Study Group A struggled with the problem of managing effectively the preparation of the first assignment in marketing management because it continued to persevere with the informal, contingency approach to leadership which had characterised its culture in the first two years of the program. An analysis of the changes in approach to leadership highlights the importance of the contingency approach in allowing the group to negotiate new ways of undertaking the
group assignments while at the same time avoiding the violation of group leadership norms and values which were prized by the group in the first two years of the program.

The informal, contingency-based approach to leadership which characterised the group's deliberations of the SSO case failed to lead to an efficient use of the group's time (see preceding section on critical reflection of group processes). The approach gave way to a more proactive leadership style where the need for the roles of chair and secretary were recognised and defined for the Heinz and Eastside assignments. Moreover, the group specifically appointed participants to occupy these positions for the last two assignments after a review of the group processes surrounding the preparation of the SSO case had been completed. The Eastside case marked the end of the laissez-faire approach initially adopted for the SSO case and the beginning of a highly structured leadership approach where the chair and secretary shaped, at the outset, the approach the group was to use in undertaking the case. There was clear evidence of a leadership team (i.e. the chair and secretary) operating within the study group intent on developing strategies to shape the efforts of the group and to maintain the group's momentum. Team members were happy to accept the leadership team's strategies, although this is not to suggest that they saw themselves in a subservient relationship with the chair and secretary.

The group's critical analysis of its own shortcomings in working through the SSO case brought them to the realisation that permanent leadership structures for each project (i.e. group assignment) undertaken by the group were required. (This process of critical reflection occurred in the group's fifth meeting.) It was a select few members of the group, during the transitional Heinz case study phase, with extensive group management experience, who recognised the need to formalise leadership structures on a project-by-project basis. These group members, drawing on their management experience, demonstrated leadership within the group, on a contingency basis, to influence the development of new leadership structures which would enable the more efficient use of the group's time. Having demonstrated leadership to resolve the particular problem confronted by the group, the experienced managers did not seek to exert their influence on a permanent basis. Such an attempt to use the uncertainty surrounding the future development of leadership structures as an opportunity to establish a more powerful and permanent leadership role within the group would have been seen by the people involved, and other group members, as an action violating long-established group norms and values.

Furthermore, the establishment of more formal leadership structures for group assignments by both study groups did not mean that group members were prepared to
cede total power to the chair and secretary to determine unilaterally the nature of the final submission (although there was some evidence of this in Study Group B’s approach to the Heinz case). Both groups were sensitive to the fact that all members needed to have a stake in the ownership of the assignments. It would not have been consistent with the spirit of group work if, after an initial brainstorming session, the chair and secretary assumed total responsibility for preparing the assignment. All group members had to feel satisfied with the assignment before it was submitted for marking. Chairs and secretaries, on assuming these roles, were particularly concerned that they did not act outside their socially constructed roles. Thus an obligation to involve fully and do the right thing by all members of the group was acutely perceived by those who occupied the formal leadership positions. Leadership had to be demonstrated on a more sustained, and less contingency-related, basis by the chair and secretary for each group assignment, but this movement from one style of leadership to another was never allowed to undermine the egalitarian nature of the groups’ work.

Complex forms of interaction

In researching students’ use of learning materials, distance educators have focused on the individual’s interaction with printed text during private study (see Clyde 1983, Marland et al. 1984, Marland et al. 1990). Moreover, based on this research distance educators have attempted to highlight those features of text which promote learning. This focus is understandable given that text is the predominant medium and private individual study, the predominant style of learning in distance education. The advent of group assignments in marketing management, however, added several layers of interaction to the learning experience in the unit. These layers of interaction are worth revealing to highlight the potential richness of a learning experience encompassing the opportunity for peer group interaction.

Individuals interact privately with the learning materials and case studies to discover ways of making sense of the cases. Frames of reference discovered in the learning materials by individuals are usually evaluated against professional experience which represents another important form of interaction. Participants’ viewpoints are pooled and debated through group interaction where the group collectively interacts with a range of learning materials and professional experiences. Emerging from this interaction may be a decision of the group to capitalise on the potential benefits of the division and specialisation of labour. Members may study an aspect of the case individually in more depth; the interaction of participant with the case becomes more specialised. The product of group interaction, possibly the first draft of the case submission which represents an amalgam of the specialised efforts of individual members, is subjected again to individual judgement (the
individual interacts with the group's work) and further group review, with this cycle being repeated several times until the final submission is completed. Moreover, smaller groups of members within the study groups may form to discuss their ideas on the cases before, during and after group meetings; this was particularly evident in respect of the work of the case study chair and secretary who had to accept responsibility for managing the development of the case study submission. The nature of interaction which occurred in and around the study group in response to group assignments is complex, multifaceted and fluid, but, in a holistic sense, crucial in determining the quality of learning for the individual participant.

The study group experience in marketing management is a good example of Juler's (1990) discourse model which he proposes for distance education experiences:

The discourse model, as I have proposed it, suggests that any organised distance education process should be to some extent unstructured and unpredictable. At one extreme it can be a free flowing, almost rambling, complex of conversations taking place in a critical community which is never fixed but which expands and contracts as necessary. At the other extreme it is still not completely structured or predictable because it refuses to try and control all aspects either of student behaviour or of modes of interaction. (p.32)

The Juler paradox is that distance educators need to organise for some degree of unstructuredness and unpredictability in the learning process. The institutionalisation of the peer group as an integral aspect of the MBA experience creates the preconditions for unstructured, unpredictable and creative forms of interaction amongst participants which could not be directly constructed by the institution. In the absence of an institutional commitment to potential benefits of peer group interaction, it is doubtful whether the rich and diverse range of interactions described above would occur.

**CHANGING PATTERNS OF GROUP NORMS**

A clue to the complexity of interpersonal relationships of working in groups is what Kegan (1982, p.107) describes as '...the two greatest yearnings in human experience'. He explains these yearnings as follows:

We see the expression of these longings everywhere, in ourselves and in those we know, in small children and in mature adults, in Culture East and West, modern and traditional. Of the multitude of hopes and yearnings we experience, these two seem to subsume the others. One of these might be called the yearning to be included, to be part of, close to, join with, to be held, admitted, accompanied. The other might be called the yearning to be independent or autonomous, to experience one's distinctiveness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity (Kegan 1982, p.107).
In order for an individual to work effectively in a group, and for the group to achieve its collective goals effectively, individuals must be prepared to enter into and maintain interdependent relationships with other group members. A commitment to engaging in interdependent relationships necessarily means that the individual must forgo some degree of autonomy over his or her actions. The individual engages in a process of negotiation with other members on what can be considered to be appropriate and inappropriate forms of behaviour. Through such negotiations norms or tacit rules emerge as to what the group expects of each of its members to allow the group as a collective to achieve its objectives. Norms of behaviour can be seen as implicit codes of conduct or codes of ethics. Each member is obliged to ensure that his or her actions do not harm other members of the group. Thus there is a duty of care which must be honoured if the individual wishes to remain an accepted member of the group and enjoy the benefits which flow from being located within an interlocking set of interdependent relationships. Groups attempt to achieve some equilibrium through adherence to norms. Northcott (1991, p.41) notes that, 'Changes, which might be caused by either internal or external forces to the group, may well require that the group seek a new equilibrium and modus operandi'. The advent of group assignments represented a new external force which had ramifications for group norms and group values.

**Group consensus making**

Group consensus making represented a crucial feature of the work of the groups in marketing management. The very nature of group assignments demanded that participants reach a consensus on the selection and presentation of case study ideas. 'Consensus decisions reflect the views of all members and have the acquiescence and, ideally, the support of all members. A consensus decision is one that all members have a part in shaping and that all find at least minimally acceptable as a means of accomplishing some mutual goal' (Wood 1988, p.186). In previous MBA units, group consensus on individual assignments and preparation for examinations was desirable, but not essential for the work of the groups. However, given that 'peer relations are founded on mutual consent, rather than dependence... there has to be a large amount of give and take' (Giddens 1989, p.78), and this was evident in the earlier MBA units. Holt *et al.* (1990c) note in respect of the first year experience of study groups that participants avoided point scoring and were prepared to admit to weaknesses or mistakes without losing face. Thus it would be wrong to suggest that the groups had to construct afresh a culture conducive to group consensus making in response to the demands of group assignments. However, in doing group assignments, it was imperative that the groups did reach a consensus. Furthermore, Holt *et al.* (1990c) identified an underlying tension in the groups in the previous years' MBA units between the forces of collaboration and competition:
Interesting comments were made about the extent to which the group collaborated on assignments and how far members worked independently. Several members expressed the view that the groups engaged in a delicate balancing act. Members collaborated up to the point at which it was felt that a general framework for answering the assignment questions had emerged. Beyond this point, members worked independently, and only first drafts of individuals' assignments were circulated within the group. Another member commented that there seemed to be a strong, unwritten norm that the group would not go too far in assignment discussion, towards reaching a collective final answer, in order to allow individuals scope to differentiate their answers. ...

Overall, an indicator of undercurrents of competition was the general refusal of group members to circulate final drafts of their assignments to one another or, in some cases, to reveal to each other the marks received for their assignments and their true state of progress through the course materials. (pp.138-9)

Group assignments required that the groups produce a collectively supported final answer. This led to changes in the groups' leadership structures (already examined), norms (discussed in the next section) and values. These cultural changes enabled the groups to engage in acceptable consensus decision making, and removed the need of the group to live with the tension between competition and collaboration. Over the duration of the semester, the dual allegiance to individual and group gave way to an almost exclusive allegiance to the group. Loyalty to the group became an overriding group value, although in one case discussed in the following section on group norms an individual in one study group did not adhere to this notion of loyalty to group above self as strongly as other members of the group. The undercurrents of tension that this less-than-wholehearted commitment to group goals caused is analysed later. However, generally it can be concluded that participants believed that a strong allegiance to the goals of the group, particularly the goal of completing satisfactorily a group response, helped the individual to maximise his or her learning from the unit. The study groups constituted 'persons committed to collective goals through collective means' (Wood 1988, p.186).

The nature of the consensus making process was crucial in maximising learning for members of the groups. As indicated above, the process of consensus making should preferably allow members to have an equal say in the shaping of the work of the group and also produce an outcome which is seen as acceptable and supportable by all group members. However, Wood (1988, p.186) notes that consensus making at its worst becomes 'a euphemism for watered-down decisions that mark the least common denominator among members.' The potential for a heavily compromised approach to achieve consensus in the preparation of group assignments was recognised by two members of Study Group B - Colin Brice and Keith Jamieson - in the group's discussion
with Vic Jaques over the advantages and disadvantages of group assignments (discussion took place when Vic Jaques visited the group during its third meeting for the semester).

While members of the groups eventually had to reach a common view on the cases, the process of achieving this conformity never appeared to be distorted by a member or collection of members attempting to dominate the discussions and pressure others to adopt their particular view. Consensus appeared to be achieved through rational and vigorous debate and a readiness by group members to modify opinions or fit in with an emerging defensible line of argument on a particular issue. The individual dissenting voice was never lost in the groups' desire to achieve a consensus. An individual with an opposing view was always listened to patiently and concessions were usually made where a strong case was argued for the group to incorporate the divergent view.

The achievement of what might be called 'healthy' forms of consensus was shaped by factors internal and external to the study groups. In terms of the outside factors, the nature of the learning materials in marketing management worked against the development of unhealthy patterns of consensus making. The group case study assignments were so diverse in meaning and potential multiple interpretations that it would have been extremely difficult for any individual or subgroup to monopolise group discussions and hijack the final work of the group. In terms of factors internal to the groups, the substantial amount of individual preparation undertaken for group assignments along with the new leadership structures constructed by group members worked against the development of asymmetrical relationships between group members. Independent preparation gave free rein to the expression of different views on the cases during group meetings, while the ways in which leadership roles were constructed in the groups meant that chairs and secretaries did not use their powers to dominate group processes and pressure individuals to conform to their views of the cases.

The strengthening of individual obligations toward the group
In respect of study group norms which existed in the first two years of the program, Holt et al. (1990c) observed that:

...there was a general feeling that the groups were tolerant towards members who were under-prepared for particular meetings, as it was perceived that everyone would be in this position at some time. Better-prepared members, therefore, generally seemed willing to help those who were less well-prepared. A widely-expressed opinion was also that this was a self-regulating problem - those who were less well-prepared tended to get less out of group meetings. (p.139)
Individuals always felt that the group expected them to come reasonably well prepared for meetings and to pull their weight during meetings in the first years of the program, although, as indicated above, laggards were tolerated. Group assignments induced more intense and varied forms of interaction; members were required to hold more meetings and communicate with each other more regularly between meetings using a range of communications technology. The need for more intense forms of interaction required greater discipline from members to make themselves available on a regular basis for meetings and to come prepared for these meetings. The importance of each member of the group accepting the responsibility to come prepared to study group meetings has been revealed in the section portraying the complex forms of interaction which occurred between the individual, group and learning and assessment materials. For group assignments, the genesis of quality group work appeared to be quality individual private study. Developing an understanding of the key problems located in a case study, and the frames of reference which can be used to structure responses to the issues identified, began with private individual study. Participant interaction through the study group was not a productive way of preparing for a case study submission.

Humour was an important vehicle for reinforcing the expectation that all group members would come prepared to meetings. Using the terminology of Deal and Kennedy (1982), in their exploration of corporate culture, humour can be seen as a form of 'play'. Rather than humour being seen as part of the social dimension of the groups' activities which underpins the essentially task orientation of the group, the evidence suggests that humour, as a form of play, is an integral part of the work of the group. A good example of the way in which humour was used to avoid outright confrontation, yet reinforce the norms and values of the group, occurred in the eighth meeting of Study Group A on the third marketing assignment. All group members were requested by the chair and secretary of the third assignment to prepare written contributions on various allotted aspects of the case, and to have photocopies of their contributions ready for distribution and discussion at the next meeting. One member of the group failed to prepare a contribution for the planned meeting. On announcing his lack of contribution, other members responded: 'Where are the tar and feathers?'; 'Is your name spelt PHIL [actual christian name of participant] - P...h...i...l or FAIL - F...a...i...l!'. These friendly barbs had the deadly serious intention of censuring the member for lack of preparation and, in so doing, impressing on the the recalcitrant member the unwritten rule that everybody must come prepared.

The important role of humour, in the context of reinforcing the key norms and values of the group, is that it allowed the group to censure tactfully the wayward member of the
group without antagonising him. A situation of potential tension and conflict was averted. The group, therefore, avoided, through humour as a form of play, creating an unproductive relationship between itself and the individual concerned. The offending individual was conscious of the cultural cue, and quickly volunteered to have his contribution completed and electronically transferred to all members of the group within 24 hours!

Participants were acutely aware of the costs involved in meeting their new obligations to the group. Frank Dickson highlighted the costs of being involved in more intense and extensive interdependent relationships to meet the requirements of group assignments:

...The workload [relating to group assignments] we had in first semester [while studying marketing management] was very, very punishing. I mean I found that extremely hard. I mean I picked an off-campus course because I didn't have the ability to regularly schedule fixed commitments and that's what we found ourselves doing and a lot of us, you know bled because of that factor. We couldn't easily find a night a week to go and meet in a group activity because we, I mean William Grant does his at five in the morning; I do mine at sort of nine at night and weekends and we all had different sort of time scales to squeeze the MBA in and that really hurt. Huge time commitment which I found a big burden.

But, yeah, it's the quality component. I mean looking at it in more depth which isn't perhaps quite the same as a quality result, but it's spending more depth on the activities I think was the reason why I'd stick with the groups (comment made at end of third year).

These tensions were highlighted in the section on Study Group A's critical reflection of the group processes surrounding the development of the SSO case. Some group members, like Frank Dickson, questioned whether the benefits derived from group assignments were worth the considerable sacrifices that individuals were required to make to achieve a quality result on group work. These sacrifices relate to the loss of individual autonomy over decisions relating to the timing, nature and place of learning. A key sacrifice related to the time required to participate effectively in more substantial forms of student-student interaction. This period of collective critical introspection led members of the group to conclude that their learning from the MBA program would be maximised if they persevered with group assignments. Thus more disciplined group norms needed to be adhered to in order to maximise learning and that the costs of being involved in more intense forms of interaction had to be endured to achieve the individual's and group's learning goals.

Distance students, however, may not necessarily reach this conclusion on the pre-eminent value of peer group learning. 'Classroom Processes', a two semester unit in Deakin
University's Bachelor of Education program (BEd), experimented with the use of study groups - called 'Fives' because students were required to organise themselves in groups of five - to enable student-student interaction. The 'Fives' were promoted as a major form of support in the unit. Students were expected to communicate in their 'Fives' on the formal assignment topics. This communication was expected to take place through correspondence and individual telephone contact. Thus there was an attempt by the course team to institutionalise peer group support in the pedagogical and assessment strategies of the unit. Student evaluations undertaken on the unit revealed that students found it difficult to sustain peer group support in this form (Altrichter 1989, 1990). In particular, difficulties were encountered in synchronising time schedules, study habits and learning paces. Moreover, in the absence of face-to-face contact, students found it difficult to develop and maintain interaction with their peers.

Altrichter (1989, p.4) notes that the students' perceptions of the 'Fives' were that they were not just "support" for the work on the tasks but tasks in themselves: in order to take advantage of a supportive environment you had to build it. This observation is consistent with the experience of MBA study groups; that is, the need to develop a supportive culture to meet the requirements of group assignments. In fact, Walter Abbott was to declare during Study Group A's critical reflection on the processes surrounding the preparation of the SSO case that, 'Marketing is as much about group management skills as marketing itself!' (comment made in fifth meeting). The attitudinal disposition of students wanting to avoid dependent relationships, coupled with a desire to redefine the Fives as face-to-face groups to maximise their learning value, are the two fundamental conclusions which emerge from the evaluation work done on the unit by Altrichter. Distance education was seen by many students as a means of providing maximum flexibility for independent work, while the requirements of the Fives created new unwanted dependencies. The value of learning emanating from the attenuated forms of interaction embodied in the Fives did not seem to justify the violations to individual autonomy demanded by the new dependencies.

Incongruity between individual action and group norms

While there were occasional incidents where a member of the groups contravened group norms and were admonished for their transgressions, most members adhered to the new requirements of doing group assignments. There was only one case where a study group member appeared not to support wholeheartedly the new group norms, although it would be an exaggeration to describe this person as a social deviant who rejected the group's norms completely. Keith Jamieson, a member of Study Group B, while happy enough to participate in group discussion, was strongly opposed to group assignments, and the
extra demands they placed on his available study time (for more detail see Keith Jamieson's biographical note in Appendix A). Barrett (1984, p.73) notes 'that social rules rarely receive total compliance. This is especially the case when the norms impose some degree of sacrifice on the part of individuals. In such cases there is always a tendency to evade of stretch the meaning of rules or to otherwise minimize their consequences'. The question is '...the degree to which members of a group live up to its norms?' (Homans 1951, p.283). The lack of wholehearted support of the group's norms by one individual was never going to threaten the very existence of the group, although the lesser degree of support offered did create some consternation among other group members.

What first became evident in the deliberations on the Heinz case (Meeting 3), became commonplace during discussions on the Eastside assignment (Meeting 5): spirited and at times heated debate between Colin Brice and Keith Jamieson. Most contested issues were eventually resolved through logical debate, or an agreement to disagree. It was interesting, however, to observe the regularity of disagreement between the pair. While only speculation, it appeared that Keith Jamieson enjoyed fulfilling the role of 'devil's advocate' in the group, and because of Colin Brice's effusive nature, found himself regularly challenging Colin Brice's views. More deeply, Keith seemed to react negatively to Colin's enthusiasm toward the learning experience, particularly his commitment to the study group as the best way of maximising learning from the MBA. Keith, on the other hand, saw himself as a committed independent learner, constrained by the demands of group work. The diametrically opposed learning dispositions of these two members appeared to lead to more antagonism between them than between other members of Study Group B.

Symptomatic of Keith Jamieson's less-than-wholehearted support for group assignments was his inability to come properly prepared for group meetings. This source of tension intensified during the preparation of the Heinz case where Colin Brice was nominated as the chair and Keith Jamieson the secretary. While Keith, in the expected role of secretary, prepared the first draft of the case for discussion at the group's third meeting, he was unwilling to rework the draft substantially for review at the next meeting. Colin Brice, as chair, perceived the need to take over the rewriting task in the absence of Keith's commitment to this job. The rewritten version was presented at the group's fourth meeting, which was not attended by Keith, where Colin explained his reasons for rewriting the first draft. As part of his explanation, Colin disclosed that Keith had not even completed the required study guide reading and therefore was in no position to do justice to the job of reworking the draft.
Colin Brice, along with other members of the group, confided to the author in the interviews on the third year experience of the MBA that they were concerned about Keith's minimalist approach to his studies. Group members found it difficult to deal with this problem as evidenced by the following participant quotation:

The values of some people don't equate with other people's values, and this is difficult to control. ...It is more difficult to manage values of a cooperative group where people aren't under the same pressure or obligation to share the same value system as may be the case in a corporation where they have to work for you and the corporate value system. There, the employee tunes into the corporate value system and is rewarded for it...there is not the same structure of reward system available for a study group. Thus it is difficult to reconcile people who have different values about work, the standard of work, and the way you should work (Michael Valenti, member of Study Group B, comment made at end of third year).

Michael Valenti's thoughtful analysis of the difficulties of managing the group's value system applies equally to group norms. Clearly, the egalitarian nature of the group, where no member was formally appointed or assumed a permanent position of power within the group, made it extremely difficult for the group to induce Keith Jamieson to adhere to group norms on what was expected of each member in preparing for and working on group assignments. Attempts were made, however, to make the group's feelings known about his less-than-adequate performance, e.g. when Colin Brice took over Keith's role in writing the final draft of the Heinz case. The group had to accommodate under-performance because group norms did not appear to be strong enough to induce Keith Jamieson to change his minimalist approach to study. Direct confrontation with Keith over his lack of performance may have been counter-productive as it could have driven him from the group (or, at least driven him further away from his former degree of acceptance of the group's norms) thereby reducing its overall effectiveness. The group was not strong enough to cope with outright confrontation and conflict, i.e. it had no permanent leadership or well-established sanctions to handle and resolve major intra-group conflict. Moreover, it was not large enough to sustain its effectiveness in the absence of one its face-to-face members. The potential effect of attempting to impose sanctions on non-conformity with group norms may have undermined the critical mass of members required to achieve the desired frequency and quality of group interaction.

Another revealing aspect of Michael Valenti's analysis is that the less-than-wholehearted support of the group's norms tended to highlight and reinforce the desirability of these norms in the eyes of those members who adhered to them. It may have been difficult for the group members to induce a greater degree of compliance with group norms, however,
an understanding of the degree of non-compliance kept 'the norm alive in the minds of the other members of the group' (Homans 1951, p.309).

The following analysis is very much a postscript to the discussion above. In the final year of the program members of Study Group B believed that Keith Jamieson's less-than-wholehearted compliance with group norms ceased to be a major problem. Two explanations can be made for this observation. First, that the subtle forms of pressure exerted on Keith to comply more fully with the group's norms had some positive effect on his behaviour. There was certainly some evidence to suggest that Keith discharged his duties as chair and secretary of group assignments more conscientiously in the final year of the program. Second, that Keith became more aware of the group's perception that he was not adhering closely enough to group norms and that continued non-compliance could lead to his exclusion from the group. While Keith may not have been enamoured with group work, he was astute enough to realise that it was a key component of the educational requirements of the program and that, in the absence of group support, completing the program would have been infinitely more difficult. This appreciation of the strategic value of the group appeared to ensure that Keith would not increase the degree to which he deviated from group norms. This strategic view, coupled with a more positive response to group activities directed at reducing the degree of non-compliance, led to the group as a whole feeling more comfortable with Keith's contribution in the final year of the MBA.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF GROUP VALUES

Giddens (1989, p. 31) defines values as 'abstract ideals'. In relation to groups, they can be seen as the ideals that group members, as a collective, aspire to achieve. These aspirations can form a vision of what a group wants to be and an image of itself that it wants to project to outsiders. Assessor feedback appeared to play an important role in shaping group values. The experience of Study Group A in relation to assessor feedback will be analysed to explore this value-reinforcement role.

Study Group A's values seemed to be strongly related to and shaped by the assessment of their work by Vic Jaques. Individual members of the group had confided to the author that they believed that theirs was a 'good group'. By 'good group' members appeared to be suggesting that they believed that individuals worked well together and produced work of a high standard. The group was an effective vehicle for deriving maximum learning from the MBA and in sustaining members' motivation through the course. This self-appraisal was often followed by the question: 'Don't you agree?'. Individual member's
views on the effectiveness of the group were never of a boastful, self-congratulatory nature. It was always a reasoned and tempered judgement of the group's capacities which reflected a quiet confidence in the value of peer group interaction. However, the group also seemed to be looking for some reassurance or positive reinforcement that the way they valued themselves was consistent with the value others attributed to their work. This positive reinforcement was found in Vic Jaques's assessment of the group's Heinz case study submission. This assignment feedback was distributed and considered at the beginning of the group's ninth meeting on marketing management. An excerpt from the feedback is reproduced below:

Assessing this case has been a depressing activity until now. Most participants (including study groups) have been unable to identify the correct framework for analysing the case study, have totally ignored the financial analysis of the data, have barely considered the issue of market segmentation, and have been unable to identify the fact that there is a difference between the failure of a single product and the failure of an entire product line. It is not surprising that the average mark to this point (and I am more than half way through the assessment process) is approximately 55%. Fortunately, your submission has restored some of my faith in the marketing potential of the Class of '88 (excerpt from written feedback provided on assignment attachment form for assignment 2).

Study Group A had scored an extremely high mark on the Heinz case, a mark which was supported by Vic Jaques's comments. Members' initial response to the feedback was one of elation. The disappointment experienced by some members of the group in response to the feedback on the SSO case disappeared. Frank Dickson had been bitterly disappointed by the grade that the group had received on the first assignment. While the grade was good, he did not believe that it was commensurate with the effort the group had expended undertaking the SSO case. For Frank, a significant performance premium needed to be achieved to justify the work of the group given his alternative scenario that an individual effort could be done in less time and possibly receive a better mark given the differential marking criteria that Vic Jaques adopted for group and individual submissions. This performance premium had been earned on the second assignment which appeared to remove any previous reservations that Frank Dickson had about the costs and benefits of doing group assignments.

More fundamentally, the high value attributed to the group's work by somebody that the group trusted and respected, reinforced the group's view of itself as a 'good group'. Vic Jaques's comments reinforced bonding within the group and a commitment to the values of the group (a tightly-knit, high-performing, egalitarian team). Vic's comments, in short, had made a dramatic contribution to strengthening the group's culture. Morgan (1986, p.133) notes, in regard to corporate culture, that 'We find that organisations end
up being what they think and say, as their ideas and visions realize themselves'. This observation applied to members of Study Group A who had developed a strong belief in themselves as being a good group, and had realised this belief in the form of a culture characterised by a strong teamwork ethos. This collective belief was nourished by Vic Jaques's positive feedback on the group's work which came at a crucial time in the group's struggles to come to terms with the demands of group assignments.

**STUDY GROUP ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TEACHER**

The study groups' direct interaction with the teacher of the marketing management unit - Vic Jaques - represented what Goffman (1961) has described as an example of focused exchanges in circumstances of co-presence. Giddens (1987, p.115), drawing on the work of Goffman, defines such a circumstance as involving 'individuals directly attending to what each other are saying and doing for a particular segment of time. ...Encounters...by definition only exist when parties to them are physically in each other's presence'. Vic Jaques visited each study group early in the semester to provide members with written and verbal feedback on the first assignment in the unit. (Study Group A was visited during its sixth meeting; Study Group B during its third meeting.) The purpose of the visits, therefore, was for Vic Jaques to provide his views on what constituted a quality assignment submission in marketing management as a basis for improving the work of the groups on the subsequent two assignments. Vic Jaques was an outsider to the groups briefly engaging with them at a stage when they were still wrestling with the demands of group assignments. It was the stage of the existence of the learning collectivities which shaped Vic Jaques's purposes in visiting the groups and the groups' responses to his presence.

There were two foci of attention in the encounter between Vic Jaques and the groups: the validity of the feedback on assignment one and the validity of group assignments. The validity of both dimensions of the learning experience were contested by members of the study groups. The intensity of the process of contestation was variable and to some extent circumscribed, although both parties did engage in the debate over the contentious issues. This debate was not merely between Vic Jaques and group members. Debate was also strong between members of the groups themselves. The nature of the encounter between the distance teacher and his students can be revealed by drawing on Goffman's (1967) work on the nature of deference and demeanor. Goffman (1967, pp.56-7) states, 'By deference I shall refer to that component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient of this recipient, or of something which this recipient is taken as a symbol, extension, or agent. These marks of
devotion represent ways in which an actor celebrates and confirms his relationship to a recipient. Goffman (1967, p.58) goes on to note that deference may be based on an evaluation of a person's personal qualities or on the nature of the position that the person occupies. Moreover, deference can be symmetrical or asymmetrical in nature and may take the form of avoidance rituals and presentational rituals (Goffman 1967, p.59 & p. 62).

The avoidance ritual and the provision of feedback on assignment 1

The nature of the encounter between the groups and Vic Jaques over the provision of feedback on assignment 1 can be illuminated in terms of Goffman's avoidance ritual. 'Avoidance rituals, as a term, may be employed to refer to those forms of deference which lead the actor to keep at a distance from the recipient and not violate...the "ideal sphere" that lies around the recipient' (Goffman 1967, p.62). Members of both study groups appeared to respect Vic Jaques as a person and also his role as teacher of the marketing management unit. To directly and persistently challenge Vic's feedback on the first assignment would have penetrated the 'ideal sphere' and undermined Vic's role as a competent teacher. Two examples of avoidance ritual relating to Vic Jaques's feedback on assignment 1 highlight the nature of deference involved in the encounters.

In providing written and verbal feedback on the first assignment, Vic Jaques emphasised that both groups could have been more creative in their answers to the question of what marketing strategies the SSO could have pursued in the longer term. An extract from the written feedback provided to Study Group A is indicative of Vic Jaques's views of this aspect of both groups' submissions:

With respect to question 3, although you identify an appropriate methodology for addressing the long run issues facing the SSO, I would have preferred that you adopt a more creative approach to your answer. Marketing management does not only concern direct analysis of the facts - it also concerns the willingness/ability of the manager to think creatively about the profit/performance opportunities found in an industry. I believe that you should know enough about the industry (from the case materials and your collective wisdom) to take a small step in the creative direction. This would require you to attempt to develop a mission statement for the SSO for example.

To perhaps identify one target market segment (e.g tourists) and to give an indication of the type of marketing mix which could be used to effectively satisfy the needs of this segment. Whilst it is important that you do not move into the realms of fantasy, I would like to see the result of some creative brainstorming on issues such as these (excerpt from written feedback provided on assignment attachment form for assignment 1).
There was little critical engagement with Vic Jaques on the assignment feedback. William Grant (Study Group A) argued that the group had deliberately attempted to limit creativity, and had certainly discussed the mission issue at length. William Grant also criticised the wording of the case question which he believed should have been more explicit in inviting the group to construct a mission statement for the SSO. Vic Jaques effectively closed the discussion on the wording of the question by arguing that the SSO case study questions were only included as a guide to thinking and were not intended to be prescriptive. He acknowledged that it was unfortunate that the specific questions had the unintended consequence of limiting the group's perceptions of what could be reasonably included in the final submission.

Colin Brice (Study Group B) showed particular discomfort in response to Vic Jaques's comment on the need for more creativity in the group's assignment. He had been influential in shaping the group's conservative response to the last case study question. Based on his own marketing experience, Colin had argued strongly that the SSO's marketing research had been done badly, and that if he were managing the SSO, he would ask the consultants to go away and do the job properly. He continued by arguing that when a proper piece of marketing research had been produced, he would consider it, along with the issue of long-term marketing strategies, at that time. In essence, Colin argued that the only long-term strategy the group should recommend was that the 'SSO should get its bloody marketing research right!' Colin Brice's view was contested at the time the group was completing the final draft of the submission with both Craig Farrell and Keith Jamieson believing that that the final report should contain more clues on what the SSO should do in the longer term. However, Colin Brice's view through force of argument and personality won out. While Colin Brice openly accepted responsibility for the thrust of the group's response to the final question, he appeared to respond sceptically to Vic Jaques's suggestion that the group should have been more adventurous in charting a possible long-term future for the SSO. Vic Jaques certainly acknowledged that Colin Brice's position was defensible, but it was not what he was personally looking for in the assignment submission. Colin Brice demonstrated a reluctance to engage in a critical debate with Vic Jaques on where the line between informed conjecture and fantasy should be drawn, although he admitted at the next meeting of the group only that Vic Jaques also had a defensible position which, on reflection, he would not quarrel with.

In both instances described above, key members of Study Group's A and B declined to pursue a vigorous debate on the validity of Vic Jaques's feedback on assignment 1, although both participants registered disagreement over aspects of the wording of the case study questions and the major assignment criticism that the submissions lacked creativity. While Vic Jaques was able, in part, to close potentially long-winded and irresolvable
debate on the validity of his feedback through a skilled and diplomatic management of the discussion, which did acknowledge the viewpoints of different members of the groups, the more decisive factor appeared to be participants' reluctance to push their own views too stridently. This reticence can be explained in terms of Goffman's avoidance ritual. Participants did not want to appear to undermine Vic Jaques's role as competent teacher due to their respect for him as person and their respect of his role as assessor. In this respect, Goffman (1967, p.65) notes, 'An important focus of deferential avoidance consists in the verbal care that actors are obliged to exercise so as not to bring into discussion matters that might be painful, embarrassing, or humiliating to the recipient'.

Participants deferred to Vic Jaques because they appear to see themselves in an asymmetrical relationship with him, particularly in the crucial teaching area of assessment. Thus while Vic Jaques is seen to have the power to assess participants work, participants do not see themselves as having the power to assess the validity of the feedback they receive on their work. Assessment is, therefore, not expected to be reciprocated. There appears to exist a tacit rule that teacher and participants keep their distance on the crucial area of assessment. This social distance, which is embodied in the avoidance rituals in evidence when Vic Jaques provided the feedback, is not consciously manufactured or manipulated by either the teacher or participants. The distance is socially constructed by the actors and appears to be shaped by each parties' 'personal biography and...personality' (Giddens 1987, p. 118). Vic Jaques's past experience as teacher and participants' past experiences as learners provide insights into why student critique of assignment feedback is seen as a taboo. One can only imagine how both parties would react if participants aggressively challenged the assessment practices of teaching staff and if teaching staff in turn responded by asking participants to assess their own work. Pre-existing mutual expectations would be shattered. One suspects that such unpredictability would lead to a high degree of insecurity and panic being experienced by both the teacher and participants in the face of the dissolution of accustomed role expectations.

The avoidance ritual and the debate surrounding the value of group assignments

While interaction between Vic Jaques and the groups on assignment feedback was eschewed, a full and open exchange took place on the value of group assignments. Vic Jaques did not visit the groups with the express purpose of debating the value of group assignments. This topic of discussion was initiated by the groups in response to their less-than-satisfactory experience of undertaking the SSO case on a group basis. In contrast to assignment feedback, the topic of group assignments was not avoided by either party. The author was unsure of why this was the case. Participants must have
believed that a critique of the group process that they had experienced was not an issue which would convey a disrespect for Vic Jaques as person and teacher. Vic Jaques, in turn, appeared to feel more comfortable about engaging in a spirited and lengthy debate on the value of group assignments.

The key instigators of the debate on the value of group assignments were Keith Jamieson and Colin Brice (debate held at end of Study Group B's third meeting). Both members admitted after the meeting that they had orchestrated the debate to tease out the key arguments for and against group assignments. They were interested in hearing why Vic Jaques had included group assignments in marketing management as a basis for developing their perspective on the value of group work. In particular, it appeared that Keith Jamieson was playing the 'devil's advocate' role in critiquing the purported advantages of group assignments in order to elicit a response from Vic Jaques. Keith Jamieson was well suited to this role as he had admitted during interviews on the experience of studying the first two years of the MBA that he strongly disliked the residential school component of the program and also that he preferred to learn independently from books. Keith was not enamoured with group learning approaches as he believed that these did not suit his own learning style. It should be noted, however, that he appeared happy enough participating in Study Group B in the first two years of the program. As already mentioned, his less-than-wholehearted support for the norms of the group did, however, cause some consternation among other members during the group's study of marketing management.

The members of Study Group B were not critical of group work per se. They had benefited greatly from engaging in group discussion of assignments and examination preparation during the first two years of the program. The point of contention was the perceived requirement to prepare jointly a final submission, rather than being given the opportunity to disengage from the group after discussion to prepare individual submissions.

The open and vigorous contestation of ideas on the value of group assignments clarified the arguments for and against group assignments. In contrast to the lack of critical debate on the assignment feedback, both parties appeared happy to raise, argue and defend their views on the costs and benefits of undertaking group assignments. Vic Jaques was to emphasise that technically there was no compulsion for members of the group to submit a group assignment. The study guide merely strongly encouraged those students who can participate in a group to submit a group assignment. Thus, in his view, the group had, as a legitimate option, the choice of reverting back to group input into a set of individual submissions. Moreover, Vic argued that if the group chose to continue with group
assignments it was up to group members to decide what leadership styles and decision-making processes they adopted. Vic Jaques indicated that while he would be disappointed if the group reverted back to their previous modus operandi, he would respect their decision as the group had engaged in the process of preparing a group submission and would have clearly made such a decision in the light of an informed and considered assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of this style of peer group work. Ultimately, Vic Jaques did not make an autocratic decision, based on his formal authority as teacher in marketing management, to coerce the group to continue with group assignments. He merely expressed his opinion on the desirability of persevering with the group approach, but left the final decision to the group. The open, full and frank discussion between the parties, where inequalities in power between Vic and the participants were not prominent, appeared to lead to a positive learning outcome. For most members of the group, the discussion had reaffirmed their faith in the value of group work in general, and group assignments in particular.
Chapter 5

THE THIRD YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL: FORMS OF INTERACTION

THIS CHAPTER ANALYSES PARTICIPANTS' experiences of selected sessions run at the third year residential school in the MBA program. Sessions are selected for analysis on the basis of their representativeness of the residential school experience. Four different levels of analysis are undertaken on the forms of interaction observed at the school. Interaction analyses examine:

- intra-group bonding which occurred within study groups, including relationships between individual remote participants and established groups;
- inter-group conflict which occurred between groups;
- interaction between individuals outside their established groups; and
- interaction between participants and teaching staff.

Micro level analyses relate to forms of interaction observed within and between study groups, while macro analyses relate to broader forms of interaction between participants and the place of the residential school within the overall MBA experience. Different forms of interaction are located within and seen to be shaped by a set of pedagogies, including assessment strategies. Participants collectively responded to the perceived demands of the residential school pedagogies. However, the intentions of these pedagogies were, in certain instances, less than clear. The ambiguity surrounding certain pedagogical intentions led to negotiations over their meaning between participants and teaching staff. In one instance, the pedagogy induced a complex and, in some senses, confused and critical set of responses from participants.

The residential school is not treated as a discrete and separate learning event. The school represented both the climax of certain learning activities whose origins preceded the school itself and the genesis of other learning activities which followed the school. The residential school is seen as a key event in the flow of MBA learning activities. The special character of the school in linking together different learning activities is seen through the opportunities that it provided to broaden the forms of interaction available to participants.
THE ROLE OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

There has been a lively and continuing debate on the value of residential schools in distance education. The debate highlights a compromise between the value of residential schools in providing opportunities for student-student and staff-student interaction on the one hand (Perry 1976; Smith 1979; Eastcott & Small 1984), and the cost and access problems associated with compulsory residential schools on the other (Parer 1988; Quality Tuition: A Consultative Report 1990; Herrmann et al. 1991). The analysis of MBA participants' conceptions of the value of residential schools makes an important contribution to what has developed in Australia (Cameron et al. 1991) and the United Kingdom (Morgan & Thorpe 1992) as a major policy debate. However, what is relevant to this analysis is the assumptions that the protagonists appear to make of the value that students ascribe to the residential school experience. The value of opportunities for sustained interaction between students and teaching staff is often assumed to be the case. The question is whether the costs of making residential schools compulsory outweighs the purported educational benefits which accompany the opportunity to experience at first hand, albeit for a compressed period, the University culture. Those who strongly advocate that residential schools should be a mandatory component of distance education courses believe that they are critical to the success of students. Those against compulsory schools, while sympathetic to their educational advantages, are concerned that their presence represents a major barrier to study for certain students. The promotion of equity objectives through broadening access to learning opportunities is a major concern for those who challenge the compulsory nature of residential schools. Little empirical research has been undertaken to substantiate the purported benefits of residential schools from the perspectives of students and teachers (exceptions include McIntosh 1975; Mason & Morgan 1986; Parer 1988; Cameron et al. 1991). Mason and Morgan (1986) elicited strong student opinion both for and against the value of the United Kingdom Open University's summer schools in the light of the financial cutbacks suffered by that institution during the mid 1980s.

The analyses of MBA participants' experiences of the third and fourth year residential schools presented in this chapter and Chapter 7 respectively represent an attempt to review critically the taken-for-granted assumptions made about the value of an extended period of face-to-face interaction in a distance education program. The analyses generally support the powerful contribution that residential schools can make to the quality of the educational experience, although the most significant aspect of the experience resides in the value attributed to peer group interaction. The value of the schools does not reside in the opportunity they provide teachers to disseminate and reinforce the learning of a large
amount of content through lectures and tutorials. This highlights the fact residential
schools in the MBA program are designed to fulfil a legitimate role within the distance
education experience. They are not designed, as has been observed with disquiet by
some distance educators (Parer 1988) who have evaluated weekend schools, to provide
remedial teaching to cover the deficiencies of poor learning materials. Learning activities
structured by the institution form the basis of the analysis presented in this chapter.
Chapter 7 provides an analysis of a key learning experience which unfolded during the
fourth year residential school which was initiated by participants independently of the set
of learning activities designed by the institution for the school.

THE INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSES FOR THE MBA THIRD
YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

The third year residential school was held over five week days in the eighth week of
second semester, 1990 (background information on residential schools is provided in
Chapter 2). Each MBA participant receives a residential school package 2-3 weeks before
the school begins. The package sets out a detailed program of activities for the school as
well as a range of learning resources, in addition to third year subject study guides and
textbooks, which form the basis of the learning activities presented. While no explicit
teaching intentions are stated for the third year residential school in the package, it is clear
from the program and the Residential School Director's letter that participants are to be
exposed to 'interesting' sessions devoted to the reinforcement and extension of the three
compulsory subjects - *Marketing Management, Finance, and Personnel Management and
Industrial Relations* - that they study in the third year of the MBA program. Sessions
relating to the these three subjects were to be conducted by the course team chairs of these
units as well as outside experts.

INTRA-GROUP BONDING

Paradoxically, activities conducted at the school helped both to increase bonding or
cooperation within study groups (e.g. Study Groups A and B) and to increase conflict
between groups in certain circumstances. This social phenomenon has been well
documented in the literature on group dynamics. For example, Homans (1961)
concludes that hostility can increase between groups which are placed in a competitive
situation where rewards are seen to be scarce and capable of being fully captured by the
best performer. In this situation, a superior group can deprive the inferior group of the
limited available rewards. The capture of available rewards by the superior group tends
to increase members' liking for each other and therefore intra-group cohesion, whereas
the deprivation of rewards experienced by the inferior group also increases member bonding and group cohesion. Thus competitive situations can lead to increased intra-group bonding and inter-group conflict.

A major activity which contributed to these patterns of group behaviour was a finance case study titled, 'Flying High Airlines'. This section examines the ways in which participation in the preparation and presentation of this case promoted valuable forms of interaction within study groups. While the analysis focuses on Study Groups A and B, the effects of the activity on stimulating new forms of interaction between remote participants is also explored.

The Flying High Airlines capital budgeting case study was an assignment in the Finance unit. The case could be prepared as either an individual or group submission. Half the marks for the case were to be allocated to a group presentation at the third year residential school. This was the first time in which participants were asked to present and be marked on an oral presentation of a case study at the third year school. The pedagogy was new, untested and yet to be fully understood by participants. The two Melbourne study groups (A & B), and a Sydney study group, were to make group presentations. The rest of the class, made up of remote or highly mobile participants who were unable to participate regularly in face-to-face study groups, were arranged into three study groups for the purposes of making the oral presentation of Flying High at the school.

The format of the day devoted to the Flying High presentations saw the six groups arranged in pairs. Each pair of groups was to be involved in a session with three closed sessions of presentations scheduled for the day. Melbourne Study Groups A and B were paired together for the first of the three sessions. Within each session, both groups were required to make their presentations to the Finance course team chair, Derek Bartels. Questions and answers between the two groups involved in the session followed. The usual practice was for Derek Bartels, acting as Managing Director of the Board of Flying High, to direct an opening question to each group and to then pass the question and answer time over to the groups themselves. Groups were encouraged to interrogate each others' submissions and therefore were pitted against each other in a competitive situation which contributed to intra-group solidarity and inter-group rivalry.

The case required the groups either to make a choice between the purchase of two different types of aircraft for Flying High Airlines Ltd or recommend some other alternative course of action. The decision had to be based on financial, marketing and strategic planning criteria. The two models the groups had to consider were the FL6000
(a more tested but more expensive aircraft) and the AB641 (a less proven but more economical aircraft).

**Intra-group cooperation**

The study groups had to plan a strategy to respond to the demands of Derek Bartels and their opposing group. Study Group A's pre-session preparation for the presentation reveals how one group attempted to plan for the demands of the learning encounter. Group members attempted to define the objectives of their presentation. Moreover, they needed some plan as to who was going to handle what questions in the question and answer time. Most importantly, the group needed to determine appropriate tactics for the interrogation of the other group's submission.

William Grant believed that the objective of the presentation was to convince the Board of Flying High (i.e. Derek Bartels) that their recommendations were the most appropriate. A corollary of this objective was to convince the members of Study Group B of the superiority of the group's recommended course of action. Moreover, it was important to demonstrate to Derek Bartels that all of the members of the group had a mastery of the report's content, and that the analysis contained in the report was thorough and creative. The strategy, therefore, was one of demonstrating a collective mastery of the case and convincing the opposing group and Derek Bartels that theirs was the most appropriate course of action for Flying High.

The objectives which the group set itself for the presentation influenced its views on the appropriate tactics to adopt in the question and answer time. Before discussing tactics, however, the case study leader - Frank Dickson - worked through each of the key issues embodied in the written report and asked for volunteers to handle these areas if they arose in the session. Frank Dickson was chosen by the group to be the case leader/presenter because of his outstanding oral communication skills. These skills were seen as being essential in achieving a high mark on that aspect of the case relating to the oral presentation. Key issues were distributed amongst various members of the group based on their prior areas of interest and specialisation in the preparation of the written report. Consistent with the group's objective that all members of the group should have the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the case, the allocation of specific issues was reasonably evenly spread around most members. A high degree of organisation was in evidence during the briefing session, with each member given a specific role to play during the actual presentation.
Study Group A's tactics for the question and answer time were based on the primary objective of convincing the other group of the validity of the recommendations proposed, rather than 'to pick holes in the other group's presentation' (William Grant). Walter Abbott argued that the group should not be too aggressive in question time. Ken Johns believed that it was more than likely that the Net Present Values (i.e. profitability figures) calculated for the two aircraft would be different between the two groups and that it was important that their group be able to identify the different assumptions underpinning the profitability calculations and defend their own particular model. The group also personalised their tactics by identifying the key areas of expertise which resided in the other established groups. The Sydney study group was perceived to have strong accounting expertise owing to the fact that some of its members had a background in accounting. Therefore, if the group were paired with the Sydney group (which did not, in fact, eventuate) they felt they should anticipate rigorous questioning of their finance analysis. On the other hand, the group were aware that Tim Greaves, a member of Study Group B, was employed, at the time, by a large firm involved in the aviation industry and would therefore have an extensive technical knowledge of the two aircraft. Thus, the members of the group were anticipating some probing questions being asked, by a person like Tim Greaves, on the assumptions they had made regarding the technical capabilities of both aircraft, and the economic life and salvage value of the planes.

Study Group A fashioned its oral presentation and approach to the question and answer time to the demands of a competitive form of interaction with another study group. While the content of the presentation was not, in the members' view, strongly influenced by the anticipated competitive encounter, the style and tactics of the presentation were shaped by the need to gain supremacy over the other group, with the assumption being that it would be most unlikely that the two groups would produce identical sets of analyses, interpretations and recommendations. Gaining supremacy was not seen as necessarily destroying the other group's case. Supremacy was defined in terms of convincing the other group that their case was the weakest. Participants perceived that the marking criteria used to evaluate the oral presentations would reward the group making the strongest presentation. Hence, they believed the strongest presentation would receive higher marks than the weaker presentation. Thus oral presentations would receive differential rewards based, in part, on competitive interplay between the groups.

The establishment of remote participant identities in a face-to-face study group

The Flying High case study in particular, and the school in general, provided the two remote participants, associated with Study Group B, with the opportunity to establish
themselves more fully within the regular group. Here, the analysis focuses on the individual's personal and emerging relationship with a particular group of participants. The accounts of the remote participants are covered in some length as they represent special cases of student networking in distance education. In this case, the interaction is between remote participants and a group of participants meeting face to face. In the next section, another unusual form of participant networking is examined, that is, the development of a non-face-to-face study group through telephone conferencing. Both networking configurations are important in considering ways in which student interaction can be promoted at a distance.

Malcolm Ingram, the remote telephone participant from northern central Victoria, was allocated the role of case study presenter for the session. Due to Malcolm Ingram's isolation, he declined to occupy the role of chair or secretary for any of the group marketing management assignments (see Chapter 4). Occupying the role of the presenter of Study Group B's report on Flying High provided Malcolm Ingram with an opportunity to play a leading role in the management of the group's work. This opportunity made Malcolm feel as though he was a fully-fledged member of the group and therefore on equal terms with his study group colleagues.

The third year residential school also allowed Belinda Hitchcock, the other remote student located in south-eastern NSW, to participate fully in the life of Study Group B. Due to personal and work commitments, she declined to participate in group discussion surrounding the preparation of group assignments in marketing management and finance. However, Belinda also revealed a deeper motive for not participating when interviewed at the end of the third year:

I felt a lot more comfortable doing group assignments with the group going to the residential school this year...because one of the problems that I face doing a group assignment is I'm not certain that I'm putting in as much as everyone else...thus previous to the residential I was more comfortable doing assignments on my own. Once I'd done the residential I felt that I was capable of contributing at the same level that they were. ...

[In my work situation] I've always been told I'm dominating by nature and I found that in Study Group B during and after the residential school that it's probably been the first time for a long time that I've come up against, or come into the situation where I haven't felt comfortable leading the group and in fact there's been numerous times where I have felt far more comfortable letting someone else take the lead. At the residential school there were times when I was comfortable taking the lead within Study Group B, but they were pretty rare. I think part of the reason is that the study group, most of them apart from Malcolm Ingram and myself, meet face to face and therefore they are far more comfortable as a group. When I turned up, it's not that I'm outside, it's just that I'm a bit of a curiosity and they ask me a lot more questions than they ask of each other.
It's important to know how they interact together. Like it was funny at the residential, when I came down for the residential, they were all joking about one participant and how he is always so particular and I had never, over the phone never really got a good handle on that. But once I was there for the residential, I understood what they were saying and I could join in if you like that sense of humour, but it takes time to develop those identities. ...

[Understanding norms of group?] Yes, that's very true. See I don't know how they react about me. I mean I'm the only female in the group and I've got no idea about how that impacts on them. Certainly I was down over the residential. I didn't feel that I had developed a special identity within the group. I mean I felt quite welcomed by them and everything, but I didn't feel I had developed a special identity. Like I was renowned for doing something, or saying something, or...

Belinda Hitchcock experienced some ambivalence about the value of her involvement in Study Group B. The residential school provided her with an opportunity to connect better with the group and this certainly allowed her to make a stronger contribution to the work of the group subsequent to the residential school (see discussion below). Clearly, however, she found it difficult to establish her authentic identity in Study Group B. Thus she believed that she was unable to demonstrate her capacities for leadership in the study group, capacities which were part of her professional persona. The denial of opportunities to demonstrate and practice leadership skills could be seen as a significant problem for MBA participants. MBA participants, as either actual or aspiring managers/leaders, would see the study group as an appropriate vehicle for cultivating their leadership abilities amongst a critical audience of peers.

Belinda's 'outsider' social position in the group limited her ability to adopt her normal professional identity and this in turn made the group involvement a less-than-satisfying one from her perspective. As indicated, the residential school did provide an opportunity for Belinda to demonstrate more fully her capabilities in the face-to-face situation and this convinced her, and other members of the group, that she was capable of contributing more to the work of the group. The school provided the opportunity to redefine and increase the expectations of the potential contributions that the remote participants could make to the group's work. Belinda, as well as Malcolm, perceived that they were distant from the centre of group power which meant that they felt they had less control over the work of the regular members of the group. When the group was struggling to put a group assignment together, the remote participants found it difficult to exert any influence over developments or lack thereof. As Malcolm Ingram noted at the end of the third year of the program, being remote meant that 'I didn't know whether people were doing their jobs and that the assignment was coming together as I perceived it should. I couldn't be there to argue points as strongly and couldn't fully gauge whether my points were better than others. It is difficult to argue as strongly over the phone'.

The source of this disadvantage is explicated by Berger and Luckmann (1966):

The most important experience of others takes place in the face-to-face situation, which is the prototypical case of social interaction. All other cases are derivatives of it. In the face-to-face situation the other is appreciated to me in a vivid present shared by both of us. I know that in the same vivid present I am appreciated to him. My and his 'here and now' continuously impinge on each other as long as face-to-face situation continues. As a result there is a continuous interchange of my expressivity and his. ...This means that, in the face-to-face situation, the other's subjectivity is available to me through a maximum of symptoms. ...no other form of social relating can reproduce the plenitude of symptoms of subjectivity present in the face-to-face situation. Only here is the other's subjectivity emphatically 'close'. All other forms of relating to the other are, in varying degrees, 'remote'. (p.43)

The absence of visual cues is seen as a key barrier to be negotiated in using telephone conferencing in distance education (Thompson 1991). Belinda Hitchcock and Malcolm Ingram had to struggle to negotiate the demands of being remote participants operating in a face-to-face group. Despite their disadvantage, both managed to create and sustain workable lines of communication when they participated in group discussions. Ironically, their disadvantage was amplified by their involvement in a face-to-face group. Participants involved in a remote group communicating through telephone conferencing may experience a collective disadvantage, but the feeling of remoteness, indeed alienation, is not so intense when compared with being on the fringes of the rich experience of face-to-face contact. Here, there is a feeling of being a cultural outcast which can be alleviated if there are opportunities for occasional direct, spoken interaction. This observation highlights a significant learning dimension of the residential school as it relates to remote participants.

After the third year school Belinda Hitchcock was to join Study Group B in discussions over some assignments in the latter part of the year. In the first semester of the final year of the program she participated in all of the meetings of Study Group B as well as participating in her remote group (described in a later section as the 'All Australia' group) for the group assignments in a unit on operations management. For some of the assignments she officially associated her name with the work of Study Group B, for others she associated her name with the work of the remote group. In a sense, Belinda fulfilled an important intermediary role between Study Group B and the remote group. This unplanned inter-group networking allowed for a cross-fertilisation of ideas on the cases under consideration between the two groups and represented an important additional source of learning for members of both groups during the study of operations management. Her apparent motive for involving herself in the work of the two different groups was to derive maximum value from her studies. She perceived that the two
groups tended to approach problems in different, but complementary, ways and that the experience of these approaches enriched her understanding of the learning materials.

This productive intermediary role fulfilled by Belinda ended in second semester of the final year as the remote group delivered Belinda an ultimatum: she was either to associate her name exclusively with the work of the remote group in their final semester's studies or leave the group and participate exclusively in the deliberations of Study Group B. Belinda decided to stay with the remote group. Unlike Malcolm Ingram who gradually established a strong and respected role in Study Group B over the final two years of the program, Belinda Hitchcock never fully developed an 'insider' role within Study Group B. Her decision to return to being an exclusive member of the remote group in the final semester of the program is evidence of the less-than-perfect integration which occurred between herself and the culture of Study Group B in the final years of the MBA. In contrast to Malcolm Ingram who joined Study Group B early in the program and attempted to integrate himself as best he could with the culture of the group, Belinda Hitchcock always maintained the dual association with the Melbourne and remote groups. In the end, it appears that she perceived herself to be less disadvantaged working with remote participants who were all studying in the same circumstances as opposed to putting herself in a situation of perceived disadvantaged in relation to the Melbourne face-to-face group.

Intra-group bonding amongst members in a remote study group

The learning activities conducted at the school also had a significant influence on the development of non-face-to-face study groups. Therefore it contributed to the establishment of enlarged forms of peer group interaction. Three of the groups which operated at the school were made up of remote participants who could not participate in face-to-face study groups. These temporary groups consisted of participants who reside in a number of different states and territories in Australia. One of these groups, which shall be called the 'All Australia' group, is worth examining because the residential school was a particularly important event in drawing the members of this group together into an effective working entity.

The 'All Australia' group has ten members located in the States of Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania. The educational demand to present an oral presentation of Flying High stimulated the group to hold a telephone conference before the residential school to develop an approach to the case study. During the telephone conference, Gary Black, one of the group's members, was appointed to lead the group presentation at the school. Because the group had decided
that members should all make individual written submissions, it was decided to use one submission - Gary Black's - as the basis for the group oral presentation at the school. While Gary Black's written submission was not necessarily representative of members' views on the case, a compromise presentation was negotiated, at the school, by all members of the group. It could have been confidently hypothesised that the 'All Australia' group, and the two other remote groups, were at a major disadvantage in making their oral presentations at the school compared with the three established groups. The three established groups had more opportunity before the school to reach a consensus on the case, and to embody that consensus in a written document, and also to plan for the oral presentation. In fact, the 'All Australia' group received the highest mark for the oral presentation which may say more about the abilities of Gary Black, in his written submission and oral presentation, than the collective efforts of the group before and at the school.

Remote participants appeared to benefit from their discussions of the Flying High case at the school. Furthermore, the remote participants registered a strong interest in using the University's telephone conferencing service more extensively than they had done in the past in order to derive maximum benefit from case study work. The residential school had helped to foster the development of these groups, and remote participants on more clearly experiencing the benefits of group work at the school and appreciating the technical possibilities of participating in non-face-to-face groups through telephone conferencing, appeared to leave the school more committed to using the group approach.

This commitment was demonstrated in the final year of the program when the 'All Australia' group made extensive use of telephone conferencing. Telephone conferencing was used in the first semester of the final year to allow individual members to capitalise on the skills of the group in preparing individual submissions on case study assignments. In the second semester, however, the group members felt proficient enough in working with each other using telephone conferencing to undertake group submissions. The genesis of this commitment to group approaches to assignment work lay in the positive effect of the learning activities with which group members engaged before and during the third year residential school and the realisation by group members that they could function effectively as a study group when they returned to their remote locations using the telephone conferencing system provided by the institution. Significantly, the group saw more value in participant-directed as opposed to tutor-directed teleconferencing sessions. Peer group learning became a significant aspect of the MBA experience for this group of participants in the final year of the program. The pre-eminence of the peer group, in its various configurations, is a pervasive theme of this thesis. It can be concluded that
residential schools can be conceived as a useful strategy for promoting valuable forms of interaction between students linked together by communications technologies. Thus the residential school can be seen as an effective strategy for promoting interaction amongst distance education students. Interaction through different types of communications technologies is also seen to be facilitated by initial face-to-face meetings in post-entrepreneurial organisations which value communication, cooperation and teamwork (Moss Kanter 1989).

**INTER-GROUP CONFLICT**

The presentations of the Flying High case study represented direct interaction between the established study groups. Inherent within this form of interaction were sources of inter-group conflict as the groups were placed in an adversarial situation. Such tensions were observed when Study Groups A and B interacted in their presentation session. These tensions were manifested early in the session when Michael Valenti, a member of Study Group B, interjected during Frank Dickson's presentation on behalf of Study Group A. This interjection was seen as unfair by members of Study Group A and required the intervention of Derek Bartels to clarify the rules governing people's behaviour during the session. The interjection indicated that group members were uncertain of the ground rules governing appropriate forms of behaviour during the session. The explanation of these rules of fair play by Derek Bartels during the actual session reflected the experimental nature of the activity. Derek Bartels had introduced a new pedagogy at the school, but was inexperienced in the ways in which participants would respond to the session's perceived demands. Derek had to intervene to moderate what members of one group believed to be inappropriate and unanticipated behaviour demonstrated by a member of the other group.

However, it was Derek Bartels himself who directly exacerbated the tensions during a break after Study Group A's presentation. During this interval members of Study Group B conducted a private review of the quality of Study Group A's presentation. Their criticism of the presentation was quite severe believing it to be a 'glib, wishy washy' presentation which failed to present the 'numbers' required to prove their case. Derek Bartels, who was in the vicinity of the group's private discussions, also volunteered his view that Study Group A had failed to present its calculations. He stated, with some derision, to members of Study Group B that Group A reminded him of a 'British airplane sales team', implying that the group was strong on form, but weaker on substance. Without the numbers, Derek Bartels argued, Study Group A could have been 'slaughtered' during their presentation. The pointed critique of Study Group A's
presentation by members of Group B, which appeared to be fortified by Derek Bartels's own assessment, indicated a growing sense of tension borne of the competitive interplay which was developing between the two groups during session.

Study Group B's financial analysis of the two planes showed that over the economic life of the planes that they had chosen, both the AB641 and FL6000 would be unprofitable. On the basis that no other course of action was available other than to purchase either the AB641 or FL6000, they recommended the purchase of the least unprofitable plane - the AB641. The first question the Finance chair asked of Study Group B is why they would recommend a course of action which could send the company broke. 'If both planes were proven to be unprofitable, would not it be better for Flying High to exit the industry?', queried Derek Bartels. This was a course of action Study Group B had clearly not contemplated in its submission, an action which made sense given their financial analysis of both planes. (On the other hand, Study Group A's analysis had shown that both planes would be profitable.)

Both groups interrogated each other closely, in the question and answer session, about the assumptions they had made regarding the economic life of the planes. Study Group B specified a short operating life of the two planes (4 years), but made a significant error in not stating a resale figure for the assets on disposal by Flying High, while Study Group A assumed a longer economic life of 20 years. Tim Greaves, based on his work experience, challenged the operating life assumption made by Study Group A. Study Group A, however, had anticipated this question, from somebody like Tim Greaves who had experience of the industry, and had gone outside the case material to industry sources to substantiate a twenty year economic life assumption it had made for the planes.

While Study Group B was on the defensive over its recommendation to purchase an unprofitable airplane and the lack of specification of a resale value for the assets, Study Group A was forced, in the question and answer time, to present their information on the costs and revenue associated with each project. The group had decided not to present the numbers during the presentation because the financial analyses were provided in the written report. The group had assumed that the Board members would have read the report before attending the presentation; an assumption, Derek Bartels noted, which could be untrue and have dire consequences for the success of an oral presentation to the company board.
Participants registered some reservations about the value of the session. The question
and answer time did not seem to meet participants' expectations. The groups either
became preoccupied with the rectification of major problems with their presentations as
revealed by Derek Bartels or with the perceived weaknesses of each others' presentations.
For example, Anthony Collins, a member of Study Group A, was to make the following
comment on the value of the question and answer time:

[Did you get the sorts of questions you anticipated from Study Group B during the
question and answer time?] Well, unfortunately we didn't get that sort of question. The
other group...were put off balance pretty quickly because of their negative value [i.e.
recommending the least unprofitable plane]. Well, unfortunately, they really didn't ask
any questions on it. They might have asked one question or something like that which
was really a bit of a pity. I mean we were quite well prepared for having lots of
questions asked and having a reasonably...in-depth study on it, but it never really got,
quite got that way. It would have been, I think a lot more interesting, had it gone that
way (comment made at end of third year).

A genuinely critical and constructive stance to each others' presentations did not appear to
emerge in the time allocated for competitive interplay between the groups. Some
participants believed that a significant learning opportunity was lost to develop, through
joint exploration, a more enlightened view of the case. For example, Colin Brice made
the following comment at the end of the third year:

[Was the question and answer time a valid learning experience?] It probably made you
do more work on the assignment beforehand, but I think the question and answer time
we had with Derek [this session was held after all groups had made their presentations]
regarding the actual, what the assignment was actually about was of more benefit than
actually between the two groups. ...I mean you're not really going to carpet anyone
else in another study group anyway, because that turns the experience into a negative
experience, so you're not really out to turn around and try and punch holes in their
argument, because you don't want to turn it into a negative experience. You know it's
really everyone bouncing and learning of each other...which means it becomes more of
a positive contribution from many different perspectives being presented.

Moreover, some acrimony was evident between the two groups after the residential
school which related to the marks given by the Finance chair for the presentations. Study
Group B, while receiving the lower mark, had managed to argue for a slightly higher
mark than the one originally granted by Derek Bartels. While members of Study Group
A were satisfied with the mark they had received from the chair, they were extremely
dissatisfied with the closing of the relativity between their mark and Study Group B's and
the way in which the increased mark was negotiated through aggressive argument with
Derek Bartels. On the other hand, Study Group B members still maintained after the
School that Group A's presentation was all style, and no substance. It appeared that a
certain amount of rivalry had developed between the two groups after the School, where
the focus of members' competitive drives had firmly shifted from within the group to the other group. While the group demands of marketing management had caused members of the groups to set aside their own self-interests in order to enhance the collective interest and performance of the group, the finance case appeared to add an extra dimension to this group camaraderie by focusing each group's attentions on the competition which existed outside the group. Thus the demands of Flying High led both to a heightened degree of intra-group cooperation or solidarity and inter-group tension which appeared to be aggravated by the groups' inability to engage in effective forms of interaction over the substance of their presentations subsequent to the residential school session.

This heightened degree of inter-group conflict was, to some extent, caused by the actions of Derek Bartels. It appears that a threshold of inter-group conflict is reached whereby further competitive tensions, whether deliberately orchestrated or unintentionally provoked, could outweigh the positive learning achieved through enhanced forms of intra-group cooperation and inter-group exploration of case study materials. It can be concluded that the teacher needs to establish and articulate the rules governing any competitive exercise between study groups and ensure that the destructive aspects of competition are avoided by striking a balance between the benefits of enhancing intra-group cooperation on the one hand, while maintaining constructive inter-group relations on the other. Intra-group cohesion was enhanced through the preparation of the written component of the assignment and the preparation of the oral presentation in anticipation of its delivery to a critical audience. However, the negative side of the competitive situation was that it encouraged, during the presentation session, defensiveness rather than a critical and constructive exploration of the key issues embodied in the case. The need for the teacher to establish the ground rules was discussed by Frank Dickson:

But that activity [the presentation session for Flying High], probably could have worked better. The ground rules, I don't think had been well set for the activity as it could have been and the ground rules, in terms of what we were meant to do and interact with the other group, I think needed to be better explained which is a comment that Derek took back on and said, 'Yes, we'll clarify this more next time round'. But, I'm not quite sure how good a quality that was, debatable (comment made at end of third year).

INTERACTION BEYOND THE ESTABLISHED STUDY GROUPS

A negotiating role play, which placed participants in different groups, formed the basis of a unique context for interaction at the school where participants were required to work outside the established cultures of their study groups. Furthermore, the exercise provided
a major input into a group assignment which was undertaken by the established study
groups after the residential school. After a brief introduction to the principles and
practice of negotiation, participants were formed into eight groups to undertake a
collective bargaining simulation exercise which was a part of the learning materials for an
MBA unit on personnel management and industrial relations. Four sets of two groups
were to negotiate with each other a log of claims, with one group adopting the employer
side and the other group taking the union side. Both sides had access to general
information on the state of industrial relations in the company, which had deteriorated
badly in recent months, and a brief to approach the negotiations over future wages and
conditions in good faith without immediate recourse to strike action or referral of
unresolved issues to formal arbitration. In addition to the general information supplied to
both sides, specific information relating to key objectives to be achieved by the sides,
including a points system for scoring the achievements negotiated, was confidentially
supplied to the groups representing the employers and unions respectively. Essentially,
the aim of the game was to negotiate a settlement on wages, a no-strike clause, redundant
manning, cost-of-living and education leave, within a set period of time, which would
simultaneously maximise your side's point score and be greater than the the score
achieved by the other side. Obviously, the side with the greatest point score at the end of
the negotiation period won the game. In order to achieve a maximum score there was a
need to develop and refine negotiation strategies throughout the game by arguing hard for
items which were big point scorers as well as attempting to second guess the major items
which would maximise the point score of the other side. For example, it was important
for the union to win the cost-of-living adjustment, while negotiations over the level of the
wage increase was a matter of 'testing the waters'.

An intriguing aspect of the role play related to what role participants were really adopting
during negotiations. The role play appeared to assume that participants, as students,
would adopt the roles embodied in the exercise. Thus, participants were encouraged to
act, feel and think like either employers or employees during the negotiations. Such
instructions tend to ignore the fact that many MBA participants have considerable
negotiating experience. They are not devoid of personal experience demanded of a
particular negotiating role, whether it be that of the employer, which may have been
enacted in the workplace, or trade unionist, which may have been experienced from the
employer perspective. Hence, it was observed that some participants rather than merely
being the student playing the role of the employer actually took on their professional
persona and became, in a sense, themselves enacting their role as employers during the
negotiations. In this regard, Colin Brice was to remark later that the employer
representatives in his session, whose actual work involved them in negotiating with
unions in their industry (mining), were excessively aggressive and serious minded in their negotiations. They appeared to transform themselves into their professional persona during the negotiations and conducted themselves in ways which were seen to be inconsistent with the educational intentions of the game. Ironically, in a desperate last minute attempt to avoid a union strike which would have heavily penalised the employer side, the representatives rashly conceded a substantial employee pay rise! The danger with participants being the role rather than playing the role is that they can lose some perspective on the purpose of the exercise. Participants can end up being the role and acting it out in habitual ways without developing a more reflective stance towards the consequences of their actions on other parties involved in a dispute. Thus role being as opposed to role playing can negate the learning experience. The importance of seeing and responding to other parties' subjective perceptions of events would seem to be an important skill in developing more informed professional practices in the area of employer-employee negotiations.

While participants found the role play to be a useful means of experiencing the nature of the collective bargaining process, there were limitations expressed about the applicability of the experience to actual employer-union negotiations. The usefulness of the game was explored amongst all participants at the end of the negotiation session. On the positive side, the fact that many participants used the learning opportunity in a genuine fashion had allowed them, through their own interactions, to gain some appreciation of the negotiation dynamics with which they would be involved in the workplace. One reservation about the game was that through its point scoring design it encouraged an adversarial situation where one party won points at the other party's expense. By design, both parties could not achieve a win-win result which some participants argued was the great potential benefit of participating in a collective bargaining process. Furthermore, it was argued that the nature of the game encouraged both parties to hold out for their preferred positions for the longest possible time, with the approach of the end of the negotiating period causing a flurry of ill-conceived trade-off concessions in order to avoid the deadline and thus point losses for going to formal arbitration (to the union) or taking strike action (to the employers). In real collective bargaining the two groups would start trading concessions from the beginning in order to reduce the risk of strike or referral to formal arbitration as well as attempting to achieve a win-win outcome for both parties. The ability of a number of participants to review critically aspects of the exercise, indicates an understanding of the reality of much negotiating which transcended the artificiality of the role play. This represented a significant positive learning experience emanating from the role play.
Role playing in professional development programs can have both positive and negative learning consequences. To the extent that students capitalise on the potential learning benefits of playing and studying the consequences of actions associated with a role, role plays can enrich professional conceptions and practices. On the other hand, the danger exists that professional conceptions of a particular role can be enacted uncritically, therefore negating the educational intentions of the exercise. It must be acknowledged that seasoned practitioners may be more likely to be the role rather than playing the role. At the very least, they may suffer some form of role ambiguity and confusion as to the intentions of the exercise. On the positive side, experienced practitioners are more likely to see the virtues and limitations of any role playing exercise. Critically evaluating the artificiality of the context is a useful starting point in adding structure and theorising to the concrete experience of the role play. To be effective, role plays must be seen as providing the concrete experience stage of the experiential learning cycle or spiral. Participants need to be encouraged to detach themselves from their professional persona in order to benefit from the experiential nature of the exercise.

Post-school assignment work: study group critique of collective bargaining in Australia

On the basis of the role play conducted at the school, the final assignment in personnel management and industrial relations provided participants with the option of undertaking a group critique of collective bargaining in Australia, with specific reference to the desirability and feasibility of extending the process of non-compulsory collective bargaining into Australian industrial relations. The critique was to be informed by the role play and required participants to reflect upon and theorise about their concrete experiences. There were five sets of learning interactions which shaped Study Group A and B's submissions on the desirability and feasibility of extending the process of collective bargaining in Australia: learning from interaction at the school in the role play exercise; learning from participants' individual and collective interactions with the study guide and prescribed text; learning through the location of relevant resources outside the study package; learning through critical reflection on workplace practices; and learning through the cross-fertilisation of ideas in the study group. The study group was the important node in this web of learning interactions.

Group members acknowledged the value of having been separated and allocated to other groups at the school because this had led to a situation where about half of each group's members had received union and employer experience respectively. Thus, in preparing the critique, each group was able to draw collectively on the experience of being involved in collective bargaining processes from both parties' perspectives. If participants had
remained in their own established study groups for the role play, they would have only been able to experience one side of the negotiation process which would have provided an unbalanced input into the final group critique.

In supporting the view that great scope for collective bargaining existed outside the heavily unionised manufacturing sector, Colin Brice drew on his own negotiation experience. Colin Brice runs his own company along consultative lines where there is a more even power balance between management and employees. His approach to negotiations is to tell his employees directly and honestly what the company can afford to pay (i.e. present the 'bottom line' 'up front' with 'no mucking around') and hope that a win-win situation can emerge out of the ensuing negotiations for both groups. Colin Brice argued that these negotiations were essentially collective bargaining in nature. He also argued that the most useful lesson that he had derived from the residential role play was the negotiation tactics of unions, including their penchant for making ambit claims which require protracted negotiations to settle and the seeming desire of unions to win a settlement at the employer's loss through such ridiculous claims. Colin Brice had learned that in a highly unionised environment it would not be a sound tactical ploy to reveal his 'bottom line'. Craig Farrell, based on his own involvement in industrial relations in his organisation, substantiated the use of the ambit claim by unions (which 'make good reading'), but added that such claims were encouraged by the current system where the objective was to set up a long-term paper dispute with the employer. Colin Brice was so affected by the nature of the negotiation process, as experienced in the role play, that he declared that if union power emerged in his industry, he would close the company down and move it interstate to an area less heavily unionised! In this case, the role play had reinforced prejudices against unionised labour.

While the work of members of Study Group B in and around the group meetings was focused on relating their understanding of the study guide material to the experience of the role play at the school, Study Group A's work had a different emphasis. Members of Study Group A were concerned with locating learning resources outside the study guide to prepare their assignment submission. Furthermore, in keeping with previous practice, the group allocated the tasks of searching for, and reading through, the additional material to various members of the group. As was the case with the group's work in marketing management and finance, there was clear evidence of division of labour and a willingness to explore alternative sources of learning material outside the the study guide and textbook provided by the institution. This latter enduring characteristic of Study Group A's work, and its absence from the work of Study Group B, leads the author to categorise Group A as 'learning-material free' and Group B as 'learning-material bound'. This categorisation
of group learning coincides with the syllabus-free and syllabus-bound dualism used to
describe individual students' approaches to study (Hudson 1968).

The nature of the assignment induced a great deal of debate within the groups. One
element related to the conclusions presented in the draft report presented to the members
of Study Group A. The chair - David Richards - and secretary - Anthony Collins - had
used the resource material as a basis for arguing a strong case for the abolition of the
'anachronistic' Australian conciliation and arbitration system and its replacement with the
full-scale introduction of collective bargaining. William Grant was unsure whether the
draft submission actually supported the drawing of such a strong conclusion. More
fundamentally, Ken Johns disagreed with the whole thrust of the conclusion by arguing
that it was the current union structure and industrial relations culture that was wrong, not
the conciliation and arbitration system itself. Changes within the existing system, rather
than a radical transformation of the system itself, could foster the development of
collective bargaining. Ken Johns supported his case by pointing to the reduction in
industrial disputation over the last few years under the Accord and the current system, the
moves to reduce the number of unions and the emphasis on award restructuring. All of
these developments indicated that the current system was improving and could support a
greater emphasis on collective bargaining in the future.

While Anthony Collins believed the system was declining, William Grant acknowledged
that the figures did support Ken Johns's case. On the other hand, Walter Abbott
confessed that he did not know whether the current system was improving or not. He
asked the question: 'Does anybody know?' David Richards, the joint submission writer,
was prepared to modify the initial conclusion stated in the submission in response to Ken
Johns's arguments. David believed that evidence could support both views and although
the current system did not appear to be the best, it was hard to tell what the best system is
to promote more collective bargaining. The issue of the final line to be adopted in the
submission was left to the chair and secretary. It was doubtful whether the complete
thrust of Ken Johns's counter-arguments would have been accepted by the submission
authors. As Ken Johns noted, however, during a previous interview: 'I guess also I'm
aware of the value of group participation, value of other individuals can make to problem
solving. I'm prepared to tolerate points of view that I know are wrong'.

This sort of contestation needs to be seen in a broader light. While it does represent a
stark example of a study group not reaching consensus and dissenters allowing their
views to be modified by those formally responsible for the preparation of the assignment,
the more important conclusion is the spirited debate which occurred on the topic under
investigation. What was fundamentally important to group members was that the debate had been encouraged and enacted to everybody's satisfaction. The open nature of this debate had provided all of the relevant arguments for and against collective bargaining. The conclusions presented in the final assignment were relatively unimportant. What was important was that group members were aware of all the relevant arguments. This allowed them to reach their own conclusions on this issue, irrespective of the final recommendations made in the assignment. In this regard, Frank Dickson commented:

For many of those assignments it really doesn't matter what answer you come up with. I mean to come up with an answer that collective bargaining is right or...centralised arbitration is right, it doesn't matter. ...I mean essentially if you can reason an argument out and show the pros and cons, what conclusion you end up with at the end of the day is really not very important (comment made at end of third year).

INTERACTION BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS AND TEACHING STAFF

The nature of the interactive relationship appeared to differ between Deakin teaching staff and the outside experts, although the differences should not be exaggerated. While interaction between teaching staff and students seemed relaxed, equal and open, the relationship between expert outside presenters and participants was at times characterised by closed forms of teacher controlled discourse. Three different forms of communication closure were used by the outside experts in making their presentations at the school. (The outside experts who presented at the school were either academics or practitioners who had an academic background.) The first, and mostly severely criticised, form of closure was a monologue delivered by a Finance Lecturer on dividend policy. The lecture repeated material which could be found in the study guide and prescribed text for the Finance unit. Not only were participants restricted in opportunities for questioning the speaker on contemporary Australian dividend policy issues, but they also had to absorb passively material that was available in the course materials. Participants perceived the unique potential of the school to promote direct, spoken interaction between participants and staff as having been wasted in this session even though the standard of the lecturer's presentation was extremely high. It was noted that the speaker had probably churned out one of his standard undergraduate lectures on the topic. The purpose of the school and nature of the audience had been lost on the outside presenter involved.

The second form of communication closure took place in a session on strategic marketing tools and thinking. In this session the presenter began by aggressively questioning
participants on the pre-reading which was set before the school for his presentation. This
was a case of communication by coercion where participants were admonished if they had
not done the prescribed reading. This type of aggressive approach is often used in
traditional full-time MBA programs with younger, less managerially experienced MBA
students. It is seen as an inappropriate approach for Deakin MBA participants who do
not appreciate teachers adopting a strong authoritarian role. Participants either responded
in equally aggressive ways to the lecturer's coercive discourse or did not respond at all.
In the first case the interaction was strained, while in the second it was constrained. At
least in this second example of communication closure, the lecturer appeared to recognise
the counter-productive nature of his efforts and adopted a 'softer' approach as the session
progressed.

The final form of communication closure involved a presenter on industrial relations
whom participants considered highly entertaining. The lecturer, however, used sarcasm
to close down participants who disagreed with his analysis of the motives of those people
who undertake part-time, casual work in the labour force. This could be described as
communication closure through ridicule where any participant who disagreed with the
analysis was branded as backward or behind the times, just 'like the lecturer's old man'.

In each of these three situations it seemed that the lecturer was so intent on teaching what
he had decided to teach that there was no or little time for participants to join the debate
through an open invitation to ask questions. For participants, however, the quality of
learning was very much determined by the desire for opportunities to join the teachers in a
mutually rewarding exploration of the meaning of the topics under discussion. Put
bluntly, teachers can be so intent on delivering content that participants are denied
opportunities to learn from teachers and their peers. On the other hand, a good example
of student-based learning orchestrated by a teacher - Derek Bartels - occurred in the
summing up session on the Flying High finance case study. In raising key issues
common to all group oral presentations, highlighting contentious points made by some
participants, and gently inviting group response, Derek Bartels was able to facilitate a
student-controlled discussion on Flying High which saw him gradually withdraw into the
background. The teacher, in this situation, through initially creating an open form of
discourse with participants had also been able to open up lines of interaction amongst
participants themselves.

More fundamentally, the different forms of symmetrical and asymmetrical communication
in evidence in face-to-face situations involving teaching staff and participants at the school
supports the following contention by Harris (1991):
[The unhelpful polarity between distance education and face-to-face teaching] is badly in need of a thorough critique, especially in higher education. For years, traditional education has confidently been asserted as the only method suitable for proper teaching. Its advocates have conjured with words like dialogue and critical discussion, or with concepts like the cut and thrust of argument in groups, as if all these good things were somehow axiomatic to on-campus teaching. I want to suggest that, although all these desirable outcomes are possible face to face, they are not necessarily there by any means.

On-campus teachers have ways of closing off the possibilities of dialogue even though they are in the actual vicinity of their listeners. (pp.50-51)

There was certainly some evidence at the residential school that possibilities for dialogue can be closed off by teaching staff. Thus it can be concluded that the purported benefits of student-staff interaction associated with the residential school experience in distance education may not necessarily occur. The mere bringing together of teaching staff and students does not necessarily realise the benefits of dialogue and critical discussion which are all too often taken-for-granted outcomes of face-to-face teaching components in distance education. A dramatic example of the closure of communication which took place at the fourth year residential school between a senior academic staff member and participants over a key program issue is provided in Chapter 7. The strategies and apparent motives which shaped this closure of communication are examined further in that chapter.

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EVENT: EXPANDED FORMS OF INTERACTION AND ITS ENDURING INFLUENCE ON THE MBA EXPERIENCE

Participants least enjoyed those sessions where they were taught didactically, and most enjoyed those sessions which provided them with opportunities to learn for themselves. It was the provision of a diverse range of learning opportunities on the one hand by the institution, and the MBA participants' desire to use these opportunities on the other to maximise their learning, which appeared to lead to a high level of satisfaction with the school as a significant learning event in the MBA experience.

In providing a diverse range of learning opportunities at the residential school, the institution was able to broaden the network, albeit momentarily, for interaction between participants themselves, and participants and teaching staff. Existing established study groups were further strengthened, while fledgling remote study groups were nurtured by the educational demands of the school. Study groups were provided with the opportunity to interact with each other, and individuals were provided with the opportunity to work in
different groups. The latter opportunities galvanized the spirit of the 'Class of '88'. There was a temporary feeling of togetherness, despite the moments of tension already documented, which transcended the participants' primary allegiance to their study groups. In a sense, the residential school signified the gathering together of all participants in the third year of the MBA program into a super study group - the 'Class of '88' study group - with the benefits usually seen as being associated with the ongoing work of the study groups also flowing from the work of the larger group. Thus individuals negotiated their identities within their study groups, study groups interacted in ways which further defined the identity of the groups and members of different study groups interacted in ways which created an overall identity for the all participants who attended the residential school. The learning milieu of the school appeared to foster the development of individual, group and class identities. The development of different levels of group interaction at the residential school is consistent with Caine's conclusion that: '...all these groups have different needs and identities. Development can however be encouraged at all of the different levels. There must also be recognition that to a certain extent they must not be seen in isolation, and that an overall culture must be developed which encourages group development at all of the different levels' (Caine 1990, p.2).

The ending of the school signified the contraction of the network of learning communities. However, as already indicated, the school had left its mark on the operation of all study groups, but particularly remote groups. The school had provided an incentive for remote participants to interact in non-face-to-face study groups, both before and during the school, and evidence gathered subsequent to the school suggests that remote participants, having experienced the benefits of group work, consolidated their group approaches in the final year of the MBA program.

Emphasis has been placed on the importance of the school in providing opportunities for learning. These opportunities required participants to learn through experience; competencies were developed by practising doing something. Participants learned about presenting a capital budgeting case by actually doing it, they learnt how to defend their views on such a case by the experience of having their views interrogated by members of another study group and the course team chair of Finance. Participants came to appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of collective bargaining by experiencing a negotiation role play. The experiences were both personal and collective through interaction with other participants. In fact, the opportunities for learning demanded a collective experience, a sharing of ideas among members of a group. It appeared that participants believed one cannot experience the demands of presenting a case to a group of people, or defending one's views, without the group being present. Thus the group is an integral
part of the learning opportunity, with the experience being a collective and interactive one to improve understanding. The experience must also be reflected upon, and developed into a more personal theory which can help to inform future professional practice. The group assignment option, which required participants to critique collective bargaining, as a means of conflict resolution in the workplace, was a further stimulus to encourage participants to turn their experience of the negotiation role play into a workable theory of the collective bargaining process. The process of professional learning through a cycle of experience, reflection, theorising and experimentation (Kolb 1984, Boud et al. 1985) was both encapsulated in the series of learning activities surrounding the role play and collective bargaining assignment and indicative of the ways in which participants appeared to learn from the experience.

Mason and Morgan (1986) argue that opportunities for face-to-face interaction between the key parties in the distance education process provide students with a key human dimension to their studies. Such opportunities allow students to 'connect' with particular parts of the distance education system. Morgan and Thorpe (1993) in relating this point to the value of residential schools argue that the quality of learning which can be achieved through the residential school experience empowers students through access to academic dialogue and debate. In this respect, they quote from Evans and Nation (1989a, p.252) to support the case that residential schools can 'humanise' the learning experience and make distance education 'liberating' not 'dominating'. Their conclusions are, in part, relevant to the third year school experience. Remote participants experienced the school environment as intensely humanising as it provided them with the opportunity to bond together in meaningful human relationships both among themselves and, in the case of Malcolm Ingram and Belinda Hitchcoock, with the members of their face-to-face study group. The 'humanising' effect was probably less important for participants who had experienced the benefits of face-to-face study group work over a period of time. The 'humanising' experience emanated mainly from the opportunities for participants to interact among themselves. There was some evidence of a less than humanising experience in relation to participants' interactions with some of the outside experts. Here, participants were denied the opportunity to engage fully with the academic dialogue and debate. The mere presence of teaching staff, therefore, is no guarantee that students will connect with the organisation. Residential schools can still be, as Morgan and Thorpe (1993) term it, an 'alienating' experience. They do not necessarily represent a panacea for the bureaucratisation and dehumanisation which can occur when there is an over-preoccupation with content dissemination through the elaborate construction of learning packages in distance education. Chapter 7 highlights how empowering and liberating the residential school experience can be in a particular distance education setting.
Chapter 6

THE STUDY GROUP EXPERIENCE OF OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT: CULTURAL CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO THE FREQUENCY OF GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES CULTURAL change within the study groups to meet the demands of MBA 892 Operations Management. Participants studied operations management in the first semester of the final year of the program (see details on MBA structure in Chapter 2). While subjects that participants studied in third year required them to negotiate the demands of group assignments, Operations Management presented the groups with a new assessment condition, i.e. the completion of a heavy load of group case study assignments. It was the frequency of the group assignments which shaped further cultural change to meet the new demands. This cultural change was achieved more easily than the change required to meet the demands of group assignments. This transition appeared to be more easily negotiated because of the groups' growing sophistication in learning how to learn better as groups. Group members' ability to assess their own and colleagues' contributions during the work of the groups emerged strongly in Operations Management. Groups demonstrated the characteristics of mature learning communities. This development was highlighted in the light of the unintended negative side-effects of the assessors' feedback in Operations Management. These negative side-effects did not impede the groups' learning, partly because the groups were able to continue to learn, on the basis of their own resources, despite the negative perceptions of the assessor's feedback.

The chapter analyses how participants' responses to and use of assignment feedback were incongruent with the assessor's expectations and assumptions. This incongruity did adversely influence participants' attitudes toward the subject and assessor, although, as already stated, these attitudes were not translated into poor learning. Assessment strategies are seen as powerful shapers of group approaches, although the groups, as mature learning communities, demonstrated that they did not need to rely on assessor feedback to derive value from the learning experience. The role of the teacher is seen as circumscribed when interacting directly with the groups during study group visits. An
extended period of being a distance student appears to develop in participants a view on 
the role of the distance teacher in the learning experience. Ironically, teachers appear to 
have greater influence over participants’ actions at a distance than they have during 
occasional face-to-face interaction.

THE FIRST FORM OF CULTURAL CHANGE REVISITED

The principal objective of the study groups from the beginning of the program was to help members negotiate the formal assessment demands of the MBA program. In the first two years of the program, the groups negotiated the demands of individual assignments and the examinations. In the third year of the program, the groups negotiated the demands of group assignments. Group culture changed to meet this new assessment demand (see Chapters 4 and 5). In both phases of the groups’ development, participants were collectively responding to the institutionally-determined educational requirements. Even when some ambiguity surrounded the need to undertake group assignments in Marketing Management, the groups conformed to institutional expectations, i.e. all those participants who could participate in a study group undertook group assignments. Most members of the groups came to the realisation that group assignments were the best means of maximising their learning. The relationship between participants could best be described as one of 'subjection' (Becker et al. 1968, p.7). However, as Becker et al. (1968, p.7) go on to state, 'We must understand, of course, that the term does not express an unfavourable judgment. We use it as a technical term to refer to a hierarchical arrangement in which all the decision-making power is in the hands of the superior group'.

While the study groups were constrained to act collectively in ways to meet externally-imposed assessment requirements, there was latitude to respond to these demands in different ways. A degree of group autonomy was reflected in the different ways that Study Groups A and B organised themselves to negotiate the demands of group assignments in Marketing Management, Finance, and Personnel Management and Industrial Relations. The study groups' approaches, however, were not strikingly different as each group was confronted with the same academic conditions. While these conditions were largely determined by the institution independently of participant influence, one event in the third year of the program did signify the potential of participant group action to change the conditions under which they were assessed. Up until 1990, there was no group option for assignments in the Finance unit. This option was included in response to Study Group A’s request to the course team chair - Derek Bartels - in second semester of that year. The request was motivated by the group's hard-earned
success in undertaking group assignments in marketing management. The group oral presentations of the Flying High case study at the third year residential school (Chapter 5) was also an indirect outcome of the group's desire to change the conditions under which it was to study the Finance unit. Derek Bartels's receptiveness to changing his assessment procedures at short notice indicates a willingness to listen seriously to participants' views on appropriate forms of assessment.

A DISTANCE EDUCATION PARADOX: THE PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCE OF THE MISSING PEDAGOGUE

What emerged in the third year of the program was the power of the absent pedagogue to influence the patterns of learning collectively and individually pursued by group members. The means of achieving this influence was the pedagogical impact of assessment. The nature (case study), form (group submissions) and timing of assignments in Marketing Management shaped the ways in which participants privately and collectively interacted with text (study guide and prescribed text) and among themselves within and between group meetings. Moreover, the nature of assignment feedback and participants' collective responses to this feedback powerfully shaped the groups' subsequent approaches to group assignments. The pedagogue's intentions were embodied in the assessment requirements and these conditions strongly shaped the nature and outcomes of the learning process. Hence, Rowntree's (1987, p.1) conclusion that 'the spirit and style of student assessment defines the de facto curriculum' captures the significance of assessment conditions in the lives of MBA participants. It is assessment which carries the most compelling, but frequently covert, demands of a course. What is extraordinary is the power of the teacher in distance education, although physically absent from the actual event of learning, to influence the patterns of learning through the power of assessment.

FURTHER CHANGES IN GROUP CULTURE

Further changes to group culture were observed as they responded to the new assessment demands of MBA 892. Operations Management is an integrative unit, with a strong production flavour, which is undertaken in the first semester of the final year of the program. It differs from the third year units in one important respect: the frequency of group assignments. In Marketing Management, participants were required to submit three group assignments, in Finance two group submissions were required, while Personnel Management and Industrial Relations required participants to submit two group
assignments and two individual assignments. Each of these third year units had a final examination.

In *Operations Management* there was no final examination and participants were required to submit eight group assignments and two individual submissions if they were able to participate in a study group. Participants who could not participate in a study group were required to submit six assignments - the two individual submissions set for the groups and four of the eight group submissions, but as individual assignments. While Vic Jaques had applied differential marking standards to the same set of assignments in *Marketing Management* in recognition of the circumstances of isolated participants, Bruce Gordon (the course team chair of *Operations Management*) differentiated between participants who could and who could not participate in groups on the basis of overall assignment workload. On any particular submission common to individuals and groups, Bruce Gordon did not apply different marking standards believing it to be too hard to make such distinctions. This approach received support from the study groups as a fairer way of accommodating the different circumstances of participants in the *Operations Management* unit.

The dramatic increase in the number of group assignments represented a new set of conditions within which participants had to operate. These conditions had a pronounced impact on the approaches the groups collectively negotiated to meet the new assessment demands. These changes to group approaches are considered to represent a further form of cultural change. This form of cultural change was characterised by two important developments which form the backbone of subsequent analysis: refinements to managing the heavier group assignment workload; and the experience of receiving and responding to assessor feedback on the group assignments.

The latter development represented a significant experience for the groups in *Operations Management*. It had also been significant in the groups' efforts to negotiate the demands of group assignments in the third year subjects. For instance, Vic Jaques's general assignment feedback in *Marketing Management* proved to be a key reference point for the groups in preparing subsequent assignments and was particularly important to Study Group A in reinforcing their view of themselves as a 'good' study group. Rowntree (1987, p.209) notes the following in respect of students' responses to assessor feedback on assignments in distance education: 'Do students read their tutors' carefully-wrought responses? Do they pay attention to them? How do they use them? The evidence is partial and anecdotal...'. As already stated, the ways in which participants both individually and collectively used assessor feedback to improve the group learning
experience are examined in relation to *Marketing Management* in Chapter 4. Observing
directly the study groups' responses to assessor feedback delivered personally and in
written form in *Operations Management* provided further interesting insights into the
questions raised by Rowntree. These questions have continued to be under-researched in
the distance education literature no doubt because of the difficulty of witnessing at first-
hand students' experiences of assessor feedback. This experience was revealed to the
author through the public disclosure and discussion of the groups' performance on the
group assignments. This represented a unique opportunity to understand the students' experience of a fundamental aspect of the learning experience. It must be said, however,
that MBA participants were far more private in their deliberations over feedback received
on individual submissions, even when these assignments had been extensively discussed
by the study groups. The analysis of a key aspect of the distance education experience
(i.e. students' responses to assignment feedback) relating to assessment parallels the
work of Lockwood (1990) who studied students' perceptions of and reaction to another
dimension of the assessment process in distance education, i.e. students' use of activities
in text. As with the current study of students' responses to assignment feedback,
Lockwood noted that little research had been undertaken on this ubiquitous aspect of
assessment found in distance teaching material. His research revealed some significant
mismatches between teachers' espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön
1974) in relation to the assumptions and expectations surrounding the use of in-text
activities. Moreover, from the students' perspective attempts to use in-text activities had
unanticipated negative consequences on learning and motivation. Aspects of the
assessment process in distance education, therefore, appear in need of significant critical
analysis.

The observation of participants' responses to assessor feedback in *Operations
Management* revealed that participants' understanding of and response to this feedback
was incongruent with the teacher's intentions on how the feedback was to be used. This
incongruity represented an unintended negative side-effect. This side-effect, while
annoying to participants, did not appear to affect substantially the groups' learning from
subsequent assignments. It did, however, make it more difficult for the groups to change
their processes to meet the demands of a higher frequency of group assignments. The
fact that the unintended negative consequences of the feedback did not seriously
jeopardise the work of the groups was partly due to the timing of the assignments and the
high levels of self- and peer-assessment skills demonstrated by the groups in their
deliberations on the cases.
Changing management approaches

The higher frequency of assignments in *Operations Management* led to further refinements of management approaches adopted by the groups. These refinements represented extensions to the approaches adopted by the groups in the third year of the program and, therefore, did not constitute identical responses to the new assessment conditions.

*Study Group A*

Frank Dickson was appointed as group coordinator for the semester and this position allowed him to implement a full-scale project management approach to assignment demands of *Operations Management* (Frank had argued a need for such an approach during the review of the SSO case - see Chapter 4). The first meeting of the group was devoted to formalising a rigorous approach to the assessment requirements. The aim of the meeting was to produce a plan for the semester indicating who would be responsible for each of the eight group submissions (this person was to be designated as the Project Leader), the key activities that needed to be undertaken to complete a 'project' (i.e. a group assignment), the time required to complete each of these activities and deadline dates for each activity. The dual aim of the plan was to allow the group to complete the assignment load on time and at an acceptable level of quality. The plan was produced and circulated by Frank Dickson at the second study group meeting.

The planning approach implemented by Frank Dickson represented a sophisticated response to the logistical problems of completing a large number of group assignments. Coincidentally, the approach adopted was consistent with material that participants would later learn in the *Operations Management* unit on project management. The unit's assessment, in fact, posed a major operations management problem for the group which was considered using operations management techniques! Group processes, scheduling of activities, the capacity of the group to meet the demands, the efficiency of the group's work and forms of technology to enhance group interaction all had to be considered in determining an approach to the assessment requirements of *Operations Management*. The role of the project leader was to embrace the former roles of the group chair and secretary. The group was unable to persevere with the dual management approach of the past given the increased workload and the lack of people with the time to adopt the old roles for each of the assignments.

In Study Group A, management responsibilities and processes were determined for all assignments at the beginning of the semester. While the schedule appeared a little intimidating to some at the beginning, by the end of the semester there was unanimous agreement among group members that the assessment requirements would not have been
achieved without it. The plan was adhered to for the entire semester and provided a constant reminder to all members of the need to make a fair and reasonable contribution to the process of assignment preparation throughout the semester. In a sense, the plan was a cultural artefact of the group. It was a tangible manifestation of the group's culture. The plan also helped to reinforce the group's norms and values. That is, the need to remain loyal to the collective interests of the group by adhering to the desired patterns of activities embodied in the plan and contributing to these activities in ways deemed to be helpful to the group's interests. While Frank Dickson argued that the plan was flexible and could be adjusted for unforeseen events, the implicit message was that the plan was to be respected by group members. Frank fulfilled the role of cultural guardian of the group. He was to ensure, as group coordinator and instigator of the plan, that each member would conform to the action, norms and values undergirding the planning document.

Study Group B

In contrast to Study Group A, Study Group B's approach reflected the informal, haphazard processes it had adopted in the past to assignment group management. There was no systematic approach to determining management responsibilities and processes for the semester. Nevertheless, the group had mapped out roughly who would be responsible for each of the eight group submissions by the end of their first meeting. This allocation of duties was orchestrated by Craig Farrell who had done more preparation on the first two cases than other members of the group.

Patterns of activities, the role of the person responsible for each assignment and the timing of meetings gradually unfolded as the group worked its way through the assignment load. Interestingly, there was a convergence in approaches adopted by the two groups as they negotiated the demands of assignments in Operations Management. The role of the project leader in Study Group A coincided with the role attributed to this person in Study Group B. In each group, individuals provided their written views on the case, the leader compiled these views in the form of a first draft, the draft was reviewed by the group, with additional points incorporated into a final report by the leader. This was very much the cycle of activities undertaken by Study Group B in the third year of the program. On the other hand, Study Group A had pursued a policy of specialisation to increase the efficiency and quality of the group's work in the third year subjects. The increased frequency of group assignments, and the attendant tight deadlines, militated against the use of this approach. The frequency of assignments structured the efforts and timing of the groups' work in similar ways and reduced the autonomy of the groups to adopt novel responses. One piece of evidence supporting this convergence of approaches
was the number of meetings held by each group. In *Marketing Management*, Study Group A conducted twice as many meetings as Study Group B. In *Operations Management*, both groups held about the same number of meetings (see Appendix C).

Divergent understanding of the purposes of assignment feedback

Giddens (1989, p.17) notes that 'Sociologists draw an important distinction between the purposes of our behaviour - what we intend to do - and the unintended consequences which it brings about. The purposes for which we do things may be very different from the consequences they produce.' He further states that 'Sometimes behaviour undertaken with a particular aim in view actually has consequences that prevent the achievement of that aim' (Giddens 1989, p.18). Teacher feedback on assignments in *Operations Management* provides a powerful example of how intentions can be incongruent with consequences, and how consequences can undermine the intention of the original aim.

To analyse this incongruity, the intentions surrounding the provision of assignment feedback and the unintended negative consequences of this feedback need to be revealed. This requires that the intentions and responses of the key actors involved in the interaction - the teacher and participants - are studied. The need to study the different perspectives of the key social actors is supported by Giddens (1987, p.68): 'What is unintentional cannot be even characterised unless we are clear about the nature of what is intentional; and this, I would argue, also presumes an account of agents' reasons'.

The staff member's perspective

Assessment strategies cannot be divorced from the educational philosophy of the teacher, program and institution. This analysis, however, concentrates on the pivotal role of the teacher in shaping assessment purposes and practices. Moreover, assessment can be influenced by the way the teacher views his or her discipline, including what is believed to constitute legitimate knowledge and the methodologies favoured to yield useful knowledge. The discipline perspective embodies, implicitly or explicitly, a view of the relationship between research and practice. To understand the assessment strategy employed in the *Operations Management* unit one must examine the philosophy, knowledge and experiences of its teacher - Bruce Gordon.

Bruce Gordon's educational philosophy was quite simple: he wanted to help participants maximise their learning in his unit. In order to achieve this objective, Bruce Gordon was committed to group case study assignments. He was opposed to examinations as a means of helping participants to maximise their learning. This opposition was based on
his experience of marking examination scripts: 'Most exam scripts are rubbish whereas students have and continue to turn out high quality work on assignments' (comment made in personal discussion with author). Bruce Gordon saw examinations as a justifiable means of bringing participants 'up to speed' and 'weeding out' poor performers in the early years of the MBA program, but he believed that they had no place in a final year unit like Operations Management. In order to help participants maximise their learning in Operations Management, Bruce Gordon set a large number of case study assignments. The assignments were chosen to cover a wide number of topics, work contexts and operations management problems.

Bruce Gordon's marking practices were shaped by criterion-referenced and norm-referenced considerations. Thus some individuals and groups can do well in an absolute sense (based on certain teacher specified standards of performance) but be marked down in a relative sense, i.e. their work does not compare favourably with the work of other individuals and groups. Thus better performing groups tend to influence the way he grades other individual and group work. At times, he admitted that it was difficult to explain to 'poorer' performing individuals and groups why they had received an 'average' mark when their work was, in isolation from comparisons with outstanding groups, better than its final grade. Bruce Gordon admitted to the author that he struggled with this dilemma and the desire to be fair to all participants. He was also prepared to provide the study groups with some insights into these marking dilemmas during his study group visits.

In respect to the nature of the feedback that Bruce Gordon provided on the assignments, he was strongly influenced by the desire to promote certain skills that he believed were desirable in the actual practice of operations management. Bruce's own insights into the practical world of operations management had been strengthened by a considerable amount of fieldwork which involved him visiting factories and examining their operations strategies. For example, after setting an assignment requiring participants to explore the aggregate planning strategies of a lawn mower factory, Bruce actually visited a factory to find out at first hand how the firm went about the task of aggregate planning. He was particularly interested in comparing and contrasting the models of aggregate planning put forward in the academic literature (and which were presented in the Operations Management learning materials) and the approaches to aggregate planning in the workplace. His conclusion was that the models may be useful, although many of them are not known and therefore used by operations managers, but their use needed to be tempered by the realities of the workplace. Many operations managers develop their own more flexible models and progressively change them as circumstances change over time.
Bruce Gordon believed that better operations theory could be developed by understanding practice in the workplace. He wanted to encourage participants to think more critically about the practical applications of many academic models. He chose to do this through assignment feedback, and surprisingly, not through attempting to weave some of these practical concerns through the learning materials, particularly the study guide. Assignment feedback was to be the means by which participants learnt more about the practical operations management realities (i.e. the need for flexibility and less-than-perfect textbook solutions) surrounding the graded case. Bruce disclosed privately to the author that the actual grade participants receive for their assignments will mean little to them in the long term. What matters is that they learn something useful about operations management. The purpose of the feedback was never explicitly disclosed to the groups. This appeared to be an oversight rather than a deliberate decision to hold back grading intentions.

The high frequency of assignments placed Bruce under tremendous pressure to mark and return the cases in a reasonable time. He confided to both groups, on providing them with verbal feedback on the first two group submissions, that the marking process was less than perfect given the volume of work to be assessed. Thus a good assignment needed to present core ideas in a way which could be readily comprehended by him. He also conveyed to both groups that he saw the assignments as learning exercises and therefore saw no problems if the groups stumbled along the way. This was the only clue that Bruce gave the groups about his intentions regarding the use of the assignment feedback.

In summary, Bruce Gordon was able to articulate clearly what he wanted to achieve through his assessment and appeared to put in place strategies consistent with his stated intentions. Moreover, his assessment beliefs could be considered to be laudable in their desire to maximise participant learning in his unit.

The group members' perspectives

In order to understand the groups' responses to Bruce Gordon's assignment feedback, one must first appreciate participants' views on the purpose of assessment. Participants' perceived two purposes for assessment which shaped their responses to the feedback in *Operations Management*: assessment as a means of ascertaining standards of performance; and assessment as a means of stimulating motivation and improving learning.
The first function of assessment relates to the judgemental aspect of assessment. Participants saw assignment feedback as conferring value on their individual and collective efforts. This evaluative aspect of assessment was experienced in an intensely personal way. Good feedback strengthened the group's culture, it validated their collective efforts and competencies. It motivated them to continue to strive for high levels of performance. Poor feedback tended to deflate group morale, it caused participants to question whether they were a good group. Assessor judgement struck at the heart of individuals' views of themselves as good learners (in fact, one suspects, as competent and worthy people). This view of the potential positive and negative effects of assignment feedback on the work of the group is described by Matthew Hilliard:

The assessment feedback in MBA 853 Finance was very good, not just because we had got high marks, that helps. But because the assessor had done the assignments justice. ...In MBA 853 assignment 1 we did well, and were seen [by the assessor] to do well, and this encouraged us to put some effort into the second assignment. In [another MBA unit] we were not enthused about the feedback, we didn't get motivated to make a big effort. Good feedback from the other side prompts you to do just as well if not better the next time. ...Some assignments get labelled as not deserving the effort. Thus one makes a pre-judgement based on first impression [of the subject, the nature of the assignments and the first feedback] which carries over the whole semester (comment made at end of third year).

Given the significance of this aspect of assessment to participants, they were extremely sensitive to the fact that assignment feedback should be valid and fair (i.e doing the assignment justice). Thus assignments should only assess designated knowledge presented in the learning materials and feedback needed to value submissions in relation to the designated knowledge and professional experiences which could be reasonably drawn upon in making sense of the assignments. Assessor value, therefore, should be conferred on the basis of a demonstration of knowledge and experience which could reasonably be expected to be drawn upon given the circumstances of each assignment. Assignment feedback was to validate participants' knowledge of a topic. Knowledge which could be reasonably assumed to be demonstrated in assignments was identified by participants using two criteria: the location of the assignment in the unit materials and the questions stated in the assignment requirements.

The second function of assessment was to provide assistance in undertaking subsequent group case study submissions. Participants were less interested in specific feedback on a particular assignment for this purpose. This feedback was seen as being unique to the particular case study and was therefore viewed as evidence justifying the value attributed to the assignment. The overall grade and/or mark was seen as the indicator of value. Thus participants looked to the grade or mark as an indication of their standard of
performance and the qualitative feedback for general guidance on undertaking future case study work in a particular subject. This general guidance was provided and used by the group in their deliberations on the *Marketing Management* assignments (Chapter 4). Participants' perceptions of the role of assessment, as containing both formative and summative components, is not surprising given their previous educational experiences, including their experience of assessment in previous MBA units.

**Disjunction between teacher and participants' expectations**

A clear disjunction emerged in *Operations Management* between the purposes of assignment feedback as conceived and practised by Bruce Gordon, and the meanings ascribed to this feedback by the participants in the two groups. The groups did not use the feedback in the way it was intended to be used by the assessor. That is, they did not use the feedback to learn retrospectively more about the case studies that had been completed and assessed. This is not surprising given that participants did not see this as an important role for assignment feedback. Given more time, they may have attempted to gain a better understanding of the completed cases using Bruce Gordon's feedback. The frequency of the submissions worked against such reflection on previous learning events as the groups were under intense pressure to move on in order to complete the assignment load on time. The pedagogical intentions were largely undermined by the frequency of assignments.

The issue, however, was not one of the groups merely ignoring much of the specific feedback as they moved on to the preparation of other submissions. The nature of the feedback created two sources of tension in the groups. The most obvious source of tension was that the written feedback, and even Bruce Gordon's contributions during the study group visits, did not provide clear, unambiguous guidance on how to do better group case study submissions in *Operations Management*. A further complicating factor was that by the time the groups received feedback on a particular assignment, they were working on assignments far removed from the material covered in the assessed submission. This was not due to any tardiness by Bruce Gordon in assessing submissions. All assignments were assessed and returned to participants within two to three weeks of their receipt. Bruce Gordon worked just as hard in marking the assignments as the groups worked in doing them. However, given the frequency of assignments, the assignment turnaround time usually encompassed a period of time where the groups may have been working on at least two other assignment submissions. By the time some assignment feedback was received, the assignment preparation experience itself was seen as a distant, largely historical (and forgotten) event.
The second source of tension requires some elaboration and involves a number of streams of criticism. Essentially, the groups believed that the feedback did not embody a valid and fair assessment of their work. Several reasons were given by participants in support of this commonly held view. First, at least one assignment (the first of the two individual submissions which proceeded the first two group assignments) was seen as covering material that participants had not studied thus far in the course. On reflecting on the individual feedback to this assignment in their groups, participants were unsure whether this was a deliberate strategy, and if so, why it was being pursued. However, there was unanimity of opinion that this was an invalid assessment strategy. This view was summarised by Frank Dickson:

It is disconcerting when one is required to read ahead, when it is hard enough keeping up with the reading, let alone reading ahead! I'm not sure whether this was deliberately planned. If so, one could argue that it is a good teaching strategy, but it is an invalid assessment strategy. He should only assess material studied (comment made at the beginning of Study Group A's fifth meeting on *Operations Management*).

Some participants believed that it may not have been a deliberate teaching strategy:

Maybe it's not a deliberate strategy - possibly it's a lack of assignment planning (Anthony Collins).

Response from Frank Dickson: Cynics would say yes, but I'm not a cynic (comments made at beginning of Study Group A's fourth meeting on *Operations Management*).

Assessing knowledge which could not be reasonably demonstrated was seen by participants as contravening their views on what represented a valid and fair judgement of performance standards. These views were also contravened by the nature of the assignment feedback which tended to embody Bruce Gordon's practical insights into the cases. This would have been seen as legitimate if participants had perceived feedback as a means of learning more about the management operations problems confronting different firms portrayed in the cases. However, given participants views on assessment, it was seen as a totally illegitimate feedback strategy. The feedback left the groups perplexed. On the one hand they received scant feedback on why they had received a particular grade, while on the other hand they had received a large amount of feedback providing practical insights into the problems confronting the firm being investigated and possible solutions to these problems.

The confusion and incredulity caused by this feedback approach was highlighted in the feedback that Study Group B received on their fifth assignment. The group had received a distinction for the assignment, but Bruce Gordon, presumably based on his practical insights into the case, stated that their assignment was 'out of touch with the reality of the
situation and contemporary production management practice'. Keith Jamieson was to ask the group what grade they would have given the assignment on the basis of the qualitative feedback. All agreed that the feedback justified a pass grade only, although nobody was arguing with having received a distinction! Keith Jamieson went on to argue that it was unfair to criticise the group for being out of touch with contemporary operations practice when nobody is currently working in the operations management area. Thus it was seen to be unfair to expect participants to impart practical insights in their assignment submissions when no such knowledge base existed in the group. (Some of the practical issues raised by Bruce Gordon were incomprehensible to the group and were therefore briefly considered and then basically ignored.) There was almost a feeling that the group had received their grade under sufferance; 'You have done so much work that I have to give you a distinction, even though some of what you said doesn't accord with reality'. It was Michael Valenti who summed up the criticisms of both groups on the nature of much of the assignment feedback:

There is lots of theoretical stuff in the study guide and textbook, but no practical rules of thumb, you find the rules of thumb in assignment feedback, but this doesn't seem right (comment made at beginning of Study Group B's eighth meeting on Operations Management).

A third source of tension related to the form in which Bruce Gordon presented his assignment feedback to individuals and the groups. In order to deal with the logistical problem of marking so many assignments, Bruce Gordon devised a scheme whereby he codified the key errors of thinking for each assignment. Presumably, this codification was based on his current and past grading of the particular assignment. Thus in providing feedback he would construct a short customised comment on a particular assignment and then choose what he believed to be relevant comments from the existing menu of key errors made in relation to the case being graded. Unfortunately, the string of independent remarks did not, in participants' eyes, necessarily always correspond with the points they believed they had made in their submissions. This left the impression that the assessor had not read their assignments carefully. This once again contravened their view on the need for assignment feedback to be and be seen to be valid and fair. The system of presenting feedback was designed by Bruce Gordon to expedite assignment turnaround to in turn help participants learn more from the cases. However, the system of expediting the turnaround of assignments had the unintended side-effect of undermining participants' perceptions of the credibility of the feedback provided.
Effects on participant motivation and learning

It is difficult to ascertain the exact effect that participants’ responses to the feedback provided had on their motivation and learning in *Operations Management*. Participants in both groups registered disappointment with the feedback they received on their individual and group submissions. The grading was considered to be tough and not congruent with the effort participants had expended on the assignments. Participants expressed some demotivation with the unpredictable and ‘tight’ marking standards applied by Bruce Gordon. Clearly, some participants are ‘energised’ by good feedback. Their frustration appeared for a time to colour their views of the subject matter and the person teaching the unit - Bruce Gordon. Michael Valenti, in response to the feedback on assignment five, remarked that he was 'living in trepidation' in respect of the arrival of the assessor's feedback on assignment six which he had prepared on behalf of the group (this assignment was submitted before the feedback on assignment five had been received by the group).

One factor which partially nullified the potentially highly damaging side-effects of the feedback on motivation and learning was the fact that by the time that both groups had completed the ten assignments, they had only received feedback on the first three in the case of Study Group A, and five in the case of Study Group B. As already indicated, this had nothing to do with the marking practices of Bruce Gordon. It related to the timing of the submission of the assignments in three bunches, with the first three assignments due at about the same time near the beginning of the semester, the second lot of three due in the middle of the semester and the final bunch of three due at the end of the semester. The groups were required to continue to meet the heavy submission schedule, irrespective of the timing and nature of the feedback.

Bruce Gordon did not appear to be aware of the unintended consequences of his marking practices throughout the running of the *Operations Management* unit. Moreover, the study groups showed no interest in informing him of their concerns over the nature of the assignment feedback. Thus, neither Bruce Gordon nor the participants were prepared to elicit or provide feedback on the assignment feedback. Participants, as will be elaborated soon, did internally assess the value of the assignment feedback and this proved to be a substitute for what they considered to be less than satisfactory feedback. This peer group assessment, however, did not find its way back to Bruce Gordon. Giddens (1984, p.5), in explicating the stratification model of agency theory, notes that, 'The reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others'. The unintended negative consequences of action should, through the reflexive monitoring of action, be fed back by the agent into
improved action. Reflexive monitoring of activity was missing in *Operations Management*. Bruce Gordon was oblivious to the negative consequences of his actions. This appears to have been caused by Bruce Gordon's remoteness from the hub of study group learning activity. In this case, Bruce Gordon was unaware that his espoused assessment theory was incongruent with his theory-in-use:

We value the consistency of our theories-in-use and our behavioural worlds. Hence, theories-in-use tend to be self-maintaining. We tend to adopt strategies to avoid perceiving that data do not fit, that behavioural reality is progressively diverging from one's theory of it, that one's theory is not tested out. ...One goes on speaking in the language of one theory, acting in the language of another and maintaining the illusion of congruence through systematic self-delusion (Argyris & Schón 1974, pp.32-3).

It appears that distance teachers need to be aware of the importance of eliciting feedback from students on the usefulness of their feedback to students. In the absence of such elicitation, students do not appear to be inclined to volunteer such feedback. Why this is so is uncertain. In the case of *Operations Management*, delayed assignment feedback, coupled with the fast moving nature of the assessment process and an intensification of peer assessment, militated against the initiation of feedback by participants to the teacher. It can be concluded that social distance existed between Bruce Gordon and the participants in the area of assessment. This social distance appeared to be exacerbated by the physical distance between the two parties. Where conflict exists between teacher and student expectations, students appear either to defer reluctantly to teacher judgements or to ignore or dismiss assignment feedback.

**The opening and closing of windows of learning opportunity**

Bruce Gordon wanted the groups to learn more retrospectively about the cases. However, much of the feedback on the cases was received well after the groups had completed the relevant submissions. (In fact, feedback on a number of the assignments was not distributed to group members by the assignment leaders until second semester when the groups had started their study of new subjects and after each member had received their final grade for *Operations Management*.) This late feedback, as evidenced by the following conversation by group members, appeared to be ignored by the groups as their collective attentions were focused on the requirements of the second semester subjects:

Frank Dickson: How many people read the feedback on the final assignments in *Operations Management* which came back late this semester? Let me make a true confession. I haven't read the feedback yet and I probably never will!
William Grant: I don't know whether I've read the feedback or not.
Anthony Collins: I just looked at the marks, added them up, they came to over 50 so I put them away.
Ken Johns: I didn't even count up the marks.
(Conversation took place during Study Group A's seventh meeting on Management Policy held in second semester of the final year. It was triggered in response to the group's critical review of assessor feedback on the third assignment in Management Policy.)

The window of opportunity to learn more about the Operations Management cases had closed. It appears that the opportunity to learn more about a particular assignment only lasts for a certain period of time. This window of opportunity gradually closes as participants become immersed in new learning events. The opening and closing of windows of opportunity for learning highlights the importance of the timing of assessor feedback and assignment submissions. The timing of feedback has to be seen in the context of the frequency and timing of assignment submissions. The value of feedback, as perceived by participants, lessens over time. Ultimately, the value of feedback is lost as participants' learning energies are channelled into new opportunities for learning. The value of feedback rapidly deteriorates as participants become more involved in the preparation of the next assignment.

Distance teachers need to be aware of these moments of learning opportunity when constructing their assessment schemes. While there is a temptation to construct an institutional rule on what is considered to be an acceptable period for assignment turnaround, such policy is likely to be insensitive to the contingency-based nature of exploiting opportunities for learning through assignment feedback. What is judged to be an acceptable assignment turnaround time is contingent on the nature and form of the assessment, and the interconnections between and frequency of assignment submissions. Furthermore, the importance of exploiting opportunities for learning from feedback may be dependent on the extent to which students are reliant on teacher feedback to improve performance and enhance motivation and their previous experience as learners in the off-campus mode. An inter-institutional study of assignment turnaround time in Australian tertiary distance education by Northcott and Thompson (1987) supports the author's conclusions on the need for teacher judgement in determining appropriate assignment turnaround times. While Northcott and Thompson (1987, pp.82-3) recommend some turnaround time guidelines, they qualify their advice by stating, 'it would be dangerous to conclude arbitrarily that a specific time of turn-around is desirable or necessary' (p.83).

Finally, recognition must be given to the final stage of the assignment turnaround process, that is, the distribution of feedback from the assignment leader to the members of the group. This distribution stage, which is not controlled by the assessor who returns
feedback to the assignment leader only, may be delayed and, as a consequence, the potential of feedback to stimulate learning may be undermined further.

STUDY GROUPS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The importance of self- and peer-assessment skills

The more positive reason for the avoidance of motivation and learning dysfunction lay in the groups' ability to, in a sense, be assessors of their contributions. Changes in the groups' cultures were a way of allowing the groups to maximise their learning in the time available for study. These changes led to more varied and richer forms of interaction between group members. The most notable example of this was the emerging roles and contributions of the remote participants in Study Group B. Participants over the the first three and a half years of the MBA, had learnt how to learn better in groups. A key aspect of this learning was the development and refinement of members' self- and peer-assessment skills. Throughout the group experience members were continually assessing their own and other members' contributions and generally felt comfortable with the assessments made by other members of their work. They, in fact, openly embraced other members' help in times of uncertainty. The study groups had become relatively self-contained learning communities over the course of the MBA program. Participants openly acknowledged that Deakin teaching staff were as accessible and approachable as they wanted them to be. Academic queries, however, were usually taken to the group for resolution. It was only on the odd occasion when the group could not resolve the problem that an individual approached a Deakin staff member for help. When Rowntree (1987) asks the question 'Assessing students: how shall we know them?' it can be concluded for participants who studied Operations Management and, indeed, other units in the MBA program, that it was most important for the students to know themselves. That is, participants needed to see themselves as possessing the knowledge and experience to shape and assess the progress of their own professional development. The development of these capacities for self-understanding allowed the groups, and participants within these learning communities, to be self-determining. Heron (1981) recognises the interconnections between self-determination and self and peer assessment. His view captures the essence of assessment as practised by participants within the study groups:

... a self-determining person can only be so in appropriate relations with other self-determining persons. Persons are necessarily persons in relation and in dialogue, where each enhances the identity and self-discovery of the other. On this view, self-assessment is necessarily interwoven with peer assessment. I refine my judgement of myself in the light of feedback from my peers. My judgement of myself is not
subordinate to that of my peers. Rather, I use what my peers say to acquire the art of balance between self-denigration and self-inflation. A just self-appraisal requires the wisdom of my peer group.

...Of course to participate effectively in the process requires a measure of affective and interpersonal competence. I must be willing to take risks, to disclose the full range of my self-perceptions both positive and negative, to confront others supportively with negative feedback, to discriminate between authentic peer insights and unaware peer projections, to trust others, and so on. Hence the importance in practice of... the democratic model...in which intellectual competence, emotional and interpersonal competence, and self-determining competence go hand in hand (Heron 1981, pp. 64-5).

Study Groups A and B, therefore, had the internal resources and self- and peer-assessment skills to derive value from the Operations Management case studies both in the absence of regular feedback and in the presence of feedback which was not, in their view, altogether helpful. Self- and peer-assessment skills were in large part substituted for teacher assessment. Båth (1980, p.32) identifies one of the three functions of assignment feedback as being the provision of contact to counteract student isolation (a function which is also supported by Northcott and Thompson 1987, p.12). In considering the issue of whether prompt assignment turnaround is equally important for all distance students, Northcott and Thompson (1987, p.37) suggest that it may not be for students who can take advantage of alternative forms of feedback. One of these forms of alternative feedback would be peer assessment. Study group interaction achieved more than providing a temporary means of providing 'provisional' feedback until the teacher feedback arrived; self- and peer-assessment became the driving force in shaping participants' learning in the unit.

On the one hand, the assessment strategy of the missing pedagogue exerted a powerful influence over the structuring of the groups' time and efforts. On the other hand, that aspect of the assessment strategy relating to the nature and form of the assignment feedback, although proving disconcerting to participants, did not noticeably adversely affect their levels of motivation and learning. The groups had appeared to develop a culture which was resistant to the perceived negative performance of the assessor.

The peripheral role of the teacher during study group visits

The role of the teacher in relation to the study group is well illustrated in the case of Bruce Gordon's visit to Study Group B. In a sense, the group was so preoccupied with the task of completing the fourth assignment that its members did not appear to be wholly conscious of the contribution of the staff member. The author's use of the term 'conscious' should not be confused with the work of Miller and Parlett (1974) who developed three consciousness categories - cue seekers, cue conscious and cue-deaf - to describe undergraduate students' approaches to preparing for examinations. These types
were in turn linked to students' examination performance, their judgements on what was required to perform well on exams and Perry's (1970) three stages of intellectual development. Miller and Parlett (1974) concluded that cue-seekers actively prepared for the demands of exams, performed at a high level on them and demonstrated intellectual maturity in their academic work. On the other hand, cue-deaf students pursued no particular strategy for exam preparation, performed poorly on them and were intellectually immature. Cue conscious students were an intermediate category. MBA participants could all be considered to be seasoned cue-seekers and therefore the author's use of the term 'consciousness' does not relate to the Miller and Parlett (1974) categorisations. Furthermore, the author eschews the use of the term 'cue-seeker' as means of explaining MBA participants' approaches to assessment as there was little evidence of the group members attempting to ascertain the demands of particular assignments by either 'interrogating' or contriving their behaviour to make a favourable impression on the assessor. Consciousness relates to participants' awareness of the significance of the advice that the assessor provided on particular assignments, particularly during his visits to the study groups.

Bruce Gordon was aware of the need to fit in with the agenda of Study Group B during his visit to the group. His view was one of a service provider; he did not want to take up the time of the group if his service was not required. Generally, he found it difficult to discipline himself to occupy such a circumscribed role during group discussion of a particular case as study group visits were one of the few opportunities where he was able to interact directly with MBA participants. Bruce Gordon perceived himself as an isolated member of the school because no other staff member researched and taught in the operations management area. This sense of isolation appeared to be exacerbated by teaching at a distance. Arguably, Bruce Gordon felt more isolated than his students. Bruce Gordon was, however, able to exercise such self-discipline during the group's final deliberations on the fourth group assignment. After providing feedback on the first two group assignments, Bruce carefully chose his opportunities for participating in the discussion of the fourth assignment which happened to relate to the lawn mowing case described earlier. It should be said that participants showed little interest in Bruce Gordon elaborating on the feedback to the first two assignments. Their grades were good and they were far too preoccupied with the task of completing the fourth assignment. (Again, a degree of deferential behaviour appeared to be exhibited by study group members toward Bruce Gordon when he delivered the assignment feedback. This avoidance ritual was also observed when Vic Jaques presented assignment feedback to the groups in Marketing Management. The reasons for deferential behaviour were examined in Chapter 4.)
Consistent with his view on the need to be aware of the realities of operations management, Bruce Gordon's contributions centred on raising practical issues in relation to the lawn mower case. Craig Farrell was in charge of the preparation of the case study. Many of Bruce Gordon's points for consideration appeared to run counter to the operations management strategy that the group, under the guidance of Craig Farrell, believed the firm should be pursue. Bruce Gordon's cues seemed either to be only perfunctorily considered or ignored by the group. The discussion climaxed when Michael Valenti asked Bruce Gordon what firms like the one in question would actually do. Based on his research of a lawn mower factory, Bruce Gordon elaborated the sort of operations strategy which would be pursued in actual practice. This strategy was contrary to the one which had been developed by the group. Craig Farrell's response was merely, 'Fair enough' and then the group moved on to other issues. Clearly, Craig and the group were not prepared to reconsider their recommendations in the light of Bruce Gordon's contribution. Bruce Gordon had momentarily entered the life of the group and his contributions were, in a sense, seen as peripheral to the work of the group on the assignment. It could be argued that group members deliberately chose to ignore his contributions because the members were either so deeply committed to their own view of the case that they could not countenance a different perspective or there was no time to reconsider their approach to the assignment even if they saw some validity in the alternative perspective. This may be partly correct. However, it seemed at times that members of the group were not conscious of the type of contribution Bruce Gordon was trying to make. They did not connect with his thinking because they were not fully conscious of it. Participants were focused on the work of the group and, as a stranger to the group's deliberations, Bruce Gordon was effectively marginalised. At the beginning of the next meeting there was a feeling expressed by some group members that they did not derive much value from Bruce Gordon's visit because they did not need to see him. They did not need to see him because the group was doing quite well on the assignments, as judged by Bruce Gordon and themselves.

MBA teachers are seen as outsiders by group participants because they are not immersed in the total experience of working as a full member of the connected group. When visiting the groups their role is circumscribed. They are not given the opportunity to be full members of the group; to join fully in the struggles and arguments of the group as they work through the assignment requirements of the course. The groups represent autonomous, dynamic, interactive, self-assessing micro social systems.
The emergence of the study group as an autonomous learning community

Hughes (1989, pp.115-16) argues that 'a successful student career [for distance students] is enhanced by the provision of opportunities for the development of a student culture'. She goes on to note, based on her ethnographic research of off-campus students interacting in study groups in undergraduate, social sciences units, that they 'create their own version of a university culture' (Hughes 1989, p.117). While the students that Hughes researched are studying at a different educational level and have different orientations to study (i.e. personal/intrinsic) and different group objectives compared with MBA participants, her conclusions are relevant to the MBA study group experience. The provision of opportunities for interaction led to the development of robust study group cultures in the MBA program. Group culture changed in response to the different assessment conditions in the program. Participants were able to establish their group cultures, and change their cultures in response to the demands of group assignments in the third year of the program (the first form of cultural change) and the demands of the increased frequency of group assignments in Operations Management (a second form of cultural change). The second form of cultural change was more easily negotiated mainly because of the group members' developing capacity to learn about how they learn in groups. The development of sophisticated self- and peer-assessment skills meant that the groups could operate as largely autonomous learning communities (within the overall constraints of the assessment process), i.e. a kind of university culture located off-campus. The development of this culture appears to be consistent with the aspirations of the MBA program as articulated in its mission statement (see Chapter 2).

The socially constructed role of the teacher in Operations Management

The role of the teacher in Operations Management is surrounded by complexity, paradox and irony. Bruce Gordon, through his learning materials and assessment strategies, was able to influence profoundly the way the groups approached the group assignments. The frequency of group assignments actually led to a convergence in the approaches adopted by the groups, whereas in the third year subjects there was some differences in the groups' approaches to the group assignments. Thus in Operations Management the groups held about the same number of meetings and defined the role of the case study leader in similar terms. While the pedagogue exerted a strong influence on the work of the groups through his assessment strategies, almost by remote control, one key factor - assignment feedback - which is usually considered to be a powerful shaper of students' learning experiences, did not noticeably affect the work of the groups at all.

Unexpectedly, the feedback failed to make a positive contribution to the learning
experience because it was not congruent with participants' expectations of the functions that feedback should fulfil. The negative unintended effects of feedback were lessened by the imperatives of the assessment schedule (i.e. the need to keep moving on) and the high level of self- and peer-assessment skills which existed in the groups. Somewhat ironically, while Bruce Gordon was prepared to disclose a considerable amount of information on his marking practices to the groups during his visits, he failed to inform them about his intentions in providing assignment feedback, that is, to allow participants to learn more about the graded case. It can be concluded that the negative side-effects of such misunderstandings could have been reduced if the teacher had been more explicit about the intentions of the assessment process. The assessment, as hidden curriculum, needed to be more fully revealed and considered by the participants.

Finally, while Bruce Gordon was able to shape group processes by 'remote control', he was unable to influence the work of the groups when he was in their presence, i.e. during study group visits. Bruce Gordon was treated as a peripheral member of the groups during these visits. Group members were too preoccupied with Bruce Gordon's assignments to direct their attentions toward him during these face-to-face encounters. Thus he contributed sparingly on the basis of the groups' learning agendas. Both Bruce Gordon and the groups understood that 'teaching' was not required during the staff visit. There seems to be strong evidence that participants had grown into the role of distance education students and that this experience was characterised by private study of the learning materials and group work. The norms of being a distance student did not embody the need for regular, direct contributions from teaching staff. Their major contribution is expected to made through the learning materials and assessment strategies. Thus staff are seen as 'outsiders' briefly engaging with the 'insiders' - the participants - when they visit the study groups. The teacher, therefore, appears to develop a role or place in the distance education experience, but this role is a far cry from the traditional role of teacher as the fountain of wisdom and knowledge who must and should take centre stage in the educational experience.
Chapter 7

MANAGEMENT POLICY, THE FOURTH YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL AND PARTICIPANT EMPOWERMENT

This chapter analyses a significant and unanticipated dimension in the MBA experience relating to participants' efforts to organise a collective response to problems surrounding the future development of the Deakin MBA program. The chapter analyses the ways in which participants empowered themselves to exert influence over the future development of the program. The climax of the participants' efforts to signal their concern over the development of the MBA occurred during the fourth year residential school which took place in October of the final year of the program. The analysis highlights the importance of the school in allowing participants to negotiate and pursue action directed at influencing the future development of the program.

It is also relevant that this analysis be embedded in participants' experiences of studying MBA 831 Management Policy. Participants used their learning and their collective management experience and expertise, to analyse the causes and symptoms of the MBA program's problems. Moreover, recommendations for the future development of the MBA, and the contribution that participants could make as alumni, were grounded in the content of Management Policy and their managerial competencies. The problems surrounding the development of the MBA were seen to be strategic in nature, and the emergence of these problems coalescing with participants' MBA knowledge and managerial expertise provided a context within which participants could use their strategic management skills. The intersection of participants' concerns over the future development of the MBA, their study of Management Policy, the experience of the residential school and their expanded knowledge and confidence in the field of management provided a peak learning experience during the school itself.

There are four reasons for concentrating on the political dimension of the residential school. First, it was seen as a key learning experience at the school which tended to overshadow other aspects of the school. Second, it represented, in some senses, the ultimate group learning experience as it required the whole final year group to work together to achieve some collectively-desired end. Third, the learning experience was unplanned and unstructured by the institution whereas the learning experiences examined
in relation to the third year school represented mainstream learning activities orchestrated by the institution to achieve certain pre-specified teaching objectives. Finally, the only documented case the author could find of political activism among distance students was that undertaken by Grace (1989). Hence this represents a significant contribution to the literature on the politicisation of distance students and is a vehicle for exploring the value of peer learning and face-to-face encounters (e.g. residential schools) in distance education.

DEFINING EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment, as it is used in this chapter and Chapter 9, 'is an act of building, developing, and increasing power through cooperation, sharing, and working together. It is an interactive process based on a synergistic, not a zero-sum, assumption about power; that is, the process of empowerment enlarges the power in the situation as opposed to merely redistributing it' (Vogt & Murrell 1990, p.8). Through flows of influence all parties involved become empowered in such a way that the new level of group empowerment is greater than the sum of individual's empowerment in a given situation. Individual participants can initiate their own empowerment or work towards empowering others. The drive to self-empowerment or the empowerment of others is best conceived as a process rather than a known state of power to be achieved.

STUDY GROUP B: THE GENESIS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

It is illuminating to uncover the key instigators of political activism and the origins of the movement. The key instigators of the movement (Colin Brice and Malcolm Ingram) were members of Study Group B and their concerns about the future of the MBA can be traced back to the beginning of the final year of their studies in 1991. The first major concern over the future direction of the program was expressed over the resignation of the MBA Director at the end of 1990. A new Director was appointed at the beginning of 1991, however, he resigned from the position and left the University after only four months. Another MBA Director was appointed; a person who already carried a significant range of academic responsibilities and who essentially saw himself in a caretaker role until a permanent Director could be found. By the middle of the year it became obvious that there was a good deal of instability in the leadership of the MBA. Moreover, information was obtained by the two instigators that there was more general turmoil in the new Faculty of Commerce (previously School of Management) which coincided with new academic leadership in the Faculty. There were concerns that new priorities were
emerging in the Faculty which were undermining the value of management education in general, and the MBA in particular. Specifically, there was concern that the focus of the MBA program might be changed from a practical demonstration of useful theory (i.e. a multi-disciplinary approach) to an emphasis on theory per se (i.e. a pure traditional discipline approach). In response to these perceived changes in priorities, Malcolm Ingram, a remote participant, visited the University to discuss matters of concern with the person who had resigned as MBA Director at the end of 1990 and the current Director. His concerns were not alleviated after this meeting. In fact, he experienced some discrepancies between information volunteered during the meeting and information he had obtained through alternative sources.

A second, distinctive concern also started to emerge at the beginning of the second semester of the final year of the program. Enough evidence had accumulated over the previous two years to suggest that a general problem existed concerning outdated course material. This was considered to be a serious deficiency in the quality of the MBA given that participants relied so heavily on the study guides for their learning. The cause of the growing outdatedness of a significant amount of the material was attributed to the change in culture which had occurred within the Faculty under the reign of the new academic management. (The author's own view, supported later by some participants, was that it was unfair to attribute the blame solely to the new leadership when some study guides had not been revised for many years. The seeds of the problem could be located well before the advent of the new leadership.)

While Malcolm played a valuable supporting role in airing concerns with institutional representatives, it was Colin Brice who was the the dominant agent in the politicisation process. Colin was driven by his perception that the MBA program was not being managed in such a way as to allow it to achieve its potential. Colin saw the Deakin MBA as potentially the premier MBA in Australia which could make a significant contribution to improving the performance of management in the country. Achieving its potential would be good for the University, the economy and society more generally. The perception that the MBA was being poorly managed was intensely disturbing to Colin who was fundamentally committed to the importance of effective management in achieving organisational success. Colin also had a strong bias for decisive action which was an attribute that he required to be a successful senior manager of his own company. Colin Brice's attitudes and skills were developed within a fast-paced entrepreneurial world.
Consistent with the above profile, Colin was perceived by his study group colleagues as being a skilled political operator. His forte was an ability to develop and use information networks (skills recognised as being essential to management - see Mintzberg 1973; Kotter 1982). Colin was able to penetrate the University bureaucracy to secure information which gave him some idea of the internal workings of the Faculty which appeared to be negatively affecting the MBA. Craig Farrell was to make the following comment on Colin’s information networking skills:

He's got skills basically because he's a contactor, if you like. His focus is getting other people to provide him with information and he picked up vibes in collecting that information that perhaps slipped by others. He's certainly fairly politically aware, there's no doubt about it (comment made at end of program).

One example which occurred after the residential school illustrates just how finely-honed Colin Brice’s information gathering skills were. There was some debate at the residential school about the effectiveness of the Faculty’s promotion campaign for the MBA in 1991, particularly in the light of the increased competition in the MBA marketplace. Colin Brice was able to ascertain from the University’s Student Centre that near to the final date for 1992 MBA applications that the number of applications received only totalled around 200. At this time, the number of applications usually runs to about 400. This dramatic reduction in applications appeared to confirm the participants’ stated view at the school that the promotion of the MBA had seemed inadequate in 1991. Furthermore, it was a tangible sign that the instability in the leadership of the MBA had adversely affected its overall management. The implications of maintaining high entrance standards in the light of a dramatically reduced pool of applicants were also considered. In summary, Colin Brice was a networker, information gatherer, proselyte and political activist.

In exploring the politicisation of external students at the University of Queensland, Grace (1989, p.70) concludes that ‘external students are effectively disenfranchised by their limited access to information and low sense of group identity...’. Colin Brice was the key figure who opened up lines of communication between the institution and members of Study Group B to provide the necessary information to begin the process of participant activism. Moreover, the study group environment provided a useful forum for evaluating this information and planning strategies for further action. Colin Brice was determined to empower himself, and through such personal empowerment, he attempted to empower his study group.

Colin and Malcolm were able to convince other members of Study Group B that their concerns should be addressed by the Dean of the Faculty at the fourth year residential
school (this decision was taken in the group's first study group meeting in second semester). It was agreed that Michael Valenti, the coordinator of the group, would seek out the names of the other coordinators operating in the fourth year of the program to ascertain the interest in running a plenary session with the Dean to discuss the future of the MBA program. This represented a crucial first step in moving beyond the group to mobilise opinion and action on a broader front.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE COURSE TEAM CHAIR OF MANAGEMENT POLICY: AGENDAS, DILEMMAS AND COVERT ASSISTANCE

Larry Davidson, chair of Management Policy, was only dimly aware of Study Group B's interest in discussing with him during a visit the problems surrounding the MBA in general, and the content of a draft letter which was to be circulated to the coordinators of other fourth year groups in particular. Larry's own agenda was to discuss the requirements of his unit and play a video tape presenting the work of one of the key management policy theorists in the unit. The study group's agenda prevailed and Larry Davidson was drawn somewhat reluctantly into a consideration of the future of the MBA and the content of the draft letter. Larry Davidson confronted an ethical dilemma in engaging in debate about the MBA: should he actively support the participants' interpretation of the causes of the problems afflicting the program; or should he distance himself from such interpretations and possible actions by asserting primary allegiance to the Faculty and the University? Larry, having sighted the draft, felt obliged to inform the Dean that participants held serious concerns about the future of the MBA which they wanted him to address at the residential school. Participants were unconcerned that Larry felt ethically obliged to disclose the existence of the letter which was to be circulated around the fourth year groups. It was felt that it would be difficult to keep the letter confidential anyway and that the whole process should not be seen as clandestine.

Larry Davidson resolved this dilemma by treating the draft letter as the basis of a learning experience in Management Policy. For example, Larry encouraged the participants to think critically about whether the Faculty had embraced a matrix structure which could be seen to be supportive of the MBA program or whether the purported structure was essentially a discipline-based, line management one which tended to defocus attention on the MBA. Larry's questioning was directed at inducing participants to consider the advantages and disadvantages of matrix and conventional line structures, and whether such structures were supportive or unsupportive of the program. The advantages and disadvantages of a divisionalised structure based on supporting different educational
offerings in the Faculty was also considered. He did this without providing his own interpretations and therefore avoided directly endorsing the content of the letter on this point. Another example related to the assumed causal link between deteriorating quality and lack of planning on the one hand, and the new leadership of the faculty on the other. The letter left the distinct impression that the new leadership was deliberately downgrading the importance of the MBA. Larry raised the issue that in an extremely unstable organisational environment, buffeted by recent and proposed mergers, that the MBA may be an inadvertent victim of management’s preoccupation with other pressing issues. Distraction rather than deliberate sabotage may be the cause of the lack of focussed thinking on the MBA’s future. Participant action, therefore, could help the Faculty refocus its attention on the future of one of its key educational offerings.

Larry also recounted the story of the University's response to a Federal Government commissioned Report which recommended, in the early 1980’s, that Deakin's MBA be downgraded to graduate diploma status based on the rationale that quality Masters level study in management could not be delivered at a distance. In these circumstances, Larry noted, the staff and participants worked together to save the fledgling program and that the mobilisation of participants' organisational and political skills had made a substantial contribution in saving the MBA. While the MBA was currently under no direct threat, two implications of Larry's recollection of previous political action were clear to participants. First, there were internal disagreements within the Faculty which meant that staff and participants could not openly work together to secure the future of the MBA. Second, the recollection was meant to convey Larry's tacit support for participants to organise and take some action in order to make their views known on current problems and future possibilities. The implication was that MBA participants had it within their own power, if they so desired, to have some impact on current developments.

Larry Davidson appeared to have addressed satisfactorily his own ethical dilemma by adopting a constructive pedagogical approach which saw him not overtly siding with either the Faculty leadership or the participants. The outcome of the meeting was the removal of the more extreme claims in the draft letter. The approach to be adopted in contacting other groups and eventually the Dean was to raise issues rather than make unsubstantiated judgements. Group members developed a sharper focus on the issues and eschewed any claims which may have reflected badly on Faculty staff. They reaffirmed their collective motivation for taking further action; their desire was to help the Faculty, not undermine future development if the MBA was heading in the right direction. The final letter, however, still attempted to identify possible causes of the problems that participants had experienced; there was still some attempt to move beyond immediately
experienced symptoms. Larry Davidson also promised to ensure that time would be
made available at the residential school to run the plenary session and that he would
inform the Dean that participants wanted such a session scheduled in the school program.

The group eventually changed its strategy and circulated the letter directly to every
participant enrolled in the final year of the program. A deliberate decision was taken not
to involve participants enrolled in other years of the MBA. The actions to be taken were
never claimed to represent the views of all participants enrolled in the program. They
were expressed as coming only from those participants in the final year of the MBA.
Participants from other years were not involved for several reasons. First, it was too
difficult to coordinate action amongst all MBA participants. Second, participants from
other years would not be attending the final year residential school, therefore, it was
impossible to plan joint action at the school in their absence. Third, it was felt that
participants in earlier years of the program would not be in a strong position to make
comparative judgements about the gradual decline in the quality of the course materials.
Finally, it was believed that participants in the early years of the program would be
preoccupied with the new demands of the course and therefore may lack the inclination
and confidence to participate in political activism. Participants needed to speak with a
strong and united voice, but the scope of such activism was limited by the need to take
action on a fully-informed, intimate and consensual basis.

EXPANDING THE NETWORK OF POLITICAL ACTION:
CONSENSUS, DISAGREEMENT AND UNCERTAINTY

Study Group A discussed the content of Colin Brice and Malcolm Ingram's letter at the
beginning of their sixth and eighth meetings held in second semester. There was general
agreement amongst members that the letter had correctly identified some aspects of the
MBA program which had deteriorated over the previous years. However, members of
the group were loath to accept the connections, indeed, causal links, being made between
the deterioration of some aspects of the MBA program, which were essentially
irrefutable, and the recent changes which had taken place in the Faculty. The causes of
the deterioration in quality put forward in the letter were seen as conjecture. Emerging
from the discussion were two interesting viewpoints bearing on participants' orientations
to study. These viewpoints appeared to shape people's stand toward the necessity of
running a plenary session at the school. Ken Johns reaffirmed his strong vocational-
intrinsic orientation to his studies by arguing that as the end of the MBA approached he
had already consumed most of the educational value that he could from the course. The
value of the MBA, therefore, had already been internalised for current and future use.
This is all he ever wanted from the course and with this requirement fulfilled he saw no need to take any action to protect the quality and credibility of the credential. In fact, he believed that parading an MBA qualification could be detrimental to one's career as employers were becoming increasingly critical of MBA graduates who were seen to be overly ambitious, demanding and disruptive influences in their organisations. Ken repudiated the value of the qualification per se; for him, what was important was the value of the learning embodied in the course. Ken Johns later acknowledged that this was a 'selfish' view, but one from which he was not prepared to resile. In contrast, Matthew Hilliard was keen to protect his investment in the MBA by ensuring that the Deakin course maintained its credibility in the future. This view embodied a definite extrinsic-vocational orientation, while not necessarily denying the intrinsic value of the MBA. As a consequence, Matthew supported any action to secure its credibility. These two viewpoints were reflected by other participants and they can be contrasted with Colin Brice's more altruistic motivation for instigating political action.

Members of Study Group A were uncertain how to proceed. They supported Colin and Malcolm's description of the symptoms of poor quality, but the group felt that they were in no position to endorse the analysis (conjecture) on the causes of the problems. Group members were willing to attend a plenary session to hear about future plans for the MBA. However, there was ambivalence about turning such a session into a political event. Participants did not want to become embroiled in the internal political machinations of the Faculty. Ironically, it was Colin Brice's understanding of these political machinations which had fuelled his determination to instigate political action. Overall, the strong sense of concern held by people like Colin Brice and Malcolm Ingram was not shared with the same level of intensity by members of Study Group A. Members of Study Group A had never shown any interest in apprising themselves, in the final year of the program, of the internal workings of the Faculty and the purported ramifications of the internal dissension on the quality of the MBA program. Thus there was contestation over the delineation of the legitimate territory for any potential political action. The territory for political action was broadly defined by key members of Study Group B as encompassing the symptoms and causes of deterioration in the quality of the program. On the other hand, members of Study Group A were inclined to define the common interest of concern more narrowly by focusing on symptoms only. What Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, pp.8-10), in the context of participatory action research, term as the 'thematic concern' was under dispute or at least doubt within the wider final year MBA community.
THE FOURTH YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Juxtaposing experiences: encounters with the Dean of the Faculty and the University's Acting Vice-Chancellor

The organisation of the plenary session was undertaken in an atmosphere of uncertainty and ambivalence. The disputation over the definition of the 'thematic concern' was not resolved before the school mainly because of the isolation of the groups and their preoccupation with the study demands surrounding preparation for the residential school. Participants were not unsupportive of the session, but many were unsure what would transpire during the meeting and what would be achieved through the planned encounter. Even some members of Study Group B expressed doubts at their last meeting before the school about whether the final year group overall would see and respond as intensively to the perceived problems identified and elaborated by Colin and Malcolm. For example, Keith Jamieson was to comment at this meeting that he could understand why participants may respond apathetically to the initiative as it was only natural for participants to be preoccupied solely with the completion of what for many had been a long and arduous program of study:

You [Colin Brice] have inside contacts and have agitated about it, I'm not sure whether many other students have your inside knowledge of program problems. I will be certainly happy to finish the program and leave never to be seen again. If the Dean doesn't turn up for the plenary, that's it, there will probably be no follow up, we're gone, out of here never to be heard of again (comment made in the sixth meeting of Study Group B in second semester).

Despite these self-doubts, Colin Brice and Malcolm Ingram forged ahead and compiled and distributed a list of key questions to the Dean for consideration before the plenary session. While uncertainty and ambivalence existed beforehand, a strong and uniform negative response was voiced after the encounter with the Dean. As one participant noted after the residential school: 'Many people had doubts about the meeting, there was uncertainty. The Dean managed to convince all the doubters that problems existed (comment made at end of year)'. Furthermore, many of the doubters were not only convinced that problems existed, but became key agitators in the following events that transpired at the school. In response to the dissatisfaction felt over the Dean's presentation, the group decided to invite the Acting Vice-Chancellor to discuss certain matters surrounding the MBA's development. This consensus of dissatisfaction represented a decisive point where all participants at the school worked to empower themselves as a collective entity. In contrast to the encounter with the Dean, the subsequent encounter with the Acting Vice-Chancellor helped to allay the escalation of concern.
The question is: how did one institutional leader unwittingly create an environment of heightened concern over the future of the MBA, while the other created an environment which reassured and dampened mounting dissatisfaction? The answer can be found in an examination of each leader's style and the substance of their presentations. Participants were greatly impressed that the Acting Vice-Chancellor was prepared to see them at short notice. The visit vindicated, in their own minds, the efficacy of their strategy. It was another tangible indication of the power the group possessed and was using to ensure its voice was being heard by the most senior manager in the organisation. The decision to invite the VC was almost too difficult for Colin Brice to comprehend at the time: 'I can't believe we are taking this action, a year ago I wouldn't have said "boo" to anybody. The action we are taking would be considered to be radical, inviting the VC to attend'. It was this radicalism which probably made a number of participants uncomfortable before the meeting with the Dean. It could be reasonably argued that many professional people and groups are reluctant to involve themselves in what could be described as typical trade union-type collective action.

The power of the VC's presentation did not lie in its substance; he was in no real position to say anything of much significance about the substantive issues surrounding the MBA. It was his under-stated, open, consultative style which impressed participants. He seemed prepared to give them space to make their feelings known and for issues to be aired fully. There appeared to be a willingness to acknowledge that the University was moving through a difficult, confusing period as it attempted to consolidate one merger and consummate another and that these organisational-wide problems had adversely affected many areas of the University, including the Faculty of Commerce.

The Dean had a much more difficult assignment to negotiate. He was expected to provide a detailed response to various issues surrounding the future of the MBA. Given the broader institutional uncertainties, there was very little he could say other than he was committed to two key initiatives which would place the program on a more secure footing, viz: the creation of a Graduate School of Management; and the appointment of a new Director/Professor of the Graduate School. Participants may have been disappointed with the lack of detail on strategic and operational planning for the MBA, but this was not the root cause of their dissatisfaction. The issue was one of style which inadvertently placed participants, in their own view, in the position of the conventional undergraduate student who was being lectured at by the dominant academic. The Dean had purposefully attempted to paint an optimistic view of the future of the MBA; he did this logically, forcefully and no doubt with great honesty. However, in attempting to convey this message he seized on the participants' agenda, refashioned it to suit his own purposes
and controlled the flow of interaction throughout the encounter. It appeared to be a dramatic case of a purposeful and competent person who was oblivious to the negative consequences of his actions. He wanted participants' support and believed that the quality of the participants was the great strength of the program. However, his actions conveyed an impression of lack of respect for the views that participants were attempting to put forward as mature, professional people. They were effectively closed out of the dialogue.

A determination to convey an optimistic view meant that the Dean did not confront, acknowledge and seek advice on the uncertainties surrounding the future of the MBA. Yet, this was the area which participants wanted to address; this was the area where participants believed that they could help the Faculty. There is nothing intrinsically good about acknowledging self-doubt and uncertainty. However, when such doubt and uncertainty patently exists in respect of future strategies for an educational course, it would appear to have been ultimately more profitable to acknowledge the reality of the situation as a basis for a more equal, collaborative approach to its clarification and resolution. While the Dean may have seemed intent on working on participants' perceptions, the consequences of his actions were to work against the development of more positive views on the future of the MBA. Ultimately, the Dean forfeited the opportunity to work with participants in developing a collaborative approach to the future needs of the MBA. A major opportunity for learning had been lost. The presence of the Dean and the Acting Vice-Chancellor at the school certainly indicated a certain degree of responsiveness on the part of the University to student concerns. This responsiveness could have been a significant step in the embracing of a participatory action research approach to the future development of the MBA.

Participants' response: negotiating a plan of action for the future

Participants agreed in a debriefing session after their encounter with the Dean to pursue two courses of action:

- Short-term action - the preparation of a petition to be submitted to the Dean and Acting Vice-Chancellor addressing concerns raised at the residential school and an invitation to be extended to the VC to consider these concerns relating to entrance standards and symptoms and apparent causes of problems currently afflicting the MBA (as indicated above, the VC did respond positively to this invitation. Only one participant refused to sign the petition).

- Long-term action - a commitment to join the MBA Society (i.e. the program's alumni association) in order to reactivate it as a constructive body capable of making a future contribution to the development of the MBA.
These action commitments were refined in another debriefing session after the encounter with the Acting Vice-Chancellor. It was agreed that the group should work through the MBA Society to gain representation on the selection panel for the new Director of the Graduate School of Management's position. In the longer term it was agreed that the Society should seek to secure representation on any 'Directorate' established to oversee the management of the new Graduate School. There was also a reaffirmation of the need for final year participants to join the Society en masse in order to reinvigorate the body. Further specific actions included providing all relevant documentation to the the MBA's representative on the Faculty's Board of Studies who happened to be a third year participant and to a Deakin MBA graduate who sat on the University's Council. Finally, four people were appointed by the group to accept responsibility for implementing the various courses of action.

The group's management expertise came to the fore in these debriefing sessions. There was a common understanding that definite plans of action needed to be negotiated quickly in short periods of time. Specific, concrete long-term courses of action were structured around the VC's invitation to the group to secure permanent forms of representation and influence within the new structure emerging to support the future development of the MBA program. The group had a very strong sense of the need to tap into and exert influence on the structures of power which existed within the University. Thus there was a recognition that sources of power must be discovered, and connected with, before power can be used to influence long-term developments. A powerful praxis was evident at the school where the group alternated between action (i.e. the encounters with the institutional representatives) and reflection (i.e. the debriefing sessions which occurred after the encounter sessions). This praxis underpinned a powerful form of group learning and group empowerment. Brookfield (1986, p.113), in summarising the integration of Freirean principles with andragogical tenets in the modus operandi of community action groups, notes, among other things, that in such circumstances, 'adults learn best when they engage in action, reflection, further action, and further reflection'. Moreover, such a process is imperative because, 'Empowerment is impossible without alternating action and reflection' (Brookfield 1986, p.114). The political activism observed among MBA participants at the residential school was strongly characterised by this empowering action-reflection dialectic which was in turn sustained by a student-initiated collaborative approach to the issues under investigation. As has already been alluded to, the participants' approach could be genuinely considered to be characterised by many of the principles of participatory action research (McTaggart 1991) even in the absence of the involvement of the key institutional representatives.
EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL: PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS ON THE OUTCOMES OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Members of the Planning Group immediately began to implement decisions taken at the residential school after its completion. The most positive action was to begin to reactivate the MBA Society. A meeting between Colin Brice, and some other members of the executive group of the Society, reinforced the view that the Society's leadership were unaware of the developments surrounding the MBA program. The Society's lack of awareness reflected the leadership's perception of the legitimate roles and functions of the MBA Society. The Executive saw the Society more as a social organisation for MBA graduates to interact with each other informally on special occasions. The meeting with the MBA Society executive members was successful as it alerted them to the concerns held by current participants. Moreover, members of the Executive displayed contrition in not having adopted a closer interest in the development of the program. By the end of the year, the first step had been taken in reactivating the MBA Society as a major vehicle for the representation of graduates' views on the future development of the MBA program. The feeling was that if the current Executive members of the Society were not prepared to adopt a more interested, proactive approach, then there would be a move to replace the current membership with graduates who were so inclined.

A less satisfactory outcome was the feedback elicited from contacts with the University on the leadership's response to the political initiatives taken at the residential school. A response by the Acting Vice-Chancellor to the participants' petition was sent to all participants soon after the school. This response, however, failed to provide the substantive answers participants were looking for in some written communication from the institution. Moreover, the group failed to achieve any direct representation on the selection committee for the appointment of the new Director of the Graduate School of Management, although appropriate selection criteria were passed on and accepted by the Acting Vice-Chancellor in line with his stated promise. Presumably, they were submitted to the selection committee for consideration. Of most concern, was the securing of evidence which indicated that the matter of participant concern on the future of the MBA had not been aired at a Faculty meeting which took place soon after the fourth year residential school. In addition, evidence filtered back to the members of Study Group B that a view had been expressed within the Faculty which implied that participant initiatives had been orchestrated or that the fires had at least been stoked by disaffected teaching staff. This insinuation was seen as utterly repugnant to those participants who had heard about it.
In retrospect, there was nothing that the institution's leadership could have immediately done to resolve the concerns raised by participants. The Acting Vice-Chancellor had to support the Faculty Dean who in turn had committed himself to the appointment of a foundation Director of a Graduate School of Management to solve the problems surrounding the MBA. In the short term, the institution had locked itself into a position where nothing could be done until the arrival of the new Director. In fact, at least one participant - Craig Farrell - who worked in a large, bureaucratic organisation recognised the inertia which exists in institutions (like universities) and the difficulties this causes in attempting to implement change quickly. Moreover, he recognised that individual agents, even those with considerable organisational power, could not necessarily implement change quickly. Craig saw the need to seek 'pressure points' in bureaucracies and that that process had just begun at the residential school. To him, a belief that the problems surrounding the MBA could be solved simply by approaching key institutional leaders was naive. Having said this, discussion with the current MBA Director, who was a member of the selection committee for the Director's position, indicated his view on the urgency of making this appointment as quickly as possible. It is reasonable to conclude that a desire to hasten the appointment was in part shaped by participants' action during and after the residential school. The adequacy of the institution's response, therefore, can only be seriously judged when the new Director of the Graduate School takes up the position. It will be this person who will have to forge a vision for the off-campus MBA in a highly competitive environment and develop strategies for the achievement of key objectives. The connections this person makes with a potentially reconstituted MBA Society will determine how seriously participants will be treated as major stakeholders in the future of the MBA program.

THE FUSION OF MBA LEARNING, MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE, CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION AND PARTICIPANT ACTIVISM

The nature of critical reflection in the process was a two-edged sword. Participants did reflect critically on their experience of the MBA by distance education and inferred from this reflection a set of criteria for judging the quality of the course. These criteria relating to the learning materials and student services which constituted the MBA were applied to the past and current states of the program they had experienced. The application of this personal theory of quality led participants to conclude collectively that there had been some deterioration in the quality of the educational experience over the duration of their studies and that this process of deterioration had appeared to accelerate during their final year of the program. Certain participants had attempted to identify the causes of this
deterioration by penetrating the internal workings of the Faculty. On the basis of this critical reflection, participants applied their own MBA learning and management experience to an analysis of the actions which needed to be taken to remedy and enhance the quality of the program in the future. This analysis was couched within a strategic planning framework which participants had been studying in the final year of the program, and which, by the way, had a substantial impact on their management conceptions and practices (see Chapter 9 for a detailed examination of this aspect of perspective transformation). The strategic analysis undertaken by participants was related to functional concerns like marketing, operations and human resource management. While participants were not in a strong position to attempt a systematic appraisal of the internal faculty environment which was impacting on the MBA and, therefore, their strategic analysis was to some extent limited and characterised by some unsubstantiated speculation, attempts to gather relevant information demonstrated ingenuity and perseverance. Participants' emerging views on the problems and future possibilities which confronted the program were acted out in their encounters with two key figures within the organisation. Thus there was a collective commitment to reflection and action. The will to act empowered participants; actions and their consequences gave them a sense of having power, a power which they had never experienced before in their dealings with teaching institutions at the undergraduate level.

The real value [of the residential school encounters] was it showed that we had a lot more clout that we thought we had. Certainly a lot more clout than we would have had as undergraduates and that came to a certain extent from the diverse areas where our working lives are taken, there's none of that in undergraduate, you're all in the same bin, in the MBA you all come from different bins and that gives you a lot more clout...(Craig Farrell, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

However, the potency of participants' will to reflect and act can be seen in what they were expecting key institutional figures to do; that is, they wanted the key leaders within the teaching institution to adopt a more critical strategic stance toward the future development of the MBA.

I have had this feeling for a couple of years that there are people teaching the MBA who really could spend their time very profitably if they could turn around and learn to take some of their own medicine, to read their own study guides because most of the answers are there. I could never understand why something was so obvious, its already written there, you can take it and read it like a novel, people were too bloody lazy to get off their backsides and read it...(Colin Brice, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Participants turned the process of critical reflection back on the institution's key figures.
The residential school encounters represented a subtle, but powerful attempt by participants to induce key institutional representatives to reflect critically on their own views about the future development of the MBA. The conceptual apparatus - strategic management thinking - which could be used as a basis for such critical review could be found in the actual MBA learning materials. A pedagogic strategy for applying strategic planning - the case study - was a pervasive element of the MBA experience. Thus participants during these encounters challenged the institutional representatives to think in terms of the MBA's mission, its customers' needs and circumstances, its competitors, strategies for success and so on. In fact, the participants were attempting to conduct a strategic planning case study on the future development of the MBA program and, as part of the exercise, had invited the institutional representatives to participate in the process. Perhaps the fundamental reason why participants were highly dissatisfied with the Dean's performance and more satisfied with Acting Vice-Chancellor's presentation was not so much what both people said, but their differing apparent dispositions to listen and respond to the participants' viewpoint. In other words, the Acting Vice-Chancellor at least demonstrated an openness to participate in a participative form of critical reflection. On the other hand, the Dean attempted to merely present his perspective on events. In demonstrating a preoccupation with his own view of the world he effectively declined the invitation or closed down the option to participate in a more collaborative form of critical reflection. This closure of communication was keenly felt by participants.

The politicisation of a distant student group is not a smooth, unbroken progression of consensual negotiation and achievement of agreed objectives. The politicisation of MBA participants was characterised by consensual decision making, however, there were many instances of disagreement, uncertainty and ambivalence toward future courses of action. While all participants eventually accepted the need to take action to protect and enhance the quality of the MBA, disagreement still existed after the residential school on whether the strategies adopted were the best ones to secure commonly held objectives. Some participants still harboured significant reservations about the actions pursued at the school. They questioned the appropriateness of using the MBA school as a forum for political activism. A more appropriate option, they believed, would have been to work through the MBA Society. However, those holding such a view did not appreciate how politically inactive the Society had become over recent years. One participant, at the end of the year, still could not quite understand why certain dissatisfied staff members were unable or unwilling to exert more influence within the organisation to open up key issues for critical debate. He seemed to be at a loss to understand the organisational politics of universities.
There are two definite conclusions which can be drawn from the experience. First, political activism needs its leaders who may not necessarily command, at any given time, the wholehearted support of their followers. These leaders can be categorised as the empowerment generators. Second, it is doubtful that large-scale political activism could have or would have developed in the absence of a residential school located close to the University power base. The opportunity for large-scale interaction, in a face-to-face setting, transformed a politically aware clique into a formidable year-wide action group. The leaders of the group fully recognised and grasped the opportunity the school provided to construct and begin to implement an agenda for action. This agenda, however, is still to be implemented fully and, as is explored in the final section, its ultimate impact will depend on critical events which have yet to unfold. Political activism, therefore, can often achieve quite stunning short-term goals, but the long-term final objective to effect substantial change and improvement can appear indeterminate and elusive.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE TEACHING INSTITUTIONS

There are many lessons which can be drawn from this example of political activism among distance education learners. The growth in distance education in recent years has been caused, in no small measure, by its acceptance by professional bodies and professional practitioners as a legitimate and respectable form of formal education, particularly at the postgraduate level. Those people who belong to the professional classes are usually highly motivated, experienced, articulate, capable, well-resourced and well-connected in their organisational and professional communities. Thus they have a considerable amount of potential political influence. With the advent of user-pays systems in Australian higher education, coupled with the desire of these groups to avail themselves of continuing formal educational opportunities by distance education, a new and more demanding student clientele is being attracted to distance education. Such a student group has the nerve, confidence and wherewithal to exert considerable pressure on the teaching institution if they believe that the quality of the educational experience is lacking through what they perceive to be poor management. These groups see themselves as legitimate stakeholders in the courses they study.

However, it is easy to concentrate on the negative side of political activism. Of course, political activism tends to be a student-initiated reactive force, located outside the institution, which is induced by perceptions of organisationally-based problems or at least the symptoms of these problems. On the other hand, the possibility does exist for
political activism, say, in the case of the MBA experience, to give way to a more constructive, institutionalised approach through the reactivation of the MBA Society. The most positive outcome of the political activism in the MBA experience was the participants' determination to reconstitute their representative body as an effective vehicle for constructively contributing to the substantive issues surrounding the future development of the MBA. The challenge now clearly rests with the institution to embrace and use this body to improve the quality of the course. Distance education, while travelling down the road of respectability, cannot afford to ignore or antagonise its greatest advocates, that is, the graduates of its offerings. Participants were motivated by the best of intentions in organising their political action. They demonstrated an energy and commitment which belied their busy personal and professional lives. This commitment to the cause, however, cannot be sustained indefinitely. Political activism must be consolidated, organised on a permanent basis and institutionalised if it is to have any lasting effect. This is particularly the case in distance education, where participants' isolation from the teaching institution and the vast majority of their peers militates against the possibility of sustaining long-term political activism. In a sense, political activism must transform itself from a feral, outside and temporarily organised force concentrating on consciousness raising and (informed) provocation to a more disciplined, organised and institutionalised force directed at long-term positive change. The challenge for the teaching institution in the case of the MBA is obvious: can the leadership of the MBA help facilitate the required transformation? This opens up a very important dimension of facilitation which resides outside the normal ongoing teaching-learning relationship.

The case study of political activism amongst external students at the University of Queensland constructed by Grace (1989) supports this view. The politicisation of external students at Queensland University between 1975-85 was induced by perceptions that the University was demonstrating a distinct lack of commitment to distance education. The differences in the scope of the political activism undertaken at the University of Queensland and the MBA need to be highlighted. At Queensland, the political activism was broadly based representing the interests of all external students enrolled in the University. In this institution the external clientele was small both in absolute and relative terms, i.e. relative to the size of the on-campus population. Moreover, the key agents in the movement tended to be people (e.g. women) who would have traditionally seen themselves as one of the least empowered groups in distance education. Participants actively involved in the political movement perceived that they were fighting for the very survival of external studies in the University. In contrast, MBA political activism was localised, embedded in an institution with a major commitment to distance education (i.e. large off-campus population in absolute and
relative terms) and premised on the need to maintain and improve the quality of the educational offering. It is still salutary, however, to note that political activism was exhibited in such a distance-education-supportive environment. As a digression, it is clear that recently merged institutions in higher distance education in Australia should not take their distance education cultures for granted. While the objectives of the political movement at Queensland were infinitely more difficult to achieve, it can be seen in Grace's account that for all the good work the movement had undertaken, it was starting to peter out by the mid-1980s mainly because key instigators had graduated or left the organisation. The history of external studies at the University of Queensland since that time attests to this observation. Grace's case study indicates how difficult it is to sustain political activism amongst distance education students indefinitely. Moreover, it highlights the difficulties of altering institutional thinking about the quality of distance education and momentum which can take the institution away from commitments in this area. The failure of the movement to change fundamentally institutional thinking and momentum reinforces the need for political activism to transform itself into a powerful institutionalised force. This conclusion reinforces the proposition that the search for empowerment is a continuous process rather than a clearly defined state of achievement. The process of student empowerment must eventually be embedded within more open and distributed institutional power structures.
PART III:

INTERACTION WITHIN PARTICIPANTS' WORKPLACE AND PERSONAL WORLDS
Chapter 8
THE SEARCH FOR PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION WHILE COPING WITH PERSONAL STRESS

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THE interactions between two fundamental elements in participants' learning experience: the pursuit of professional integration; and the need to cope with personal stress. Professional integration refers to participants' efforts to relate their MBA learning to their professional practices. It also relates to the value participants derived from the integration of MBA learning with professional practices and participants' attitudes in relation to the need for this integration. Efforts to relate learning to work represent a professional odyssey for each MBA participant. The author has constructed three different types of professional odysseys to help reveal the commonalities and differences in the ways in which participants dealt with their MBA learning in the context of their work. Participants' professional odysseys are seen to be related to their career aspirations. The need to cope with personal stress refers to participants' efforts to maintain some control over their personal responsibilities toward their families. Participants wanted to avoid disconnecting themselves from their family lives. Specifically, participants were concerned to discharge their obligations toward their families and to derive some satisfaction from doing so.

The chapter looks at the participants' professional odysseys in broad terms. It does not focus on participants' changing conceptions and practices of management. Nor does it examine the ways in which participants approach the task of learning about management. These areas are considered in depth in Chapter 9.

THE SEARCH FOR PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

In this section an overview of three categories relating to participants' efforts to apply MBA learning to their professional practices, and the value derived from the degree of learning/professional integration achieved, is provided. These categories are substantiated following this overview. The categories are as follows:

- Integrators: those participants (2) who were able to enact much of their MBA learning within their current professional circumstances more or less from the
beginning of the program. Few participants belonged to this category, but those who did had a ferocious appetite for learning and judged the value of the MBA experience in terms of it meeting immediate professional needs. Those aspects of the learning experience which did not immediately help these participants to improve their professional practices were permanently discarded. Participants who belonged to this category were in senior management positions seeking competencies to improve organisational performance. These participants were, in a sense, already integrated with a stable professional world, and used their learning to strengthen the professional interactions through which they effectively discharged their work-related responsibilities. They had also achieved their major career ambition of securing senior management positions.

- Partial integrators: those participants who were able partially to enact their MBA learning within their current professional circumstances. A number of participants (7) belonged to this category. Most were employed in middle management positions in different functional areas (management information systems, services, production, research and development) and throughout the duration of the MBA program appeared to be reasonably well-satisfied with their current jobs, organisations and industries. Given the more limited scope of their jobs, they were unable to apply a considerable amount of their learning directly on the job. They were prepared to accept that a certain amount of MBA learning represented 'provisional knowledge' which needed to be accumulated for possible future application sometime after the completion of the program when a career move might be contemplated. MBA learning certainly did help this group to achieve better integration with their immediate professional context. In contrast, however, to the first category, this group of participants foresaw their professional contexts changing in the longer term and that their ultimate career ambitions may not be fulfilled within their current work contexts. MBA learning was, in part, a preparation for a developing career in management.

- Low integrators: those participants who were unable to enact much of their MBA learning at all within their current work practices. Again, a number of participants (6) belonged to this category. All of them were employed in either technical or project management positions on entering the program. While some remained in technical positions throughout the duration of their studies, others moved into positions with greater management content. Thus two subcategories of participants can be identified here: those who saw the MBA as preparation for a career in management sometime after completing the program; and those who
used the MBA to seek out a career in management during the course of their studies. In both cases, a large component of their MBA learning represented 'provisional knowledge'. In the former case, participants prepared themselves for a disengagement from their current technical professional contexts in order to re-engage more appropriate management working contexts post-MBA study. For them, the MBA represented the first step in a lengthy transition from technician to manager, a transition which had barely unfolded on completion of the program. In the latter case, participants used the MBA to help them move into the field of management, although they had much to do to achieve their managerial ambitions on completing the program.

These categorisations are not meant to indicate absolute levels of integration. They are merely presented to indicate relative degrees of integration of MBA learning with professional practice. The focus of the typifications is on the degree to which participants can apply MBA learning immediately and directly on the job to improve professional practices. Thus the integrators had a greater opportunity to apply MBA learning than partial integrators who in turn had a greater opportunity to apply learning than the low integrators. Arguably, all participants had the opportunity to apply their MBA learning in ways which increased their awareness of what was happening around them in their organisations. The question is to what extent were they able to use their learning to improve their current jobs and organisational environments?

This range of participant knowledge of and experience in management, learning agendas, conceptions of learning about management and career ambitions is further examined.

The integrators

William Grant, who took over the most senior management position in his organisation on entering the MBA, and Colin Brice, who set up his own private retailing consultancy company, in the second year of the program, were the two participants who could be described as major integrators of study and work. Both participants were looking for the MBA to help them set up and run their organisations. MBA learning took on a real sense of urgency in attempting to grapple with the immediate and significant challenges that confronted these participants. This sense of urgency and importance is vividly described by Colin Brice as he recollects his experience of setting up his own company:

[So your job gives you ample scope for applying what you learn?] ...Yeah, I mean I've used all the legal stuff for example, in setting up the company, ...that was invaluable to have done that...I had one set of solicitors...doing that to start off with, to establish the company, and they gave us some wrong answers, so I told them to go away and
research it, and come back with the right answers, I wouldn't have known that if I hadn't have done it [the MBA law unit]. Then they came back with the answers and the answers were still wrong, and that's what I mean, you go and refer to your textbook, you suddenly think, 'well hang on I must have been wrong, these are guys, paid lawyers', and then they came back and they were still wrong, so in the end I turned around and dumped them and got another set of solicitors... (Colin Brice, comment made at end of second year).

Colin Brice had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, but knowledge which would directly help him manage, at a strategic level, his own company. In fact, his desire for knowledge customised to meet his own unique learning agenda was so strong, that at times he was critical of the MBA when it did not provide insights into the management problems he and his own company were grappling with. Colin Brice was obsessed with the need for the MBA to be practical, to be immediately relevant to his professional needs. Something that was not seen as being relevant now or in the near future was usually jettisoned:

When I read through the study guides, I mean, every time it's a case of, I'm reading the study guide, but really half of my brain is really saying: 'How do I apply this? What's the reality? How does this work in the real world?'...every topic almost something came out of it that could be used in business, not necessarily in the format it was presented by the lecturer in, but taking the next step. It was never a case of look at the formula. It was always a case of what's the next step...the MBA is not worth anything unless you know how to apply it. I'd say the MBA has been worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to me and that hasn't come out of theory, it's come out of the application of the theory...If I didn't understand the theory I rang up somebody...and if I thought it was rubbish I told them it was rubbish...I never let anything in the whole four years, there was nothing that I ever let see that I didn't turn around and really understand or exhausted to the stage whereby I knew it was rubbish (Colin Brice, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

The central importance of the MBA in helping these two participants in their jobs is further elaborated by William Grant:

The biggest learning place is the workforce, and this is the biggest strength of the MBA. Any comment I make on MBA subjects has to be seen in that light, the way I can apply it to what's happening here [at work]. This is a test-bed...the formal approach [MBA study] has provided a very good framework for putting in and developing things on-site as I've needed them here, and of stimulating ideas and cross-fertilisation, all of this has been tremendously valuable (comment made at end of third year).

While both Colin Brice and William Grant applied specific knowledge to improve their organisations' performances, they tended to speak in sweeping terms when asked about how they were using their MBA learning in their jobs. It was difficult for them to draw the line between MBA learning, on-the-job learning, their work and the development of
their organisations. All sources of learning melded together within them, and their jobs and organisations:

[Have you found the MBA shaping you work agenda, or has the MBA slotted into what you wanted to achieve in your position in the organisation?] ...That's a chicken-and-egg question. Don't know. It's happened...must have happened I suppose. Obviously, when something comes up from the course which is relevant I'm going to use it and it has been quite striking, as I've said before, the number of occasions in which it's been a week before or two weeks after or something where it's been absolutely relevant. It mightn't be exactly as it is but there is a sufficient core in there which I could pull out and apply (William Grant, comment made at end of second year).

The partial integrators

Partial integrators all had formal management responsibility in various functional areas of their organisations. The MBA equipped them with a variety of competencies to do their jobs better. In many cases, doing their jobs better meant that participants were managing their departments better. Gaining a knowledge of other areas of their organisation also helped participants to do their jobs more effectively. Often this knowledge allowed participants to deal more critically and constructively with various specialists (accountants, lawyers, economists) within the organisation. In this respect, one participant remarked:

I am better equipped to be able to go and argue with the accountant about the fact that we screwed up the sales tax procedures - and to argue with him seven times because he didn't believe me the first six! (Frank Dickson, comment made at end of first year).

Seeing the bigger picture within which their individual and departmental contributions were being made appeared to give this group of participants more confidence in their managerial abilities which in turn appeared to contribute to their performance as managers. This broadening of horizons, however, did not totally reflect itself in improved professional performance. A significant amount of MBA learning remained provisional in nature. That is, participants could see the applicability of the learning, but could not directly use it in their jobs. Application was, therefore, limited by participants' place (i.e. their sphere of managerial responsibility and authority) within the organisation. This was particularly so with MBA material which examined organisation-wide, strategic issues. The constraints on the application of learning for those located in particular organisational spheres were recognised by participants. For example:

In my previous job at [a large multinational organisation] there was limited opportunity to utilise [MBA learning] and that's in relative terms...I wasn't I guess totally aware of the limitation until I got into this position [a job allowing greater use of general management skills]...you know it [the multinational firm] is a reasonably large
Participants saw the direct application of MBA learning as fortifying interest in the program. This contrasts with the attitude of the two integrators who perceived immediate application as of central importance to the success of the MBA.

The future remained unclear for many participants in this category. They were already engaged in a type of management work, and could see the opportunities to broaden their management horizons by entering more senior management positions, but many were unsure whether they wanted to take the next step up the corporate ladder. Some were uncertain whether they should take a step at all or whether the next step should be out of the large organisational environments within which they worked into their own small business which would allow them to be more in control of their managerial destinies.

The low integrators

Typical of the views of the frustrated, low integrators are the following participant quotations:

[Does it frustrate you that you're not able to use the knowledge that you're gathering?...Does to a certain extent, yeah, it does. I would like to be able to apply it. I'd like it to be of more benefit to me. [In what aspects in particular?]...Well, when I learn I like to be able to use it. [Talk about subject areas]. That's a bit difficult. Finance is an area where it's interesting but...we don't do any financial assessment in the organisation whatsoever. When they go and buy something they say, 'oh it cost X dollars' and go and buy it. They don't...look at what sort of return it will be for the organisation or anything like that. So, I mean that's annoying at times. I've had a word to our accountant about that, but it doesn't change the way the organisation operates (Anthony Collins, comment made at end of third year).

[How do you actually go about using our materials?]...Well seeing as I'm still in the same job [Senior Engineer], the restrictions that I had expressed before are still there in that I certainly am not in the position that I can really utilise fully what I'm getting out of the program.... [Does that frustrate you at all?]...The first year I was a bit more concerned about it than I was in second year, probably in that I was saying, 'thank goodness I don't need to 'cause I'd better get this stuff over with first'. The fact that you really...I was more concerned about 'gee...I'm missing out and this is bad, it's bad for me, it's bad for my MBA...I'm not the general manager of this place here', and I think I was a bit, I felt like an odd-man out to myself sort of thing, but I think in this
second year it's changed a bit, it sort of can wait, it can wait till this is over (Matthew Hilliard, comment made at end of second year).

Ironically, a strong source of frustration was the perceived relevance of the MBA to management work. These participants could see the relevance of their studies and the opportunities to apply their learning, but were denied the chance to enact the MBA experience because they were in non-management positions. This level of frustration, however, never became so intense as to induce these participants to seek out management positions during the course of their studies. They appeared to accept reluctantly their 'spectator role' during the course of the program. This 'spectator role' was also accepted by two other participants who did not endure frustration in not being able to apply much of their MBA learning immediately. One explanation of this inertia could be that these participants did not want to negotiate a major career change during the MBA. Moving into a management position may have interfered with their MBA studies. Also, for those comfortably entrenched in familiar technical positions, a change of career into mainstream management would have represented a leap into the unknown. These participants could not have borne the strain surrounding the demands and uncertainties of both the MBA and such a major career move. Moreover, any career move may have demanded relocation and thus placed even further strain on family relationships.

On the other hand, Walter Abbott, who was a frustrated low integrator at the beginning of the program, started the transition from technician to the world of management:

[Were your expectations of the second year of the program met?] ...one of the expectations when I started the course was to, one of my hopes was to get out of the dead-end job I was in [research and development officer] but certainly I did that within the first year, so that has clearly been met,...I've just done a staff report and my boss has said that I have abilities to handle the sorts of situations which he never thought I would have been able to handle, so, I attribute that to the MBA in great measure [goes on and describes a successful exercise he undertook which meant]...dealing with people on a day-to-day basis at general manager level (Walter Abbott, comment made at the end of second year).

While Walter had moved into another technical job, the new work gave him far greater exposure to management issues in the organisation as well as signalling to the organisation that he was looking for a career in management. These signals were being noticed by his immediate superior. At the beginning of the final year of the program, Walter moved into another higher level technical position which again gave him more exposure to management work. By the end of the MBA, he was on the verge of entering a middle management position. Throughout his MBA studies Walter made considerable progress toward his career ambitions of entering the world of management work.
Tim Greaves, unlike other participants in this category, was a contented low integrator:

[Is it frustrating that you're not in a position to use a lot of your MBA learning?]
...Yeah, you'd probably derive more from the program, but I think in the long term you're probably better off having that knowledge before you try and put it into practice. I get the impression that if you're in the job that was the ideal MBA-graduate's job, it's all a little too late. You need the slow ramping up, if you're in the position and you suddenly each time you learn something you madly rush off and try and implement it, it seems fraught with danger. I'd much prefer to be in a position where I am now where some of it's relevant, some of it you can see being relevant in the short term, the medium term and the long term, and it is a nice gradual process, and I think if it were all just dumped on you and you were trying to implement it as you were learning it you would certainly have a lot more difficulties. ...I think I look at the MBA as more or less as probably a ten year program - 4 years in the MBA and then another 10 years getting to the stage where you've caught up with everything you've learnt in the MBA and you've got the experience and you can put it all into practice, so it's more or less a medium-term type thing (Tim Greaves, comment at end of second year).

Tim Greaves experienced no frustration in occupying a number of non-management positions while studying the MBA. On the contrary, he perceived some virtue in the fact that there was little scope in these jobs for applying his MBA learning immediately. Moreover, Tim Greaves was in no great hurry to begin the transition from technician to manager; the world of management was something he aspired to enter later in his career. Tim Greaves did take up a manager-of-project-managers' job in the final year of his studies which provided him with a greater opportunity to apply his MBA learning - see biographical note in Appendix A. This job change was an offshoot of his technical expertise. It was neither sought after to increase the managerial aspects of his work nor to provide him with greater immediate opportunities to apply his MBA learning. The job move, therefore, did not indicate a major change of attitude toward the MBA. However, it did give the MBA a greater in-service professional development quality.

Conclusions on participants' professional odysseys

For the two integrators - William Grant and Colin Brice - the application of MBA learning to the workplace was a 'here and now' activity. These two participants had reached the final destination of their professional odysseys on either entering or part way through the program. The challenge was to use their learning to improve their organisations' performances. The impact of the program was so pervasive that it was at times difficult for these participants to identify discrete contributions that the program had made to their professional practices. That which was seen to be relevant was chosen and synthesised with existing competencies to form an integrated professional development experience. For these two participants, their study and professional experiences were indivisible, with each one feeding off and reinforcing the other. The results of learning applications are
not, however, so readily obvious. This relates to the nature of each participants' managerial job which required them to initiate large-scale organisational changes to improve the performance of their organisations. While both participants believed that the MBA had improved their approaches to managing organisational change, the results of their work would not become evident for some years. Even for these two participants the ultimate value of their learning experience remained uncertain, and dependent on future events.

The partial integrators represented people who, as middle managers, were able to use their learning to improve their own managerial performance and the performance of their particular functional departments. Exposure to knowledge of other functional areas they had no direct involvement in and experience of broadened their necessarily limited understanding of the nature of their organisations. Coupled with a study of strategic issues, these learning opportunities provided participants with some background to negotiate the transition from middle to senior management. Obviously, learning about things residing outside their immediate area of interest represented provisional knowledge to these participants. The extent to which participants will use this knowledge to move into the upper echelons of management remains problematic at the end of the MBA program. Some participants, like David Richards, declared their determination to use the MBA to achieve a senior management position at the beginning of the program. For David, movement into a production job in the final year of the MBA did allow him to apply more general management skills. Other participants either appear contented to remain in their chosen functional area (Craig Farrell and Keith Jamieson) or were preparing to move into another functional specialisation (Belinda Hitchcock) at the end of the program. In both cases, participants were satisfied to continue to use selectively that part of the learning experience relevant to their immediate professional circumstances. Still other participants (Frank Dickson, Malcolm Ingram) are uncertain about the future development of their careers within the world of management work. Finally, Ken Johns career uncertainty was, for him, surprisingly and in a very positive sense removed when he was offered a senior management position within his organisational subunit at the end of the MBA program.

For certain low integrators who had deferred making any attempt to negotiate the transition from technician to manager during their MBA studies (Matthew Hilliard and Anthony Collins), a certain degree of frustration was experienced in the lack of professional opportunities to test their learning. These participants, along with the two non-frustrated low integrators, came to accept their limiting circumstances as they progressed through the MBA, although on completing the program they have reached a
turning point in their professional odysseys. That is, these participants had reached the point where they needed actively to seek out appropriate professional contexts to enable them to transform their 'provisional knowledge' into enacted knowledge. The reason why some of these participants experienced periodic frustration probably relates to their ages and seniority in their technical professions. In a sense, they felt that time was running out for them to achieve their managerial aspirations given their career stages. On the other hand, Tim Greaves, the youngest member of the research group, had no reservations about moving through several different technical and project management positions during his study of the MBA. He was comfortable with the fact that he was developing a knowledge base to allow him to be a manager sometime in the future. Time, he believed, was on his side. While Matthew Hilliard, Michael Valenti and Anthony Collins were concerned about the need to begin to work towards the achievement of their managerial aspirations by seeking out appropriate professional contexts at the end of their MBA studies, Tim Greaves seemed unconcerned about the need to even contemplate a career transition - to him, the transition would begin in good time without any need for a professional transformation plan. Tim was happily located in his technical/project management world, with the MBA allowing him to take a closer look at the world of management. This satisfied his learning agenda which was partly based on the desire to ascertain his interest in managerial work.

In contrast to the abovementioned low integrators, Walter Abbott while starting the MBA in a technical specialist role, actually started the journey to the world of management early in his studies. Walter's move to integrate himself with a different professional context was motivated by a strong frustration with his technical work. This frustration existed before he enrolled in the MBA and was the major reason why he chose to undertake the program in the first place. The frustration was exacerbated by initial MBA study, however by the end of the first year he had acquired a different job within the organisation which exposed him more to the content of management work. While another job change in the organisation later in the MBA still saw him in ostensibly a non-management position, Walter was gaining greater opportunities for insights into the nature of management work at a very high level in the organisation. These opportunities allowed him to see the application of more and more MBA learning. While it could be argued that Walter moved from being a low integrator to a partial integrator, there are important differences between his case and that of participants in the partial integrator category. In contrast to the partial integrators, Walter did not occupy a formal management position in his studies, so while he was provided through his job moves with greater opportunities for seeing the application of his learning, he did not have the same opportunities as the partial integrators to actually apply his learning on the job. On
completing the MBA, Walter stands ready to break into the world of management and therefore he is on the verge of achieving a major career ambition.

Terry Plowman, a younger member of the group, was another low integrator, in the same category as Tim Greaves, for the first three years of the program. During these years he was in a relatively junior technical position and therefore had little opportunity to apply directly his MBA learning on the job. Like Tim Greaves, he was quite relaxed about his job circumstances and accepting of the fact that the MBA was preparing him for some distant career in management. However, during the third year of the program he began to experience some frustration with not being able to apply his MBA learning. This lack of opportunity for application was attributed to organisational resistance to his newly emerging management competencies. At the end of the third year, he moved into a job with a greater management component. This move was foisted on him as he was retrenched from his previous job due to a downturn in the industry. It appeared, however, that the retrenchment provided him, somewhat ironically, with the opportunity to break the shackles of his technical specialisation and begin the transition to the world of management work. However, during the final year of the program his new company fell into receivership and was sold to a new owner. While Terry retained his position in the newly owned company, his career planning was once again thrown into confusion as he contemplated taking a more technically-oriented job in a larger, stable organisation.

The study of participants' search for professional integration highlights the complex interrelationships between participants' age, work experience, learning agendas, career aspirations and MBA studies. While it was noted in Chapter 2 that all participants had an intrinsic vocational orientation to study on entering the MBA, this broad categorisation masks significant differences in participants' intentions, approaches and circumstances. The author believes that the categorisations which have emerged from the research illuminate the vocational/intrinsic category of the orientations to study framework which formed the basis of the United Kingdom Open University Study Method Group's work on the experience of learning through distance education.

The search for professional improvement through better integration with the world of management work meant different things to different groups of participants. For the frustrated low integrators it led to an interesting paradox: increased learning about management, decreased commitment to existing professional contexts. Clearly, participants are at different stages of their professional odysseys: some are contemplating the beginning of the journey; others have undertaken the journey with varying
understandings of the final destination; while still others have reached the final destination and are wrestling with substantial management concerns.

It is not a matter of one group gaining more value from the MBA compared with other groups or, put more negatively, one group succeeding in the search for professional integration with other groups failing to achieve the desired integration. Each group searches and continues to search for professional improvement in their own way and in their own time. What can be said is that the MBA experience has left its mark on every participant by making some contribution toward helping participants to negotiate their own professional agendas.

COPING WITH PERSONAL STRESS

While participants vigorously pursued their own professional agendas, they were also required to wrestle with a major dilemma: the more time, energy and so on that they devoted to the task of professional integration, the less attention they could devote to their personal and, in some cases, professional worlds. The desire for professional integration leads to personal stress and could possibly lead to social alienation, unless spouses and children are prepared to adjust to the participants' new study realities. Kirk (1977, p. 19) concurs with this observation when she comments: '...I have become convinced that the effect of part-time, home-based study upon a mature student may be more traumatic than most of us working in this field realise. I would suggest that the domestic problems for married students are an important cause of student withdrawal and academic difficulty.'

The professional-personal time commitment dilemma can be illuminated using social theory. Herrmann (1988) sets out a conceptual framework for understanding the transitions in perceptions of external students undertaking a professional development experience. Two aspects of the framework are particularly pertinent to an understanding of how MBA participants grappled with the relationships between their personal and professional worlds. First, based on the work of Becker (1960), Herrmann examines the concept of commitment as a useful way of understanding why distance students persist with their studies, even though their study has negative ramifications. Herrmann (1988, p.11) elaborates the concept of commitment as follows:

... people making decisions and choices relating to their beliefs, behaviours and attitudes will take into account factors relating to the consistency between new choices and already-existing lines of action, as well as more general and usually longer-term goals.
The individual is making a choice between two or more alternatives, choosing that which is perceived at the time to best serve his/her goals. These goals may be long or short term, the concept does not differentiate between them or indicate how the student makes the choice, or indeed chooses between conflicting commitments.

Herrmann, using Becker's work, notes that a commitment to a particular line of activity is achieved by making a 'side bet'. 'Side bets involve making some adjustments to other interest, activities or attitudes which are not necessarily related to the commitment being made, but which introduce or maintain internal consistency in the individual's life. The importance of the side bet is that it will be lost if the commitment is not maintained and finally fulfilled' (Herrmann 1988, p.12). The higher the side bets the greater the potential conflict between study, work and personal responsibilities. However, the more that students and significant others in their personal and professional lives accumulate these side bets, the greater the incentive to complete the educational experience. To do otherwise would be to forfeit the accumulated side bets and lead, in a sociological sense, to 'loss of prestige and negative effects on self-image, but [it] also means that others had suffered loss of side-bets because of the student' (Herrmann 1988, p.12).

A second allied concept used by Herrmann is that of adjustment in perspective which is based on the work of Heinze (1983) who has also explored the social and psychological milieux of distance students. Heinze identifies four different strategies which students can pursue to adjust their perspective on the new reality of studying at a distance in order to allow them to rationalise and enable them to make decisions on the use of their time. An incongruence between students' perspectives on the new realities of study and the search for professional integration, and those of significant others in their personal and professional lives could potentially lead to social and professional stress. Students can respond to the incongruence by attempting to influence the perspectives of others - to bring the divergent perspectives into alignment - or dismiss the perspectives of others. To adopt the latter course of action would be to marginalise oneself from different social groupings or, depending on one's perspective, marginalising those groupings from one's newly emerging reality.

Such marginalisation could be described as social alienation. Heinze (1983, p.60) notes that '...distance education seems to have an alienating effect at least in the social context, including work and family'(my emphasis added). Heinze does not describe what he means by social alienation in his study other than commenting that the 'alienating effect' '...narrow areas of communication and to a large extent puts a burden on relationships' (Heinze 1983, p.60). Giddens (1989, p.724) defines alienation as 'The sense that our own abilities, as human beings, are taken over by other entities. The term was originally
used by Marx to refer to the projection of human powers on to gods. Subsequently, he employed the term to refer to the loss of control on the part of workers over the nature of the labour task, and over the products of their labour. The use of the term 'alienation' in this research context is problematic. However, it could be argued that the pressure of MBA study could cause participants to lose control over their family responsibilities and circumstances and that this lose of control could destroy the participants' role as loving and loved spouse and father. This translation of the meaning of social alienation to the circumstances of MBA participants is probably tenuous, but not altogether unsustainable. Some participants did register concern that they might lose control of their marriages and that they may not be discharging their obligations, as they perceived them, towards their families. While social alienation was imagined, there was no evidence to suggest that it occurred. The fact that participants believed that it could occur makes it worthwhile to elaborate the issue. Notwithstanding the potential for social alienation, the more relevant experience was one of coping with personal stress. While it is difficult to define personal stress, and while different degrees of stress existed in participants' lives, it is clear that stress is a qualitatively lesser problem than social alienation. Stress can be seen as the ways in which people respond to events which disturb their equilibrium and which either tax or exceed their ability to cope. The MBA program represented potentially a major new stressor in participants' lives. It demanded that most participants' adjust to a new set of circumstances, i.e. life commitments. The rest of the analysis will reveal how participants attempted to cope with different degrees of personal stress. In doing so it is worth highlighting that Heinze's (1983, p.61) study also settles on the term 'social stress' in exploring how students adjust to the new reality of distance study.

The ways in which MBA participants attempted to juggle their time and energies between study, work and personal commitments will now be explored. In particular, the criteria that participants used to allocate their efforts across their life commitments as they progressed through the program, and the adjustments they and their families made to cope with the pursuit of professional integration, will be analysed using the concepts enunciated above.

**Initial expectations**

The best way to avoid possible professional and social alienation is to negotiate with significant others on the nature of the new realities. Through interaction and negotiation students and particularly spouses can reach a common view on the nature and extent of the side bets before the beginning of the educational experience. Most MBA participants had, indeed, discussed these issues with their spouses before beginning the program and had received strong and positive support from them to pursue their professional/learning
agendas. Certainly, no spouse had been actively opposed to their husband (MBA participant) undertaking the program. Any such resistance would have represented a strong deterrent to beginning study. In some instances, this support was more than just the faithful, submissive (female) spouse accommodating her husband's career development plans. In the case of William Grant, he and his wife were medical practitioners who had been studying concurrently or separately for most of their married lives, and had established a tradition of mutual support. In some other cases, participants indicated that their wives were already studying themselves, and that this would complement their own studies. Clearly, in these cases, there existed a strong culture of learning in participants' personal worlds. In these circumstances, spouses do not need to be 'influenced' to accept the new realities; they readily understood what was to be required of them and their husbands during the MBA experience.

Given that the decision to undertake MBA was a private rather than organisational issue, participants were looking for no special support from their employers to undertake the course. Participants did not accumulate many side bets in their professional worlds and therefore the greatest potential for conflict lay in disparate perspectives emerging between themselves and significant others in their personal worlds. Having stated this, participants still had to discharge their job responsibilities during study and therefore doing their jobs still remained a commitment to be juggled with study and personal responsibilities during the program experience.

**Coping with the new reality**

After the first year of MBA study, many participants were prepared to admit that they had underestimated the strain that the program would place on their family lives. (All but one participant in the author's study was married, with most of those married having children of varying ages.) This strain generally manifested itself in the need to work at times which had previously been spent with the family, especially weekends. Many participants clearly felt guilty about this and about the extra duties borne by their (female) spouses. In some cases, too, MBA participants reported that their spouses seemed to feel guilty about distracting them from their studies. Furthermore, those participants, as had been anticipated at the beginning of the program, with younger, especially pre-school children, compared with their counterparts with no children or older, teenage children, appeared to experience the greatest strain. In a number of cases, such participants (all men) stated that their children did not understand their fathers' needs to be left alone over weekends to study. The mothers often had to take the children out, so as to create a quiet study environment. In one case, an MBA participant had discipline problems with one of his young children, and his wife had to give up a part-time job to attend to the problem.
given the demands of the program which both contributed to the problem in the first place and precluded the participant devoting time to helping overcome it. Frank Dickson gave his own explanation as to why young children cause greater problems for participants attempting MBA study:

I mean I, in general I guess the kids at the younger ages probably need more support and direction and comfort and love than kids at an older age, I suppose in general. You know, there's probably no absolutes about that.

However, as Frank Dickson indicates, there are 'no absolutes'. David Richards, who had placed his work and study commitments well above the needs of his family in the first two years of the program, had a decisive change of heart in the third year. While work was still his top priority, David elevated his family responsibilities above those of the MBA (although it should be emphasised that the program was still extremely important to him). The determination to refocus his life's priorities was brought on by a recognition that his teenage children were growing up quickly, and that there was a more urgent need to participate and help them in this period of their lives before they left home.

From comments made by a number of participants, it appeared that the program was imposing a strain on the relationship with the spouse. The biggest problem was simply that the couple saw relatively little of each other during the semester. Tempers seemed to become more frayed, and there were other manifestations of tension. These personal tensions, however, did not lead to any marital breakdowns. The strain also manifested in periodic sickness among some participants which tended to undermine their performance in the program.

While MBA participants and spouses had clearly prepared themselves for the pressures of study, and had coped with the strains as they unfolded during the first year of the program, an incongruence did emerge between initial expectations and the new realities of being a distance learning student. Redefining expectations to accord with the new reality was a difficult process for all participants, although acutely so for those participants with younger children. The disparity between initial expectations and the emerging realities of the demands of studying at a distance can best be explained in rather common sense terms: people can never really appreciate the demands of something that they have never experienced before in their lives. Thus participant-spouse discussion and institutional counselling can never fully prepare prospective students for the rigours of part-time, off-campus study. The unknown must be experienced before it can be properly understood and dealt with. For MBA participants, the program represented a major and unique educational experience in four important respects:
• All participants had first or higher degrees in either sciences, technology, engineering or medicine. The MBA was the first time that they had experienced formal, postgraduate management study.

• Most participants had undertaken previous tertiary study full time on campus. The MBA was the first time that most of them had experienced part-time study at a distance.

• Most participants had undertaken their tertiary studies before they had married and had children. Participants carried significant professional and personal responsibilities during their MBA studies. 

• Many participants had not studied for a number of years, and although they had enjoyed considerable success in previous tertiary study, the demands of postgraduate study, in a new field, part time at a distance required considerable relearning and modification of old study habits. In this respect, Colin Brice was to comment: '... the first year was a bit of a grind getting back into the study thing, it was all a bit new but at least it was fun sort of thing. It was a big grind getting back into the concept of study etc and probably the first year, if anything, I probably overstudied anyway, because I did, I put a lot of hours in each week into each topic in first year.'

While participants managed to cope with the new demands of study, and avoid serious forms of personal stress, they were unable to reconcile their various life commitments to their complete satisfaction. Attempts at satisfactory reconciliation were exacerbated by participants' determination to pursue their professional development agendas, and their desire, in most cases, to surpass minimum standards of MBA performance as set by the institution. For many, the only way to attempt to do justice to all of their commitments was to find more time by sleeping less. This high risk behaviour could only be sustained for relatively short periods of time and even then resulted in the periodic ill-health noted above.

**Strategies for accommodating the demands of the MBA program**

At the end of the first year of MBA study, three more permanent and realistic strategies of accommodation appeared to crystallise in participants' minds:

• Those participants who said they would aim for only satisfactory or even minimal, rather than excellent performance, to get through the remainder of their MBA. Few participants belonged to this category.

• Those participants who would attempt to find time in their jobs to study and therefore avoid the more adverse effects of study on their personal worlds.

• Those participants who said they would try to use their time more efficiently and effectively, so as to avoid weekend work, but not compromise their study performance.
These strategies were never seen as ways of solving the problem of conflicting demands on limited time. They were merely contemplated at the end of the first year of MBA study as strategies to alleviate the worst consequences of the side bet dilemma.

Priority setting

While participants contemplated rational ways of attempting to reconcile the demands of work, study and their personal lives, the reality of the accommodations made over the next three years tended to diverge from plans considered at the end of the first year of MBA study.

The contingency-based approach to priority setting

Participants did set priorities, but this process was predominantly shaped for many participants by the unfolding exigencies of their changing circumstances. Thus how participants allocated their time and energies depended on the immediate size and nature of the demands which they confronted. This contingency-based approach to the allocation of effort is vividly portrayed in the following participant quotations made at the end of the third year of the program:

'[priorities are set by] what's biting most next' (Colin Brice);
'[time allocated on the basis of] 'where the pressure is coming from at the time'
(Anthony Collins);
'the squeaking wheel...[get's the most attention]' (Walter Abbott);
'[priorities mean that certain things around the house get neglected]... I do to a certain extent the same with the family and hope that they'll still be there tomorrow and still be there next year, because many of those things are not so easy to put a deadline on as when things have to be done and a lot of the tossing up between work and study again is just deadline based' (Frank Dickson).

While these participants tended to alternate between their work and study responsibilities depending on the pressures emanating from these worlds, the responsibility which was consistently most neglected was that to their families. (The family suffers most, 'they get pushed right back to the back' during the academic year -Anthony Collins, comment made at end of third year.) However, at times the 'squeakiest wheel' became the family and their needs became the top priority. In this respect, Walter Abbott commented that he invariably allocated his time to work and study until the 'family has reached breaking point or they can't stand another weekend of you studying'.

While participants had to recognise and respond periodically to the frustrations of their families, it can also be said that families appeared to adjust their behaviour to fit the demands of MBA participants' study. Thus perspective transformation occurred among spouses, and even children, to accord with the new realities. Manifestations of this
perspective adjustment included children learning the need to leave Dad alone when he began studying for the night, or over the weekend. Participants attempted to reciprocate by striving to establish routine where they spent regular time with their families, typically immediately after arrival from work and before dinner, or over weekends.

If family responsibilities are neglected, then for many participants their broader social activities are almost extinguished during their studies. For example, one participant - Terry Plowman - who had moved from Perth to Melbourne, for the first three years of MBA study, was confined to his circle of Perth acquaintances living in Melbourne because he had no time to extend his circle of friends.

*Strategy one: compromising study standards*

There was some evidence that participants' work suffered as they grappled with the demands of MBA study. As already noted, this was ironic given that their studies were expected to improve their professional practices. This was a regrettable consequence of study for some, but for others it was an acceptable sacrifice to make. The full and partial integrators tended to regret their lower performance at work when MBA commitments dominated, while the low integrators tended to be more accepting of the demands of the program. This can be explained in terms of each groups' different professional agendas that were elaborated earlier. The full and partial integrators were looking for the MBA to integrate them better into their current management worlds and were therefore perturbed when MBA study commitments at times lowered their professional performance. In contrast, the low integrators were looking at the MBA as a means of disengaging from their existing technical specialist worlds in order to allow them at some future time to re-engage with the world of management. The low integrators were more accepting of a lowering of their technical performance as they were looking to excel in the future in the world of management.

While participants freely admitted that at times they had to compromise their study performance to cope with the pressure, no participant, with the possible exception of one, pursued a deliberate long-term strategy of aiming for minimum study performance to get through the program. Generally, participants perceived the need to aspire to the highest standards, within changing constraints, in order to meet the institution's minimum performance standards. To compromise standards continually, was seen as a high risk strategy which could lead to failure. Participants, as they progressed through the MBA, recognised that the institution would not tolerate inferior work. One participant - Walter Abbott - did concede that he had consciously and consistently lowered his standards in aiming for lower marks, to cut down his MBA workload. However, the compromise
was only in terms of aiming for credits rather than distinctions, to preserve a margin of 
safety. This compromise strategy did not continue into the third year of the program with 
the advent of group assignments. In these new circumstances, peer group pressure 
dictated that standards could not be dropped. In other words, while previously Walter 
Abbott was able to make essentially private individual decisions on the allocation of time 
to study, the advent of group assignments meant that standards, and the consequent 
allocation of time and effort, had to be negotiated jointly with other group members. 
With the group setting itself high standards of study performance, room for individual 
decision making was severely constrained. The influence of the study group was also 
highlighted and reinforced by Terry Plowman:

I found with the study group that we are heading for higher levels of performance than I 
might have adopted by myself. The influence of a few participants who are absolutely 
keen to get it perfectly right...affects everyone, you find yourself striving very hard to 
get a perfect assignment (comment made at end of third year).

Strategy two: finding time in and around work

There was one participant - Keith Jamieson - who tended not to elevate his work and 
study above his family and social life. While the demands of study became critical at 
times (e.g. before examinations), Keith Jamieson did not see himself to be under the 
same pressure as many other participants and openly admitted that: 'I don't seem to spend 
quite as much time studying as a lot of people'. In fact, he acknowledged at the end of 
the third year of the MBA that the recent arrival of his first child had had a far greater 
impact on his family and social life compared with the MBA program. Keith's time 
pressures were substantially lessened given the nature of his job as an information 
systems manager. The flexible nature of the job allowed him to undertake MBA study in 
and around work hours. It must be said, however, that Keith did not feel the same 
degree of pressure as other participants because he did not put as much into his studies as 
they did. Keith Jamieson, therefore, was very much a study strategist who was a good 
judge of the minimum amount of work required to get through the MBA program. At 
times his minimalist approach annoyed other members of his study group who expected 
more of him in those units requiring group assignment submissions in the final two years 
of the program. In response to covert group pressure, Keith did appear to make a greater 
effort in the final year of the MBA. While Keith was atypical here, one suspects that he is 
not atypical of some other students undertaking the MBA program. While not wishing to 
make moral judgements on the approaches of participants like Keith Jamieson, it must be 
recognised that other participants do make such judgements (invariably negative) when 
the 'minimalists' find themselves interacting with a group of dedicated MBA participants 
in group settings.
Strategy three: studying more efficiently and effectively

In regard to the strategy of working more effectively and efficiently on the program, there was some evidence that participants were able to develop a more disciplined approach to their studies in order to allow them to spend more time with their families, particularly on weekends. This more disciplined approach related primarily to their private study of the learning materials. The extent to which study strategies could be refined, however, was limited by the changing nature of the educational demands of the program (e.g. different subjects, the requirement of case study-based group assignments, the increased frequency of group assignments, week long residential schools). As was seen in Chapter 4, the new educational demands of group assignments led initially to a considerable amount of inefficient and ineffective individual and group learning before group culture changed to accommodate the new demands. If the nature of the MBA was essentially unchanging, then participants may have been able to save considerable study time as they progressively learnt how to cope with the stable educational conditions. However, the new and previously unknown demands of the program meant that in the final years participants were required to respond to different educational demands. Thus not only was the MBA by distance learning a fundamentally new educational experience for participants, but so also were the more specific educational demands that this experience embraced. Periods of adjusting to these demands inevitably led to less than optimum learning. These new demands tended to increase the strains on participants’ professional and personal lives.

Participants' responses to the size and nature of the side bets

Attitudes to responses

Participants responded differently to the side bets incurred in undertaking the program. Some participants appeared to be extremely sensitive to and at times highly agitated about the sacrifices borne by them and spouses and/or families. Other participants appeared more relaxed and easy going about the negative ramifications of undertaking the program. Different responses can be explained in terms of the following factors:

- While all participants incurred side bets, some incurred more side bets than others. For example, Keith Jamieson readily admitted that he worked less on the MBA than many of his study group colleagues. Keith therefore incurred fewer side bets and was more relaxed about the demands of the program as he perceived and responded to them. Others aspired to high standards of performance on the MBA and therefore made greater sacrifices to achieve these standards. One participant who belonged to this latter category made the
following remark in response to an observation that the strain he placed himself under was largely self-imposed:

...yeah there's a degree of that that's self-imposed. I mean there's, yes I would like to get good results and I, which is something that's nice, for me it's nice to have a good score on the sheet. It's good to get a lot out of the course. I mean I've got this far, I mean I might as well get as much out of it as I can and I'm unlikely to then turn around and do the study at anything like the same depth later. ...I mean it's probably not what I'd ever do again and so in some ways it's a one shot (Frank Dickson, comment made at end of third year).

- Some participants had more substantial professional duties than others, and also had less flexibility in arranging their work commitments around their studies. These two factors increased the side bets.

- Participants with children appeared to incur greater side bets compared with those without children and the only unmarried participant (Belinda Hitchcock) in the study.

- Most participants received financial support from their employers in undertaking the program. However, the odd participant did not receive this support and therefore incurred a financial cost which placed an extra strain on family finances.

- Finally, while the above factors go some way to explaining why some participants adopted different responses to the sacrifices of MBA study, they do not provide the complete explanation. Cases can be found of participants in similar professional and personal circumstances reacting differently to the side bets incurred. For example, Craig Farrell, a hard working member of Study Group B, appeared more relaxed about the sacrifices compared with others: 'MBA's got it's own priority and it gets slotted in when the time's available to do it' (comment made at end of third year). For want of a better psychological construct, 'temperament' appeared to differ among participants. As already indicated, some participants were more sensitive to the sacrifices made, than other participants incurring the same side bets in both nature and amount.
Applicability of the concepts of commitment and perspective adjustment

Herrmann's (1988) concept of commitment through the accumulation of side bets and Heinze's (1983) strategies for perspective adjustment provide useful insights into why and how participants persevered with the MBA program. The following participant quotations made at the end of the third year of the program will be used as a basis for exploring these concepts in the context of the MBA experience:

Well if I'd had this year as my first year, I'd quit and just drop the course. Because the price, the toll it's taking on my family I think is too high. I mean at the moment they're in a situation and my wife, in particular, says look just get it over with, you know as quickly as you can. We've got to get it out of here and we're not going to throw away the pain and suffering, the effort that's gone into it already, and it is in those terms. I mean it's, it is certainly a situation where it's not at all easy. So I don't know what counsel you offer to people at the beginning of the course, but I'm not at all sure that I'd do it again if I started it all over (Frank Dickson).

[Did you ever feel like dropping the MBA?] ... No, no not at all. I wanted to do the MBA so badly I'd never contemplate giving it up. I mean I'd have to, if my wife sat down and said, 'Look I want to leave you, it's all over unless you do something about it', then I'd have to reconsider, but she's very supportive and realises it's getting close now and as it's getting closer to the end she's even more supportive. I mean the middle years are the hard ones...they really are. The first year is exciting and it's new. Two and three are, [expletive] what am I doing here and then year four, four it's good, she's been very supportive (David Richards).

[You said you nearly deferred during the middle of second year. What made you hang in there?] ... Mainly my wife ... My wife is totally convincable ... Probably because of the fact that you know, your family does sacrifice a lot and put you know, forgo a lot while you're doing the Masters and...the Masters was something that I really wanted to do because I wanted the knowledge...the first year wasn't an easy year. ...And so it was just a case of...here we were almost half way through a year...and there'd been a lot, a lot that we'd forgone with margins and work and the Masters and trying to fit everything in and surviving on...three or four hours sleep. ...It was in survival mode almost and there was either work or Masters and there really wasn't any family life and it was, I think that was really it.

The fact that we'd already committed so much and Lyn [spouse] had put so much into it and it was a shame not to at least give it a shot with at least one subject...[participant discusses bad experience with examination in second year where he believed he performed badly due to abnormal work demands]...then I guess really Lynette got me through most of that, because I was at the stage I was pretty annoyed, I was furious at work that something that I valued so much [the MBA] had been jeopardised because of work. ...So, and I then eventually, I can remember that day very vividly, she went and made a cup of coffee and sat down and said, 'just sit down here and have a cigar' so, which is most unusual because she doesn't like smoking. So, and I sat down there and I think a couple of hours later she turned around and she said, 'well now what can you do?'...and I hadn't thought. I thought, 'oh well that's it the subject's done...there's six hundred dollars down the drain...and bloody six months out of my life where we don't live sort of thing'. ...So, yeah, then turned around and said, 'why don't you ring up Deakin and see what needs to be done' and so I rang up and yes you could sit the exam later if you do a special consideration and so on (Colin Brice).
Clearly, these participants and their spouses recognised the substantial side bets that had been accumulated. The more that participants progressed through the program, the more side bets they accumulated and the greater the incentive to push on. The paradox is that if participants could have somehow appreciated the nature and magnitude of these side bets at the beginning of the program, then some of them (e.g. Frank Dickson) may not have undertaken the MBA in the first place. However, the actual existence of the side bets provides a strong incentive for completing the program. At the end of the third year of the program, all participants categorically denied that they had ever considered withdrawing from the MBA. The fear of marital breakdown was the only circumstance they considered which could lead them to drop the MBA.

While not openly discussed by participants, the author strongly suspects that dropping out of the MBA would have been experienced as a traumatic event by participants. Such action would have been considered an admission of failure. In fact, participants would have seen themselves, and perceived their spouses as seeing themselves, as failures. Thus, as suggested by Herrmann, forfeiting the side bets would have struck at the heart of participants' self-esteem and self-worth. Participants would have also seen themselves as failures in the eyes of their study groups. The study group provided strong moral support because participants could see that they were all experiencing similar types of pressures, but peer group pressure also acted as a strong deterrent to dropping out. The influence of the group on participants' determination to complete the program highlights the communal dimension of the MBA experience. While only conjecture, in times of occasional crisis it appeared that the fear of failure was the strongest motivation for getting participants through the learning experience. This does not appear to be an unreasonable explanation for people who are generally considered to be high achievers. For such people, success is experienced as the relief of avoiding failure!

The existence and accumulation of side bets provides a useful insight into why participants persevered with the MBA program. Such an explanation, however, can be enriched by examining the nature of perspective transformations during the MBA experience which allowed participants to cope with the new realities of work, study and family commitments. Heinze (1983, p.61) describes the following four strategies which students can pursue or processes they can be involved in which allow them to adapt to the new realities:

- Processes of nihilism. ('Everything else is not as important')
- Processes of segregation. ('Others, who are not studying, are no longer so important')
- Processes of influence. (The contact persons are being trained to adjust to students' behaviour)
MBA participants did not engage in the processes of nihilism or segregation. Participants did not pursue their studies in a single-minded fashion to the detriment of other facets of their lives. However, the processes of influence and advancement of life’s perspective do make some contribution to explaining how participants coped with the new realities. In terms of the latter perspective, there is ample evidence to suggest that participants recognised their current difficulties, but also the contribution the MBA was making and could make to their quest for professional integration. As participants progressed through the MBA, the end could be more clearly seen and the short-term sacrifices more readily accepted and endured. Arguably, the hardest years of the MBA experience are the middle ones, i.e., years two and three. During these years the novelty of the program has worn off, while the end of the program is not yet in sight. Here, the ‘difficulties’ are real and pressing, with the benefits of 'later' residing in the distant future.

In relation to the influence processes, there is no doubt that the key target of such influence was the spouse. However, in some cases the spouse was working or studying or had studied in the past. There was no need to induce them to support their husbands’ study. The family culture was supportive of such initiatives either being taken by the husband or spouse. Thus the respective spouses in the family valued educational endeavour and recognised the conditions required to succeed in formal study. In the case of William Grant, even his children responded positively to observing their father studying at home by studying harder themselves. In other cases (see above quotations) the spouse occupied the more traditional housekeeping role. Yet in times of crisis (e.g. Colin Brice’s predicament described by him above) the spouse played more than a submissive, supporting role. In this case, it was the spouse, acting as student counsellor, who guided Colin Brice through a difficult period in his MBA studies. When some participants appeared to be in danger of succumbing to the struggle, it was their spouses who actively intervened and pointed out the nature and magnitude of the accumulated side bets, and provided their husbands with the encouragement to press on. The role of the spouse, as critical friend and constructive counsellor, cannot be underestimated. While the MBA place a strain on participants’ personal worlds, it was the support of the spouse located within this world that enabled them to continue to pursue their professional agendas.

While female support for male participants’ MBA studies was demonstrably evident, feminist critique of support by the male spouse for women studying at a distance indicates that such support may not be reciprocated (Grace 1991). There is an important gender
issue here which is not revealed in the author’s study where all the married MBA participants were male. Where the author’s conclusions do reinforce feminist critique of the plight of many women studying at a distance is in the importance given to the need for motivational support to exist within distance students’ personal worlds. Moreover, it can be argued that the teaching institution’s efforts to provide such non-academic student counselling support would be unlikely to be an effective substitute for a supportive personal context. The most disadvantaged students in distance education can be seen to be those groups of people who receive no support for their studies from significant others in their personal worlds. Active resistance to study from significant others in students’ personal worlds would represent, based on the author’s research and that undertaken by feminist writers, one of the most significant barriers to negotiating successfully a course of study in the distance education mode.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Participants’ search for professional integration and the need to cope with personal stress involved them in a process of continual negotiation and adaptation with significant others in their professional and personal lives. No participant ever felt completely comfortable with decisions taken to reconcile the conflicting demands of work, study and family responsibilities. While participants contemplated and attempted to pursue rational strategies for allocating their time and energies across their expanded range of life responsibilities, unanticipated and largely unknown factors outside their immediate control continually impinged on their decision-making processes. These factors were both of an endogenous (changing educational demands of the program) and exogenous (changing professional and personal circumstances) nature. Participants had to abandon rational planning to optimise available time in order to meet the most pressing demands of their lives. The most pressing needs invariably emanated from their studies and work.

Under such circumstances, the potential for severe personal stress (i.e. social alienation), particularly marital breakdown, is significant. Yet while family responsibilities were often neglected, participants were acutely aware of the dangers of an excessive preoccupation with their study and professional lives. Participants would never allow study and work commitments to destroy their marriages, and a number of participants, as noted, indicated that if they had felt that they had entered the danger zone, then they would have either slowed their progress through the MBA down (i.e. taken a lower load) or withdrawn totally from the program. No participant was prepared to sacrifice their marriage to achieve their career ambitions. However, one could easily envisage a
situation where a miscalculation by a participant of the strain the MBA was placing on the family could easily end in marital breakdown.

By anybody's standards, studying the MBA by distance learning leads one to live an abnormal life style characterised by the exhilaration of learning, but also by the despair of lack of sleep and periodic bouts of debilitating stress and ill-health. MBA study, as a means of pursuing one's desired professional integration, inevitably placed pressures on professional and personal relationships. The motivation to wrestle with the ongoing demands and occasional crises emanating from all sides of life cannot be sustained indefinitely. Inter-semester and summer breaks were welcome respite from the hurly-burly of study/work/family life. These periods of relative rest were seen as important periods of recuperation by MBA participants. They were essential in allowing participants to rebuild their physical and psychological strength. Despite all the good intentions by participants to plan their studies around other commitments, the author is left with the overwhelming impression that the life of an MBA participant is characterised by struggle; the struggle to get through the program with family and work intact at the end of it. Participants succeed to the extent that they continually engage with the struggle - they never master the struggle and find comfortable solutions, but they also never succumb to it.

For many participants, the form of human interaction most under threat by the MBA experience was the relationship between themselves and their wives and families. Yet that form of human interaction under greatest threat was their greatest ally. Spouses played an important counselling role in supporting participants in their times of doubt when the struggle was getting the better of them. Spouses were sensitive to the side bets they and their husbands had invested in the MBA program and highlighted what would be lost if the program were abandoned. Spouses were able to adjust to the new study realities. This was not merely a process of participants exerting their influence to induce their spouses to toe the line. Spouses appeared to be more independently minded in assessing what was required of themselves and their husbands. Participants needed their families to pursue successfully their professional development ambitions. Family was not just another commitment to be juggled, but a positive force for success.

Finally, while participants in the author's study completed the MBA, and the MBA experience had made some positive contribution to participants' professional development, all continue to pursue their professional odysseys post-MBA. The pursuit of professional integration continues unabated. One feels that it a never-ending pursuit
which may sometime in the future be again punctuated by a significant learning event which leads to discontinuity and disruption in participants' lives.
PART IV:

THE HOLISTIC NATURE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE
Chapter 9

CHANGING CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF MANAGEMENT: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FROM THE MBA EXPERIENCE

THIS CHAPTER REVEALS THE influence of the MBA experience on participants' conceptions and practices of management. Moreover, the chapter explores how participants learnt from the MBA experience, with a particular focus on the interaction between theory and practice. Learning is seen as a process of personal or perspective transformation and related to the notions of professional odysseys (examined in Chapter 8) and professional empowerment. Participants are seen to be located at different stages of the empowerment process. Some participants are successfully negotiating the transitions from lower to higher levels of professional empowerment, while others' actions are seen to be constrained by their professional circumstances. Furthermore, the chapter examines cases of major professional disempowerment where organisational systems conspired to stop certain participants enacting their developing conceptions and practices of management. These cases show that acting on one's new professional understandings can be highly problematic, although the seeds of important learning experiences can still be found in these dramatic expressions of personal disempowerment.

EMPOWERMENT REVISITED

In Chapter 7, empowerment was defined and explored in the context of joint action taken by MBA participants to influence the future direction of the program. While the origins of this collective action lay in individuals' concerns over the future of the MBA, it was the collective energies and knowledge of the group, which were given expression at the final year residential school, which led to significant empowerment. The notion of empowerment explored in this chapter focuses on the individual's efforts to exert influence over his or her workplace milieu in order to create opportunities for professional fulfilment and growth. Empowerment can be seen as a process of proactive adaptation. As Kolb (1984) notes:
We are thus the learning species, and our survival depends on our ability to adapt not only in the reactive sense of fitting into the physical and social worlds, but in the proactive sense of creating and shaping those worlds. (p.1)

In Chapter 7 the focus was on group-based empowerment directed at changing the educational world within which participants operated. In this chapter the focus is on individuals' attempts to empower themselves, and in some cases other organisational participants, in order to change their professional worlds.

Various stages can be identified in participants' quest for work-related empowerment. These stages can be seen to coincide with and be located within the experiential or action learning cycle, viz: the development of an awareness of opportunities for professional growth; the development of personal theories of professional practice relevant to these opportunities; the seeking out of these opportunities; and the putting into practice of personal theories of professional practice in the context of these opportunities. This cycle represents a continuous process of professional development. Brookfield (1986, p.11) describes empowered adults as people who 'see themselves as proactive, initiating individuals engaged in a continuous re-creation of their personal relationships, work worlds, and social circumstances rather than as reactive individuals, buffeted by uncontrollable forces of circumstance'.

The challenge is to relate the MBA experience to participants' attempts to empower themselves in their work worlds. In Chapter 8, participants were described as pursuing their own professional odysseys. Thus empowerment can be seen both as a manifestation of the extent to which participants are successfully pursuing their professional odysseys as well as revealing the process by which participants negotiated their professional journeys. Kornbluh and Greene (1989) describe the stages of empowerment as follows:

What we have just discussed can be summarised in the format of stages of empowerment. Increased responsibility, either negotiated or offered as an invitation, leads as we have seen, to experience in new domains of action and speech. This, in turn, causes new work competencies to develop and eventually to change the way people view themselves. Workers learn that they are more capable than the organisation or their background had led them to believe. They learn that there is a great deal they can do well, and this process raises their level of confidence.

They live with this new confidence until they discover that their old images no longer fit their new capabilities. They have become more autonomous in their thoughts, actions and imagination. They increase contact with others and display a less obsequious attitude, more input into relationships, more playing with boundaries and opportunities. Their increased influence competencies lead to new skills being mastered - a leap in personal development, which in turn increases the scope of action and speech in the
enterprise. As workers expose themselves to new situations in this wider scope of activity, quickly learned skills are increasingly called for. New rhetorics, new vocabulary sets, new social norms, must be rapidly confronted and mastered. In turn, this leads to increased learning competency. (p.265)

Participants undertaking the MBA can be seen to be located across various stages of empowerment. Yet, this chapter reveals that various social constraints can exist which frustrate people's efforts to negotiate stages of the empowerment process. That is, social constraints can block the empowerment process and even disempower people. Moreover, the study reveals that some participants were uncertain about their willingness to negotiate the next stage of the empowerment process. Thus, an ambivalence can exist toward empowerment. What remains particularly problematic is the connections participants made between theory and practice as they negotiate various stages of the empowerment process.

PERSONAL THEORISING ON THE NATURE OF MANAGEMENT WORK: A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

Learning as personal transformation

Akin (1987), based on in-depth interviews with 60 managers, attempted, among other things, to identify how learning is known. He concluded that: 'Learning is experienced as a personal transformation. A person does not gather learnings but rather becomes a new person with those learnings as a part of his or her new self. To learn is not to have; it is to be' (Akin 1987, p.38). Mezirow (1990) also explores the notion of transformative learning. Transformative learning is 'The process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights' (Mezirow & Associates 1990, p.xvi). Mezirow's definition of perspective transformation embodies the need to critique and reformulate existing meaning perspectives, and act upon these new understandings. Akin's definition of personal transformation is more general. It does not specify the need either to fundamentally reformulate existing perspectives or act immediately on new understandings, although the acting out of new understandings over time is a key finding of Akin's research on how effective managers learn. MBA participants did experience significant personal transformation during their studies. As shall be revealed, this personal transformation was in part influenced by MBA study, along with their professional experience. Such personal transformation represents both a broadening and deepening of participants' conceptions and practices of management. It is a 'building-on-existing foundations' process, rather than a major demolition and rebuilding process.
This is not to suggest that some participants did not modify some of their existing views about management in the light of the MBA experience. However, this review did not represent the sort of critical reformulation of perspectives suggested by Mezirow's definition of transformative learning. As will be argued, MBA participants adopted a 'reformist' approach to their conceptions and practices, an approach which fundamentally built on their existing meaning perspectives. Later in the chapter it will be seen that participants would have resisted any attempts to redefine radically their views of management. Moreover, the notion that learning must embrace action on new understandings must be treated critically in the light of the social constraints to action which exist in organisations. It is perhaps too harsh to judge learning as having not occurred, as Mezirow appears to suggest, in the absence of more informed action. At the very least, the opportunity to act on new understandings should be treated as highly problematic.

The notion of learning as personal transformation is intertwined with the notions of empowerment and the participants' desire for professional integration. As participants pursue their professional odysseys and negotiate the various stages of empowerment their perspectives on professional practice are transformed and acted out in their changing professional circumstances. This perspective transformation is accompanied by the development of a stronger set of personal commitments to and theories about professional practice. As was indicated in Chapter 2, many participants were able to articulate some personal theory on the nature of management on entering the MBA program. The MBA did not create some new meaningful theory of management for participants. The MBA, along with their work experience, acted upon existing conceptions of management and made some contribution to transforming conceptions and practices. This section attempts to analyse the changed conceptions of management held by participants on completing the MBA and the sources of these changed conceptions. The styles of learning engendered by the MBA experience are identified as the means by which conceptions were articulated, developed and changed. The connections between conceptions of management, individual self-confidence and job performance and career opportunities are then examined. The overall empowering influence the MBA had on participants is explored in the following section.

**Broadening management perspectives: developing a strategic view on the organisation**

Without doubt the greatest impact that the MBA program had on participants' conceptions of management was the development of a strategic perspective on their organisations. The development of this strategic perspective represented new, revelatory learning for
most participants the effect of which was two-fold: it allowed participants to develop an understanding of the factors external to their sphere of influence which were impacting on their activities and the activities of other organisational areas (i.e. the insider-looking-out perspective); and it allowed them to respond to these understandings to improve their professional practices within their sphere of influence (i.e. the outsider-looking-in perspective). The broadening of most participants' horizons represented a dramatic growth in their management conceptions and practices. Viljoen et al. (1990a) discovered that few participants, on entering the Deakin MBA program, conceptualised the nature of management work as having a strong strategic perspective. The emergence of this strategic perspective is vividly described in the following quotations taken from interviews conducted at the end of the final year of the program:

Management has a more significant strategic factor than I regarded earlier. I hadn't realised the extent to which the middle to long term plan and focus for an organisation could play such a significant part in the performance of the organisation and the success of it. Clearly, things like setting goals, forming a mission statement, working out the core business and what the right environments are...I think I never really considered it. It's obvious and straightforward when you think about it, but I didn't think about it. I probably thought more about, yes, you've got to maintain the budget, keep profit lines right, you've got to finance the organisation, keep staff motivated and hire them and give them goals and set tasks for them. I probably thought more about the financial-type tasks and the downward focus rather than missions and goals, external environment. This is an area I've become more cognisant about and concerned with (Frank Dickson).

In the past I saw my little part of the organisation and worked exclusively with that in terms of what I'm doing. Now I tend to step outside the organisation and look at where the organisation as a whole is going. I relate that much more directly to my direct management role (Craig Farrell).

I can't remember very well what I thought [at the beginning of the MBA program in regard to my conceptions of management], but I probably thought that management's role was to direct, to discipline and coerce. I really don't see it like that at all now. Quite different. I now see management...management's role is to look at the future and see how the company will fit that future and where the company will fit into that future and where the company ought to be going and not necessarily how it ought to get there, but plan for achieving that and ensure that the employees within the company have the resources to get there. There is a need to look at the future and plan a strategy, organise the company in a way which is most suitable for implementing that strategy, and that includes providing resources, and then monitor it and make the adjustments. I see the manager's role as not to lead, but not from the front, but from behind...must give people the view that they did it, rather than I [the manager] did it. Need to continually push people to extend their horizons in the direction we currently want them to go, need to ensure quality of life as well as meeting objectives.

...The really effective managers I see are able to put together all the strands of the web to make it do something. There are lots of people who can do little bits, but the people who are really good are the ones who can grab hold of everything, and put together
something which is a whole. There aren’t many around who can do that (Walter Abbott).

Management, before I started the program, was a matter of trying to get people to do an appropriate job, get things done on time and receive the required output. This was more my initial management position at the time. As the course has gone, I’ve become more confident in my position. As my professional development has continued in and outside the MBA program, I now see management as more of a strategic input into the organisation where, sure, you’ve still got to get people to do the job and achieve an output for the organisation. I suppose I think more long-term strategically than I did beforehand. So that is probably the major change in my management outlook. A more external focus, than internal focus.

[Could the strategic perspective have developed in the absence of the MBA in the process of being more senior in the job and gaining more experience?] There is a reasonable chance it would have because I recognised I needed to do it and know it and I would have gone out and found it out another way. If you are asking how much these skills would have developed if I had not gone out and taking some personal training course somewhere to develop it and just relied on experience within the organisation, then it probably would have only developed 20-30% of the degree that I now have it. That’s where the MBA has helped and strengthened it and developed it to a far greater extent than I possibly could have achieved myself just working within the organisation and gaining experience (Malcolm Ingram).

Many participants were able to move beyond the mere description of the importance of the strategic perspective and the implications of adopting this perspective for their own sphere of influence. They were able to analyse the strategic skills required in their own industries, organisations and organisational subunits. In fact, they were able to project themselves into general management positions within their own organisations and articulate how they would apply strategic planning skills. The personalised nature of this process indicates that at least some participants were actively considering how they would conduct themselves as senior managers if they were given the opportunity to fulfil such a role. Their assessments also indicated a sensitivity to the unique features of their industries and organisations, i.e. whether their organisations were operating in a growing or declining market and what particular strategies were appropriate to these different situations. This represents what Akin has termed ‘anticipatory learning’. Here, learners’ conceptualisation of the task precedes action; the learning is complete when conceptualisation is put to the test through action and the results of actions taken are compared with the theoretical formulation of the task. The MBA’s influence in helping participants to project themselves into a future senior management world through the development of the strategic perspective highlights a major purpose of the educative process which has been enunciated by Tofler (1974, pp. 12-13): ‘Put simply, a significant part of education must be seen as the process by which we enlarge, enrich, and improve the individual’s image of the future’. This image of the future highlighted the importance of strategic leadership skills. As will be seen in the next section,
participants, on entering the MBA, appreciated the importance of leadership skills within their own spheres of influence. Thus they appreciated the importance of leading their subordinates effectively. However, few had considered the importance of demonstrating leadership skills within a broader organisational context.

Moreover, participants' strategic assessments were related to their own area of responsibility. The discovery of the strategic perspective allowed them to see their own efforts and those of the people for whom they were responsible in a larger context. This larger context encompassed the work of other specialised areas and the organisation as an overall entity. This discovery of the broader context within which their efforts were located helped participants to manage their spheres of influence more effectively. In the case of Matthew Hilliard, the personalised nature of the strategic perspective allowed him to assess better his future career prospects within the organisation. He believed that his organisation occupied the middle ground in its industry. The organisation had to make a strategic choice: either grow or shrink and become a 'niche market provider'. Matthew saw no future for himself within the organisation if it found itself shrinking as 'the top level will stay there and the shrinkage will go at the bottom...thus the company will undertake a harvesting policy, I'll be harvested out!' (comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

For the two participants who already occupied senior management positions, exposure to the strategic perspective reinforced the work they were already doing in this capacity. For them, the learning did not represent the creation of a new perspective so much as a validation of the conceptions and practices they already believed they needed to do their jobs well. Akin (1987, p.42) describes validational learning in terms of the learner validating 'what he or she is already reliably and perhaps competently doing'. The MBA, in this instance, provided an 'authoritative' source of information which 'reinforces a person's belief that what he or she has been doing all along is right' (Akin 1987, p.42). Akin (1987) argues that the recognition of already valid practices is not mere self-congratulation, but the essence of an important learning experience for these learners: 'Through this experience, the transformation that constitutes learning is completed' (Akin 1987, p.42).

The nature of the strategic dimension of perspective transformation revealed among MBA participants is supported by research reported by Marsick and Watkins (1990). They provide a case study of a management development program in Sweden based on action learning. One of the key generic skills which emerged from the action learning experience was the ability to think strategically which 'involved visioning and goal-
setting, tapping into the ideas of others, seeing the company as a system of interacting parts in which the decisions made by one affected many others, understanding factors that affect a company's plans and strategies, strategic planning for the future, and using one's time more strategically' (Marsick & Watkins 1990, p.71). The essence of MBA participants' perspective transformation in this area was the ability to adopt a balanced, comprehensive, integrative, holistic and future-oriented view of their organisations. This more sophisticated view of organisational life made a positive contribution toward their own professional performance and sensitised some to their future career prospects within the organisation. Akin (1987), in elaborating on personal transformation in the context of management learning, argues:

The managers whom I interviewed knew that they had learned - that they had been transformed - because they experienced a different world from the one they had experienced before the learning occurred. They found their reality reshaped, that they were literally living in a new world. (p.38)

The development of the strategic perspective in many of the participants also meant they saw themselves as living in a different, new and larger management world.

Deepening management perspectives: the importance of leadership, teamwork and the development of subordinates

Viljoen et al. (1990a) found that participants on entering Deakin University's MBA rated highly those competencies relating to developing and managing subordinates, teamwork and leadership, communication and human skills. It was concluded that participants entering the MBA were not 'managerially naive', although some participants were able to articulate a fuller understanding and appreciation of these people-related competencies than others. The essence of management was seen to be working with and through people, therefore, it is unsurprising that the MBA and participants' continuing work experience did not create new perspectives on this key aspect of management. Exposure to the MBA represented validational learning for many participants. This validational learning was typified in the views expressed by David Richards. At the end of the first year of the program he was to comment: '...nothing's changed [in response to the MBA]. If anything its all got stronger - especially about people; involvement, leadership, motivation'. At the end of the MBA, these same sentiments were repeated:

...Everything I've seen come out of the MBA program has done nothing but reinforce that ideal [being a participative manager], the value of a Total Quality Management (TQM) program, I don't really like to call it a TQM program, I prefer to call it a people skill once again. It's really just a mindset when you've got people on side, you can do goddamn near anything. ...[The MBA] strengthened those views, they were somewhat radical seven years ago [when David first developed them] and as I've progressed
through the program I've seen the value of that and how to do it and achieve that much better...I have not changed my attitudes radically.

The influence that the MBA had on shaping participants' attitudes and practices toward managing people remains problematic. Clearly, their work experience made some contribution either to validating participants' conceptions or deepening their conceptions of people-related issues. What is also significant is the speed of the process which constituted either the validation or deepening of perspectives on issues surrounding the management of people. Encounters with different work environments requiring different management styles, coupled with ongoing experience, certainly made some participants aware of the need to think more deeply about appropriate management styles. MBA learning may not have shaped the nature of these deepening appreciations, but some participants indicated that the MBA had accelerated the process of reflection and action relating to management style: 'I'm sure I would have to a certain extent gone down that path [changing management style in response to different organisational contexts], but what would have happened is I would have gone down that path a lot slower' (Craig Farrell, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Despite the impossibility of precisely ascribing changed professional action to the different sources of learning, what is interesting is the conceptions people held on the importance and nature of people-related skills on leaving the MBA program. Generally, participants expressed a commitment to the importance of people in the success of the organisation and a concern that people are sometimes misused and mistreated in organisational life. Thus it was argued that people's motivations and satisfactions in and around work needed to be understood and responded to in the management process. Flowing from the value attributed to people as a key organisational resource, was a commitment to participative styles of management (although this term was contested by one participant - see discussion on the theory-practice relationship below). A commitment to participation was not seen as a process of handing over decision-making power to subordinates. Nor was a commitment to a participative style of management necessarily seen to exclude the need, on some occasions, to make autocratic decisions. In this respect, there was appreciation of the need to embrace a contingency-based view of management where different styles of management need to be adopted for different people and different circumstances. This contingency-view of management is illustrated in the following comment made by Ken Johns at the end of the program: '...the hardest thing to learn is when to accept somebody else's opinion over your own. Knowing who to trust in the organisation with respect to allowing them to make decisions that your not totally comfortable with yourself. Being able to pick winners is what it amounts to. Conversely, knowing when to tighten up on people as well.'
A commitment to participatory management, however, was seen as the most preferable style in dealing with people in the organisation. Specifically, it was defined as a process which allowed, indeed, encouraged, subordinates to contribute to the decision-making process. Such an approach was seen as crucial in obtaining subordinate commitment to particular lines of action. Allied to this commitment to participative styles of management, was a belief expressed by some participants on the need to empower those people under their care and responsibility (one MBA participant's attempts to empower his colleagues is detailed below). The devolution of responsibility to people occupying 'front line' positions in the organisation was perceived by participants as being another sign of management's commitment to the value of the human dimension of organisations. It represents not merely a commitment to consult, but a more fundamental commitment to open up the decision-making process to those at the lowest levels of the organisation in order to allow them to construct more fully, own and implement lines of action. Moves toward the empowerment of others was seen to require a proactive management style; a finding which is returned to later in this chapter.

Embedded in the commitments to participation and devolution of responsibility was a changed view expressed by some participants on the nature of leadership. Formerly equated, by some participants, with directing, telling and coercing (something of the flavour of this thinking on leadership can be detected in some of the quotations above relating to participants' new-found strategic perspectives), leadership was now perceived more in terms of creating a supportive, non-threatening, trusting environment within which people could make their own decisions, take their own actions and avoid chastisement for making mistakes.

I guess one area which is fairly critical is to understand the people who are working with you and for you. The one thing I have noticed is that everyone has to be handled differently. Some project managers you've got to treat very hard, say, 'look I want it done and I want it done today', other people you can say, 'look work it out and come back with a solution'. I think a lot of people you are treating differently so that they would come up to what you would do in the same situation. I always think that it is a slight flaw if you try and encourage them to do what you would do, this may not always be appropriate. Sometimes you've got to let them go ahead and do what they want to do. Sometimes you sit back and say, 'I never thought that would happen'. That's the smart, clever way of handling it. Every so often you've got to pull yourself back and say, 'Alright just do it the way you want to do it' and will have a look at the solution...I find that quite often you tend to treat the people or you tend to put deadlines or solutions on the problems that you yourself would make or come up with and you're not interested in letting them come up with their own answers. That's the thing I've found and every now and then I make that mistake (Tim Greaves, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).
Embodied in Tim Greaves's thoughts is both a contingency view of management and a commitment to the manager as teacher or, as Evered and Selman argue of the management context, a 'coach' who 'is someone who has an ongoing, committed partnership with a player/performer and who empowers that person, or team, to exceed prior levels of play/performance' (Evered & Selman 1989, p. 21). Their notion of the manager as coach has much in common with progressive adult education principles (i.e. desire to learn, openness to constructive criticism, mutual respect, collaboration for improvement, equality through a learning partnership, the goal of empowerment) which is not surprising given that the management of people can be conceived as another forum for adult education. Teachers in the field of management are required to help managers-as-learners, who are also teachers in their own professional environments, to learn to be better professionals. Clearly, agents in the educative process can experience the roles of both teacher and learner in their professional and educational worlds.

Learning the language of management and management-related fields

The value of learning, in broad terms, the knowledge bases, or languages, which underlie the professional practices of specialists (accountants, lawyers, economists, computer scientists) located both inside and outside the organisational environment with whom managers must interact, coupled with a learning of the language of management itself, helped participants to develop and articulate their conceptions of management. The understanding of the knowledge bases of specialist professional groups directly helped participants to do their jobs, as managers, better. That is, it helped them to interact more effectively with the specialist professional people whose advice provided them with the all-important starting point for informed decision making. An acquisition of the languages impinging on or embodying the nature of management work allowed participants to demystify the roles of others in the organisation and also their own role or prospective role as managers. This process of professional role demystification tended to engender self-confidence; a feeling that that no aspect of management lay hidden and closed from understanding and potential mastery:

The general knowledge area of the MBA was very important. Not seeing any mystery in other people's roles, I interact with many. So being able to talk to a lawyer or academic or whoever else and not being totally mystified by the technical aspects of their role. Being able to talk to them, I wouldn't say on a one-to-one basis, at least being able to direct their work the way I want it. Feeling a little bit more in control of the things I do (Ken Johns, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

The languages made a substantial contribution towards the development of the strategic perspective. Knowing the constituent roles and perspectives of key groups in the
organisation allowed participants to conceptualise the totality of organisational life which in turn assisted them in locating their contribution in the greater scheme of things. Management was, as a consequence, better appreciated as an inter-disciplinary field of practice.

The connections between conceptions of management, individual self-confidence and job performance and career opportunities

Participants' perspective transformations in the areas of strategic planning and people management, coupled with a growing understanding of the language of management and professional specialisations which interact with the role of manager, appeared to create self-confidence within the participant which in turn fostered better professional practice and created a wider range of career options to be pursued. Akin (1987) included self-confidence as one of the six categories of managerial competence identified by effective managers. He defines self-confidence as 'the learned attitude toward oneself as a competent person. Self-confidence also refers to seeing oneself as a skilled learner who knows how to gain new knowledge and competencies' (Akin 1987, p.39). Participants developed a keener appreciation of the work of managers in general, and general managers in particular. Some participants argued that they had a quite naive and simplistic view of the importance of management before undertaking the MBA program. The MBA had helped them appreciate the importance of managing people and the complexities of this task. It was this sense of awareness of the nature of managerial work and a belief that they had been exposed to the relevant bodies of knowledge required by managers which appeared to be the source of participants' growing self-confidence. This knowledge made participants feel that they were a little more in control of their jobs and career development; a feeling which led participants to feel more confident about their management performance and potential. In relation to the issue of management potential, Anthony Collins, a low integrator, was to make the following comment at the end of the program:

[The MBA program increased my] awareness of myself and what I want to do. I now have substantially more ambition and more confidence to do what I want to do. To me, that's the major contribution of the MBA. Having been through it and having known, having done it, makes me feel, certainly I'm more ambitious than I would have been when I started...more aware of what's going on around me, more aware of my surroundings.

No participant asserted that the MBA program by itself could provide a guaranteed successful career in management. Participants believed, however, that they had given themselves every opportunity either to be a successful manager or prepare themselves for
a successful career in management. Their ultimate success now largely depended on their own performance in the workplace and continuing on-the-job learning.

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF THE THEORY-PRACTICE RELATIONSHIP

The theory-practice problematic

The most problematic aspect of the MBA experience was the processes which participants used to select, assimilate and use the program's learning materials. In referring to the MBA's body of knowledge/theory it needs to be emphasised that the program presented to participants a conglomeration of different theories, frameworks and perspectives as aids for helping participants better understand and act upon their management worlds. Furthermore, the MBA does not attempt to undertake or promote a radical critique of the nature of management practice. The presentation of 'mainstream' management theorising was directed at stimulating participants to think critically about their own management thinking and behaviour in order to reform rather than radically redefine their existing management conceptions and practices. What remained problematic was the way in which participants attempted to connect 'external' theory presented in the MBA to their existing mental frameworks on management. In a sense, participants were required to assimilate, synthesise and at times reconcile their own pre-existing theories of management with external theorising on the professional practice of management.

Brookfield (1986, p.16) notes that, 'Adults do not acquire and internalise ideas, skills, knowledge, and insights in a context-free vacuum. They interpret these through the mediatory mechanisms they have developed, assign meaning to them, codify them according to categories they have evolved, and test them out in real settings'. Evidence has already been presented which supports this process of internalisation and the transformation of external learning stimuli into a meaningful set of personal commitments to or theories about management. It is the process of internalisation and transformation which requires further investigation.

Usher (1985) has expressed a note of caution on the extent to which adults achieve some balance and harmony between internal and external theorising. For Usher, external/scientifically valid theory tends to dominate and replace the individual's own personally valid experiences and explanatory frameworks.

In my experience, adult students seem only too ready to pursue the 'scientific' rather than personal in the sense that they are often reluctant to accept that their experience has any meaning from which they can learn. ...the term 'pathologies' refers to the tension between the personal validity of experience and the scientific validity of 'accepted'
knowledge. It points to the distorting effects of pursuing one to the exclusion of the other. The pursuit of scientific validity leads to the 'objectification' where learning is seen as the mastery of 'objective' knowledge without the need for internalisation and the ascription of personal meaning. In the opposite case of 'subjectification' the pursuit of personal validity leads to a situation where learning is seen to only have personal meaning and the need for reference to 'truth' rejected. Each pathology is therefore, both philosophically and practically, a blind alley' (Usher 1985, p.61 & pp.71-2).

The 'objectification' pathology to which Usher refers requires critical examination in the context of the MBA experience.

While many participants identified, to various degrees, forms of personal transformation, and were prepared to attribute at least part of the source of their transformed perspectives to their MBA studies, most found it difficult to articulate the connections between MBA learning, their changed conceptions of management and their improved professional practices. For many participants there was a strong sense of having benefited from the MBA, but coupled with this was an inability to articulate the sources and processes which led to these benefits which took the form of more enlightened professional thinking and action. When prompted to reflect on these connections between theory and practice in the final round of interviews, many participants saw the interactions as being highly complex to the point of being in some sense indefinable and out of the reach of their consciousness: 'I don't really go back to any particular person's theory or frameworks...[there is] some sort of holistic effect that goes quite deeply in the way you conduct your work, but it doesn't require having stored up here [points to head] all of the details, theories' (Ken Johns, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

The reality of this intense feeling of value attributed to the MBA was not, however, undermined by some participants inability to plot the connections between theory and practice. It must be recognised that for the low integrators and, indeed, for some partial integrators the perspective transformation had not been enacted through changed management practices. It can be hypothesised that future opportunities for enacting changed professional conceptions may allow them to appreciate better the place of their formal learning in shaping their transformed perspectives.

Some participants, however, were able to reflect critically on the ways in which they appropriated the body of knowledge embodied in the MBA experience. Four key features of the process of appropriation were identified, viz: pre-existing conceptions and practices provided the evaluative benchmark for processing MBA knowledge; sources of external validation were used to assess the usefulness of knowledge before it was internalised; MBA knowledge was judged to be legitimate when and only when it had been
internalised; new professional stimuli tended to draw MBA-derived knowledge from the subconscious in order to help make sense of such problems and challenges.

**Pre-existing management conceptions and practices as the evaluative benchmark**

MBA theory was neither accepted uncritically by participants nor was it necessarily used to solve real-life problems in its original form. The quotations of the two integrators - Colin Brice and William Grant - presented in Chapter 8 on the value of MBA learning testify to these observations. Both referred to the need to adopt a critical stance toward MBA knowledge and to test its validity against existing professional experiences or what Brookfield (1986, p.16) refers to as their 'mediatory mechanisms'. Inevitably, these mediatory mechanisms adapted MBA knowledge to fit the professional needs of the participants. Participants were not naive enough to believe that the MBA curriculum could be passively consumed and applied in an unaltered state to the solution of practical problems, i.e. learning was not seen as a process of regurgitation. In rejection of such a naive and simplistic view of learning, William Grant was to state:

I don't want all the answers, I want to know what the issues are. ...All the [MBA] can ever do is prioritise issues for me and identify them. Because once I've got that I can take it from there. ...But if I ain't got that, I'm stuck (comment made at end of the third year).

This critical stance appears to indicate a very sophisticated approach to learning based on highly developed mediatory mechanisms.

**External validation of the usefulness of MBA learning**

Participants' mediatory mechanisms or internal validation procedures were not the only means for determining the usefulness of MBA learning. Participants also used other key actors in their organisations to test the validity of MBA knowledge. Members of the study group were also identified as being a useful source of external validation of MBA knowledge. William Grant refers to the processes of both internal and external validation in the following quotation:

[In relation to the internalisation and use of knowledge] I've had enough experience in enough areas to be able to balance a number of the things off my own experience and say, 'yeah, that sounds right, no it doesn't sound right'. If I can accept it immediately I'll use it fairly directly, but I'll also bounce it off other people because other people have different backgrounds and I guess that's one process. ...I would regard it as foolish if I relied entirely on internal validation, my sense of self-esteem apparently isn't that great. Perhaps I've got sufficient trust in my intuition, experience to say that there are some things I'm happy to take because it fits in, it matches what my past experience is, but my tendency in general is to if possible bounce it off other people particularly at work because...it validates it (comment made at end of second year).
The internalisation and use of MBA learning

Certainly for Colin and William, and other participants with substantial management experience, the internalisation of learning was achieved after the processes of internal and external validation had been completed. The final stage of learning relates to the retrieval and use of that modified and adapted knowledge, that is, the acting out of that knowledge in real-life. William Grant, in the formative stages of the MBA, attempted to explain this process of retrieval and use by invoking the metaphors of the mind as a 'filing cabinet' and 'computer technical system'. He saw his knowledge as being structured and compartmentalised. In solving simple management problems it was merely a matter of locating, opening and retrieving the appropriate information from the correct file.

However, William acknowledged that many management problems are complex. This complexity required William to move from one file to another in his metaphorical filing cabinet to obtain the knowledge required to address such problems in informed ways. This movement between 'files' was described in terms of a computer systems metaphor. The metaphor, however, was seen by William to be inadequate in fully explaining the need for making cross-connections between the 'files' as the mind is infinitely more capable of making the cross-connections than the most advanced computer system. The process of moving between 'files' required forms of lateral thinking and possibly even chance associations.

By the end of the program, William recognised the importance of being able to move fluently between the various 'files' in the 'filing cabinet' of his mind. The notion of 'fluency' was seen to require the ability to synthesise pieces of information from different files into a whole solution to a problem. This notion of fluency was applied to the learning which should take place within an organisation. William saw the objective of total quality management (TQM) as something which should pervade the activities of the whole organisation. TQM was defined as a situation, 'Where each individual member of the organisation has a personal responsibility to the quality of the organisation and its operation...and that means in terms of specifying what customers need' (comment made at end of final year of program). Specialised professional people and workers needed to direct their efforts and energies toward the achievement of this fundamental objective. This focus on the organisation's generic purpose and objective demanded a fluency by all employees in understanding how their contribution related to the broader organisational picture. William's final metaphorical analysis, with its emphasis on the integrative and holistic characteristics of higher order individual and organisational learning, transcended the more mechanistic 'filing cabinet view' of learning he had articulated earlier in the MBA. It represented a profound insight into the nature of learning.
For the integrators and partial integrators, with significant management experience and opportunities for the retrieval and use of MBA learning, albeit as part of existing frames of reference, it can be hypothesised that the mediatory mechanisms would be stronger and the sensitivity to the need for external validation more acute compared with the low integrators where more MBA knowledge would remain provisional and disconnected from emerging conceptions of management.

'Objectification' versus 'subjectification': balance achieved through a reformist approach to the selection and use of MBA knowledge

While the interaction between theory and practice was not, in the author's view, fully revealed and therefore remains to some extent problematic, it can be concluded that the pathology of 'objectification' was not evident in the MBA experience. The key reference point for evaluating MBA learning was either the participants' existing management conceptions and practices, which were in turn a product of previous experience and forms of learning, or participants' existing stock of knowledge bearing on the management role. Participants would not allow personal theory to be replaced by or subjugated to external theory presented in the MBA program. In fact, Usher's second pathology - 'subjectification' - is more likely to occur in adult professional learning. It does appear that professional learners are unwilling to allow their frames of reference to be transformed radically through a formal educational experience. The desire seems to be more one of improving already well-established frames of reference, rather than countenancing a major overhaul of professional thinking and acting. This essentially 'reformist' approach to growing and developing as a professional was articulated by the following two MBA participants at the end of the final year of the program:

It's not conscious [selecting knowledge which is compatible with my own conceptions of management], but I'm sure I have. In thinking about the MBA units there has usually been two or three things which strike you as being right to the point. That's pretty close to my philosophy, that make sense to me. ...The course also tends to ask you to reassess what your conceptions should be from time to time. Certainly, there have been bits and pieces where I've been forced to question what my thoughts are perhaps I've come to a different conclusion as a result. ...[I would resist a radical transformation of my management conceptions], but I would not deny, if somebody said, 'Here's another factor you should consider', I'm not going to deny that, I'll consider that and mould that into my perceptions. And certainly some ideas I've got changed during participation in the course. Basically, because somebody has questioned what I thought was a reasonable way that I've felt that their closer to the mark. ...It's a reforming process, bit by bit. You don't sort of pull a block out and put a new block in. You chip away at the old block and build it up (Craig Farrell, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

It is quite possible that I only selected that external theory which is relevant to my existing frames of reference. If you walk down the street and see something which is fairly impossible to believe, you may not see it as clearly as something which you
totally support. We all filter what we see, and what we do, and what we hear with our own personalities. You hope to be as receptive as possible and as critical as possible, but it may well be that a lot of it is in the reception, rather than the processing it receives after you receive the information. ...You're particular point of view would tend to filter out things which would violently clash with that point of view or at least put them in the basket which says, 'this thing violently clashes with my point of view' which automatically taints them with 'I won't put as much relevance on these things as I will on things which are ambivalent or supportive of my point of view'.

We all like to think we are not [set in our ways], I like to think that I'm not, but it's inevitable that we are, I believe (Keith Jamieson, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Both participants recognised the difficulties of countenancing some radical transformation in their professional thinking and practices, while still maintaining that they attempted to be as receptive as their professional persona would allow them to be to the influences of externally located alternative viewpoints. This resistance to fundamental perspective transformation seems to be consistent with research reported on other professional development programs taught at a distance which have explicitly embraced a critical pedagogy (Evans 1987; Harris 1987). In these cases, students have tended either to avoid, resist or toe the 'party line' in respect of such critical pedagogies.

The selection and assimilation of compatible knowledge is, however, a more complex process than the mere filtering out of viewpoints which clash with existing frames of reference. Thus it is not necessarily a straightforward process where 'subjectification' prevails. Keith Jamieson's engagement with the body of knowledge on styles of management is a good example of the complex effects that external viewpoints can have on personal theorising. Keith challenged, indeed, rejected a body of knowledge presented on styles of management in the MBA program. Specifically, he rejected what he perceived to be several claims made in the program that different styles of management exist (i.e. participative and autocratic) and the pejorative view expressed that, 'the participative management style is a correct one and the autocratic style isn't necessarily as correct...and culture with participative management was "strong" and autocratic management "weak"'. While the theory's actual meaning may not necessarily be the way in which he presented it, Keith believed that this was the way that many participants were interpreting the body of knowledge on styles of management (his view was supported by comments made by some other MBA participants who tended to describe negatively the autocratic style of management). Keith's own views on management style rejected the notion of participative decision making:

I don't believe consultative or participative management techniques exist - full stop. If you are an effective manager, you are autocratic - you make the decision. The decision
may be to allow other people to perceive that they are participating, but in reality, when it gets down to it, if you consistently allow the group to make decisions that you wouldn't have made yourself, then you have ceased to be the manager. ...The manager always makes the end decision, he or she chooses the mechanism by which they make it, but it is them who make it, or they are no longer managing - it is a committee whose managing and then the manager has ceased to function in the role of manager.

...A good manager would have made the decision on the basis of all relevant information [people's acceptance and support for decision]. The best decision to make is the one the people believe is right and I'm going to make it on that basis. So the manager has made a totally autocratic decision based on some evidence or reason put from a whole group of people who participated in gathering information, not who participated in making the decision. Can you see the distinction I'm making there, or trying to make? (Keith Jamieson, comment made at the end of the final year of the program)

At first blush, this appears to be a case of a practitioner rejecting external theory in preference for his own pre-conceived views on the nature of management style. However, such an interpretation under-estimates the degree to which Keith had reflected critically on this issue in the context of his own managerial experiences over a long period of time. A clear distinction can be made here between an uncritical rejection of external theory on the one hand, and the critical engagement with such theory on the other, even if such critical engagement leads to a rejection or modification of the external theory. This critical engagement helped Keith to be able to articulate his own personal theory of management style:

The manager should use every possible means at his or her disposal to come up with the overall best decision. If one of those means is getting everybody in the department to vote on a given thing then do that. If one of them is just making a decision on the basis of a recommendation from one person or some independent body then do that. But use every means available in every instance to come up with the best decision. And the person responsible for coming up with the best decision is wholly and solely the person appointed to make that decision - the manager (Keith Jamieson, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Keith Jamieson saw the value of the theory's emphasis on the contingency-based approach to management. He could appreciate the need for management flexibility in different situations. Keith appeared to be rejecting the construction of two generically different management styles, and the inference that one was superior to the other and a manager would tend to be characterised as using one style compared with the other. He saw a manager as being able to have a management style which could gather information for decision making in different ways in different organisational environments. Keith was able, at least to his own satisfaction, to modify and refashion external theory to strengthen his own view on management decision making. Moreover, he was able to reflect critically on the nature of this learning process:
[The external theory] has opened the door a bit more, I can see the application more clearly, I can see the range of practices necessary in management. I can see that other people have thought about them, and they group them in that way. It gives you a bigger picture. In this particular area, a bigger picture is probably a better picture. The more options that you can see are available, the more approaches you can use, the better you can be at the job, I hope (Keith Jamieson, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

PARTICIPANT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEARNING

Awareness of opportunities for professional growth

Some of the participants, who were classified as low integrators in Chapter 8, were able to achieve, but not move past this first stage of personal empowerment. These participants were still essentially located within the world of technical and project management work. It appeared that they were biding their time until the completion of the MBA before actively pursuing the transition from the world of technical work to the world of management work. Participants in this category had developed an awareness of their management potential and the possibilities of achieving this potential either in their current organisations or other organisational environments. This growing awareness of internal potential and external opportunity was, in part, ascribed to their MBA learning. However, they perceived themselves as being unable to construct proactively a management role in their organisations. They believed that they could merely make their organisations aware that they had something to contribute in this area. It was the organisation which had to recognise their potential and provide the opportunities to allow them to use their newly developed management competencies.

The only thing I can be sure of is that I've made people aware of what I'm doing [studying the MBA because of an interest in management]. I've tried to inform them of what the content is. Hopefully that might help them better work out a career path for myself. That's as forcefully as I can do.

...(Can you make a contribution to the company's strategic development?) No, I don't think so. ...That's their problem. They know what I know. That's not to say I'm an expert. The way I look at the MBA, I couldn't call myself general management material tomorrow. That would be ridiculous. I don't have the experience to do it. I believe the knowledge component of it is probably overlooked. I think I've accepted it now. I think I'm not frustrated with people who say, 'gee, I'm really good at it', I'm not really good at it. I could just be able to spark off some ideas. [Capitalising on my MBA knowledge] is really in their court. Every semester when I get a result I use every vehicle for letting them know what's happening, I'll say at the end of this semester when I get my results, I'll be making some comment to the point that I look forward to a more positive contribution, or words to that effect. But really it's not my decision to make. There are structures within the organisation which are already in place, where there is a strategic planning committee. I know enough of the hidden structure of the organisation to know where I could fit in if I were given the opportunity. I'm not
frustrated any more, my frustration might grow if I stay here too long. ...I know the
direction I want to take so that has probably taken away the frustration. The question is
whether I can achieve it (Matthew Hilliard, comment made at the end of the final year of
the program).

I feel frustrated sometimes because I know I can do more than I’m doing. It’s difficult
to break out of being a technical person, people expect you to do technical things all the
time. It seems to be an area which is hard to get out of. ...I think there are some barriers
in this industry anyway, if you’re seen to be a specialist in any particular area then you
tend to get compartmentalised in that speciality. Difficult to break out of it...in a
technical area you are expected to be good technically, but not expected to do anything
other than that. Difficult to escape. I don’t think it’s just a question of within the
company, I think it’s a question of the expectation of the industry which makes it
difficult to break out of...it’s the engineering or construction industry which tends to
follow those lines (Anthony Collins, comment made at the end of the final year of the
program).

The dilemma confronted by Anthony Collins was seen as a subtle form of personal
disempowerment. To the extent that he demonstrated continuing high performance as a
technical expert within the organisation (and even the industry), the harder it is for him to
break the mould of technical expert as perceived by significant others in the organisation.
This difficulty of breaking past expectations was certainly impeding Anthony’s attempts
to make the transition to the world of management work. On completing the MBA,
participants at this first stage of empowerment had committed themselves to begin the
transition within a certain time frame. If they could not achieve their management career
aspirations within a certain time, they had certainly committed themselves to move outside
their current organisational contexts in search of opportunities to translate their
management awareness into reality. The difficulty of moving from the stage of
awareness to contexts which would allow these participants to enact their embryonic
theories of management should not be underestimated. These participants’ will, or what
Mezirow (1990, p.355) calls ‘the conative dimension of transformative learning’, to
negotiate the transition was still to be tested fully. In fact, some participants who had
already negotiated key career transitions specifically referred to the need to have an
appropriate personal risk profile in order to negotiate successfully key stages of
professional empowerment. Thus the mere awareness of one’s potential and developing
theories of management cannot necessarily be interpreted as the first step to total
professional empowerment. People do not necessarily move easily through the various
stages of empowerment. In fact, there is no certainty that certain stages will be
successfully negotiated at all. Other personal and environmental factors outside the MBA
experience can inhibit participants’ desire to become more empowered professionals
within their chosen field. For some participants, the benefits of moving to other high
potential organisational environments had to be weighed against certain personal
considerations like the costs of uprooting family and being relocated to less congenial work and personal locations.

**Pursuing opportunities for professional growth**

While some of the low integrators were only aware of the opportunities for professional growth, other participants attempted to use their MBA and on-the-job learning to create professional opportunities for themselves in the world of management. Two examples of this phenomenon highlight the individual's determination to construct proactively a new role in their desired professional world. Malcolm Ingram's increasing self-confidence to handle a senior management role, emanating partly from the development of a strategic perspective through the MBA, encouraged him to become involved in a strategic planning issue within his organisation. The initiative he proposed as a participant in this process had the potential to create for himself a senior management job. He was to find out within 6-12 months of completing the MBA whether his efforts to secure his desired position had borne fruit. For Malcolm, the MBA had helped him to reassess his career objectives within his organisation and had equipped him with the skills and self-confidence to construct for himself a desired role in senior management. Moreover, the MBA had helped him develop the analytical, communication and advocacy skills required to persuade people of his viewpoint on strategic directions and initiatives. On completing the MBA, however, Malcolm had not actually secured the opportunity to put his emerging theories of senior management to the test.

Walter Abbott had successfully negotiated the transition from the world of technical work to the world of management during his study of the MBA program (see Chapter 8). At the end of the program, he was on the verge of entering a middle management position in his organisation. Walter perceived a symmetry and complementarity in his career development and learning over the duration of the MBA. Applying MBA learning in his changing job contexts had allowed him to develop a stronger understanding of the different functional areas of his organisation. Moreover, and quite unusually for a management neophyte, Walter had developed a strong strategic view of his organisation (see pages 195-6). The development of this integrative view, which allowed him to see problems and issues from different functional perspectives, was seen by Walter to be of great benefit when he is given the opportunity to put into action his commitments to management. Once again, the MBA, coupled with on-the-job learning, had given a participant the confidence and skills to negotiate various steps in the transition from technician to manager. Walter Abbott, like Malcolm Ingram, was on the verge of creating a major professional opportunity to enact developing conceptions of management.
Empowering others through theories in action

Kornbluh and Greene (1989, p.266) argue that attempts to empower others represented the ultimate form of empowerment: 'When workers self-consciously realize what they mastered along this journey [of empowerment], they imagine even more can be accomplished. Frequently, they see that the key to their own development is to enable the empowerment of those around them. If workers choose this route, others and eventually whole groups in the organisation set out on this empowerment journey'. Marsick and Watkins (1990, p.29) note that empowerment in the workplace 'is typically associated with organisational changes that allow workers greater participation in decision making and access to the benefits of their labour'. Without doubt, this recognition of the need to empower others was one of the crucial developments in many participants' conceptions and practices of management over the duration of the MBA. As has already been indicated, participants ascribed the sources of this change both to their MBA learning and to their professional experiences. Empowering others was seen by some as the essential defining characteristic of management. This 'other-centred' rather than 'self-centred' focus was also perceived as a reflection of one's maturity:

...[there is a ] very important age factor in management. People below thirty I don't think will ever be very good at it because in those first ten years after graduation people are totally focused on achievement through things which they do themselves. There is a lot of pressure on people to prove themselves to do things their profession had trained them to do and that to me is not consistent with good management, where if in good management you are expected to get work out of other people rather than produce it yourself. I think there is a very important age component there and certainly from my own career I feel much more comfortable in letting go of lots of decisions which certainly impact on my job and develop trust in people through your own judgement then the age side of it allows me to be more comfortable in letting go on decisions which will impact on my own performance...understanding that my span of control is wider than I could hope to control. I can't have the level of input into all areas I control and would normally feel comfortable with. Really it is a case of knowing who in the organisation can do things that will work (Ken Johns, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

The opportunity to empower others was definitely related to participants' position of authority within the organisation. The more senior the participant was in the management hierarchy, the more authority and thus opportunity he or she had to act upon any personal commitment to empowering others in the organisation. Frank Dickson, for example, as a middle manager, was able enact his theory of empowerment within in his own sphere of influence within his organisation:

In the sales environment I had tried to position my sales reps absolutely in charge of their accounts as distinct from being the front man who delivers messages when it suits us or person who runs errands. I've tried to position them as being the focus point in
the company so everything the customer wants he knows that this person will be able to deliver it. I've tried to position the company behind them to support and reinforce them, to empower them to deliver the goods.

My management change would not have happened at the same rate, may be not ever, but not with the same time frame [in the absence of the MBA experience]. I'm sure that some of those concepts I had about empowering people, the sales reps, I wouldn't have thought those things through and come to those conclusions if I hadn't had the MBA experience. If ideas had come through it would have been years down the line (comment made at the end of the final year of the MBA program).

Unfortunately, as will be explained in the next section, Frank's attempts to empower his own subordinates were antithetical to his own superior's management philosophy. This led to Frank's disempowerment, a situation not without positive learning consequences which were yet to be realised fully at the end of the MBA program.

William Grant was in an even more senior management position and therefore had greater scope to empower a larger number of people. In fact, his intention was to attempt to empower the whole of his organisation. William Grant, in his new role as a senior manager of a large health agency, described his organisation as a 'guided democracy' at the beginning of the MBA program (Holt et al. 1990a, p.16). Guided democracy was seen as a process to achieve a more purposeful organisation. The 'guiding' dimension of his philosophy is, 'Not telling how to make decisions but take a step back and make sure the methodology of making decisions is correct...it's very important that the big picture should be right' (comment made at end of second year). The 'democracy' dimension related to his commitment to participative management where decision making and the attendant responsibility is pushed down to the lowest level possible in the organisation. However, while he saw himself as being committed to the devolution of decision making and responsibility and listening to the views of people at the 'front line' in the organisation, William also saw himself as being responsible for making people aware of the larger contexts within which they worked 'so that they don't get too tunnel visioned' (comment made at the beginning of the MBA). The overall goal was to empower people to achieve the strategic directions he had in mind for the organisation. This goal was translated into set of strategic concerns relating to total quality management (TQM), management of the regions, installation of production computing system and public relations.

The process of empowering others appears to be characterised by a commitment to the devolution of power over decision making to people at lower levels in the organisational hierarchy (i.e. a commitment to participatory decision making) and the recognition and promotion of the important contribution that such people can and do make to the
organisation's performance. These commitments require a high level of trust and respect between the manager and his or her subordinates. It also requires that the manager be able to derive satisfaction from the accomplishments of others, rather than his or her own direct efforts. A commitment to empowering others does not mean that the manager abdicates his or her responsibility to manage. Managers need to be proactive (Marsick & Watkins 1990, p.280) in seizing the initiative and creating the right organisational culture to empower others. This proactivity recognises that the world of work is 'humanly constructed and can therefore be altered by human effort' (Brookfield 1986, p. 225) The devolution of power is not absolute, however. Participants indicated that some managerial prerogatives needed to be retained, particularly in the area of either shaping or interpreting the organisation's overall strategic direction and influencing the ways in which the organisation's future could be achieved through the creation of a goal-directed empowering environment.

PARTICIPANT DESEMPowerMENT: SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS

It has already been noted that some people, principally the low integrators, who occupied lower positions in the organisational/management hierarchy found it difficult to move beyond the first tentative stage toward empowerment. What became even more revealing was the potential for disempowerment for certain participants who carried significant management responsibilities in their organisations. In these cases, organisational systems did more than merely impede the empowerment process. These social constraints actually disempowered participants and undermined, at least temporarily, much of the value of their formal MBA learning and on-the-job professional development.

Frank Dickson's experience of disempowerment is a dramatic case of organisational systems essentially destroying a person's growing commitment to a people-focused conception of, and set of practices toward, management. Frank Dickson's personal empowerment, in part attributed to his MBA learning, which in turn led him to attempt to empower his subordinates, had an unfortunate and negative unintended consequence (Frank's empowerment philosophy was described above). His perception that his immediate superior was not providing him with the support he required to sustain his management commitment to grass roots empowerment, led Frank to confront his superior about his lack of performance. This confrontation eventually led to Frank's retrenchment from his current position within the organisation (see biographical note in Appendix A). It seems that Frank's desire to empower others clashed with his superior's autocratic management style. This clash of styles led to a situation of dramatic disempowerment for
Frank and destroyed his attempts to empower others under his care and responsibility. Frank's predicament was described by him as follows:

The problem I struck [in attempting to empower my sales representatives] was that I was not backed up enough. So my goal has been to empower those people. Its has two characteristics. I've found it difficult to get the goods through at times which has caused some degrees of exposure. I've tried to empower those people in the organisation as well which has had the other negative consequence of making me touch more transparent and less visible. I've taken deliberate action which has tried to minimise my standing in the organisation because by trying to make my reps the focus inside and out and to try and assist them to have the support internally, I've de-emphasised myself which has not been clever in the circumstances.

There is a degree to which I’ve built those people to have some more self-sufficiency. And in some ways self-sufficiency is great and it is good that they are not dependent on other people to make every decision, to get every letter written and whatever else. So, yes, I boosted to a certain extent their ability to do their job and to expand how much of a job they can do on their own. But a key thing which I tried to do is to position them as being visible as being the person managing and controlling the situation. ...I really wanted them to be focused on. I saw some situations in the company which were particularly significant at the time ending 6 months ago where the sales reps became disempowered...[Empowering sales reps] was a deliberate part of my management process and one which I don't think the company quite caught up with...I achieved part of the required culture change, but not enough of it (comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Jarvis (1985), in critiquing the work of liberal adult education theorists such as Knowles, concluded that, 'While a person may be free to think he may be constrained from acting by the structures of society... liberal adult education,...assumes that the learner is free to act upon any new understanding he may gain. This is clearly not the case and the lower in the social hierarchy learners may be the more inhibiting they may find the social structures, if they seek to be socially mobile' (Jarvis 1985, p.102 & 103). Jarvis's observation can be equally applied to organisational life. The lower in the organisational hierarchy one is the more difficult it becomes to initiate organisational change through empowering others. This reality was keenly felt by the low integrators. However, it was also a depressing reality for participants like Frank Dickson located in the middle ground of the management hierarchy.

Two other participants' experiences are worth elaborating in respect of the issue of disempowerment. David Richards experienced organisational hostility towards his study of the MBA program. During the third year of the program David was retrenched from his position within an Australian subsidiary of an American multinational firm (see biographical note - Appendix A). While the parent company was quite supportive of its employees undertaking MBA programs, this support was not shared by senior managers.
in the local operation. The perceived threat of somebody undertaking an MBA, was, in David's view, the chief reason why he was retrenched from his job. In his view, the retrenchment was a politically rather than performance motivated:

You can't always get to utilise skills that you have been given, taught and learnt from the MBA program in the work environment. If you're on the outside of the work environment it sounds really strange. Why can't you? People tend to be very scared of it [the MBA]. They tend to think that the skill has been acquired by someone that there going to utilise over the top of them and that they feel very threatened. That's a strange set of circumstances. You would think that any company would want to utilise those additional skills (David Richards, comment made at the end of the final year of the program).

Keith Jamieson's experience, as a middle manager in charge of a management information systems department, provides a third example of a person's inability to act upon his organisational world. Keith had concluded that his department should have a more strategic role within his organisation (a conclusion bolstered by his study of the MBA program). He was unable, however, to achieve this aspiration given the resistance to this departmental reorientation by senior management within his organisation.

Frank Dickson's experience, however, was not devoid of useful learning which requires closer analysis. While Frank was still shaken by his retrenchment when describing the experience during the final interview, he was comfortable with the stand he had taken and also indicated a valuable lesson he had learned in respect of the need to manage the politics surrounding moves toward empowerment:

[The retrenchment] could be seen either as a point of failure or point of pride. I've worked for some managers in the past where at times I thought I'd done the wrong thing by putting up with the environment and I would look back and say, 'I'd worked for that guy for a year and a half and it was dreadful and I should have fought'. ...In fact, I remember looking back with some pride and thinking I would outlast this manager...on a number of occasions, knowing him to be incompetent, knowing him not to be supporting me or doing a good job. And at the end of that time I'm not quite sure whether it was a good thing being pleased that I had outlasted him. I maybe should have upped and left and that probably would have been better for my career on a number of occasions. And at other times I may have been better to have worked out some way of changing the situation and that would be a political-type activity of undermining the person perhaps, but there have been less destructive ways of achieving that change. And in this situation I spoke out to try and generate some change. It may not have been the cleverest thing to do, but I'm not displeased I spoke out to generate some change, because I think it would have been the wrong thing to once again bottle up and maintain the status quo situation...I'm not sure that I'm totally happy with the way I did it because I don't think I achieved the change I wanted, I achieved change, sure, not necessarily the situation, I was changed!
So I probably am not happy with the way, the change I generated. I'm not displeased I didn't speak out. I had some surprise in the way my career development was presented to me. It certainly came to me somewhat out of the blue. Some months earlier I would not have been surprised if I had lost my job the next day because I knew that I had irritated my manager extremely. I had grown comfortable with, again, with my security whereas I think it would have been quite relevant to realise that I was under threat and that I may have continued to have done something to reinforce or [shore] up the situation. So in terms of change to be a bit more aware of the environment and to be more involved in [shoring] up my security would have been an appropriate thing to do. I have some discomfort about political activities to make myself look good. I have always been more interested in getting out there and doing the job, out in the marketplace or throw myself down the organisation rather than spending my time making myself look good to the people above me. I find that somewhat offensive thing to concentrate on and unproductive, but there comes a point where it is naive not to do a degree of it. Maybe I didn't do enough, maybe I did (comment made at the end of the final year).

Block (1987, p.xvii) argues that, 'We empower ourselves by discovering a positive way of being political. The line between positive and negative politics is a tightrope we have to walk. We must be powerful advocates for our units in a way that does not alienate those around and above us'. Frank Dickson's experience had provided him with valuable insights into the achievement of the empowerment of others through a greater sensitivity to organisational politics and the development of 'positive' political skills. Moreover, it seems that Frank's view of himself as a competent professional was fortified by his determination to put his personal set of commitments to the test by confronting his superior. The demonstration of a degree of moral courage to adhere to his professional convictions had been, in a sense, a positive and empowering learning experience for Frank, although the immediate consequences of his actions were stress, confusion and uncertainty about his future in the organisation. Brookfield (1986, p.22) notes that:

It is also often the case that the most significant learning we undergo as adults results from some external event or stimulus that causes us to engage in an anxiety-producing and uncomfortable reassessment of aspects of our personal, occupational, and recreational lives. This external stimulus may be a clamitous event, such as being fired... The learning in which we are forced to engage as a result of these events may be unsought and may have many painful aspects. Nonetheless, we may regard such learning as highly significant, precisely because it caused us to question our ways of thinking and behaving in our personal relationships, occupational lives, and social activities.

While it was premature for Frank Dickson himself to perceive his retrenchment as the basis for a more sophisticated approach to any future attempts to empower others, one suspects that the experience will eventually have a positive effect on his future management actions. In the case of David Richards, he had already made an important change to his people related philosophy of management. His changed viewpoint
incorporated the need to be sensitive to people's potentially negative perceptions of working with somebody with an MBA qualification: 'I need to be able to handle that [potential fear of being under threat by a qualified manager] and turn that fear away into something which is productive for the company' (comment made at end of program).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The MBA experience, coupled with ongoing on-the-job learning, had a significant impact on the development of participants' perspectives toward management. The experience did not lead to a radical reformulation of participants' perspectives and practices. The transformation constituted a broadening and deepening of existing perspectives. Evidence suggests that participants would resist a fundamental challenge to their management perspectives; however, they still perceived themselves as being open to new ideas and committed to growth and development. Participants were described as adopting a 'reformist' approach to their professional development. This reformist approach saw participants selectively using MBA theory both to broaden and deepen their management perspectives.

While perspective development had occurred, organisational constraints conspired to stop some participants from attempting to use their skills and to empower others. The empowerment of others to effect organisational change was seen as the ultimate and most difficult expression of personal empowerment to achieve. Participants were seen to be at different stages of the empowerment process. For some, a mere awareness of a desire to manage and an emerging management philosophy represented only the first tentative step toward personal empowerment. It was people in senior management positions who were in the strongest position to enact their personal set of commitments to management on the broadest scale. Yet, their actions were also circumscribed by organisation-wide and external factors. Thus as the manager moves up the organisational hierarchy he or she is confronted with different types of constraints which can undermine attempts to effect organisational change. However, the opportunity to effect organisational change is certainly restricted to those in relatively senior positions of power within the organisation.

The following table (9.1) provides a summary of the key relationships analysed in this chapter and Chapter 8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of job (see Chapter 8)</th>
<th>Degree of professional integration (see Chapter 8)</th>
<th>Stage of empowerment (Chapter 9)</th>
<th>Empowerment strategies (Chapter 9)</th>
<th>Barriers to empowerment (Chapter 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Technical specialist        | Low integrators                              | Awareness of opportunities for personal empowerment | • Make superiors aware of newly developed management competencies  
• Consideration of opportunities for empowerment outside current organisation | • Superiors may not recognise and respond to new competencies  
• Lack of personal will to seize opportunities outside organisation |
| Project management         |                                               |                                  |                                  |                                   |
| Technical specialists and project managers in transition | Partial integrators 1 | Active search for personal empowerment | • Actively seeking management-related positions  
• Cultivating supporters for transition to management ranks | • Can be slow process dependent on availability of management positions inside and outside organisation |
| Middle management          | Partial integrators 2                         | Pursuit of empowerment of others in organisation at local level | • Attempts to devolve responsibility and decision making to subordinates in own sphere of control  
• Strong encouragement and support for subordinates to assume greater responsibility | • Participative management style clashes with autocratic style of superior(s)  
• Senior management has little regard for potential of Department within organisation  
• Peers threatened by qualified professional manager |
| Senior management          | Full integrators                              | Pursuit of empowerment of all employees in the organisation | Imbue whole organisation with a commitment to total quality management and customer satisfaction through the devolution of responsibility and decision making across the organisation | • Unanticipated external environmental forces can impact on organisation in such a way as to undermine attempts at organisational change  
• Difficult, complex task to manage simultaneously external and internal environments to achieve organisational objectives  
• Strategic participative management may be disconcerting and anxiety-provoking for employees who are not used to this style of management |
Chapter 10

CONCLUSIONS: THEORISING ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

THIS CHAPTER DRAWS TOGETHER and elaborates the core statements listed in Chapter 1 and developed through the fieldwork chapters. The first core statement explicated is the 'distance' which exists between professional realities and ideals. Other core statements are considered in relation to the contribution that professional development programs taught at a distance can make to bridging this 'distance'. The educational experience is seen as one which can create the opportunities for learning communities which can help the individual professional person negotiate his or her way to more personally satisfying professional conceptions and practices. The ultimate expression of growing professional conceptions and practices is seen to take place in the workplace which is outside the influence or control of the teaching institution.

A key core statement relates to the value that MBA participants ascribed to institutionally-orchestrated peer group learning in the MBA experience. The learner is seen to occupy the centre stage of the educational experience, with the teacher moving from centre stage to the periphery of the learning experience. Both descriptive and normative analyses of the role of the teacher during a professional distance education course in use are undertaken. It is concluded that the teacher's power to facilitate actively perspective transformation during the course in use is highly problematic due to the difficulties of creating opportunities for frequent interaction between teachers and learners in the environment which characterises distance education, and the potential resistance by learners to structured forms of interaction which may be encountered by teachers who are committed to the development of teacher-learner communities.

The power of peer group learning, coupled with attempts to enact developing conceptions of management in the workplace, are seen largely to compensate for any perceived disadvantages in being denied the opportunity to interact regularly and personally with teaching staff during the course in use. Distance teachers' ability to enable effective professional development, therefore, resides very much in the exercise of professional judgement in the planning stages of course development. The exercise of this
professional judgement may need to be done, in some instances, independently of perceptions about learners' self-defined needs. Such judgement making may involve paradox and contradiction. On the other hand, decision making on key educational matters can be greatly enhanced through a more complete understanding of the professional agendas that learners bring to the course and which evolve over the duration of the educational experience. Decisions taken, at the pre-course-in-use planning stage, on curriculum, pedagogic and assessment matters can have a profound and enduring influence over learners' professional development experiences. These professional development experiences still need to be supported effectively by the distance teacher during the course in use. However, as already mentioned, it is problematic whether the teacher can exert a dramatic and direct influence over learners' perspective development as they work through the educational experience.

THE KEY DIMENSION OF 'DISTANCE' TO BE NEGOTIATED IN PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AT A DISTANCE

The influence of 'distance' in distance education needs critical assessment (Evans 1988, 1989). There is a need to determine what is meant by the 'distance' in distance education and the influence that this 'distance' had on the professional development that MBA participants experienced. Any such assessment begs the more fundamental question relating to the definition of distance education. Keegan (1990, p.44), in an attempt to distil the key characteristics of distance education from a review of the works of several prominent distance education theorists, lists 'the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process (this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education)', amongst others, as one of its key defining characteristics. Gillard (1991) restates this key defining characteristic of distance education in less formal and more appealing terms. He identifies 'as the mark of distance education the absence of the teaching voice as the primary medium of teaching' (Gillard 1991, p.2). Yet at least some of the taken-for-granted definitions of distance education appear to be in danger of providing caricatured views of the nature of distance education as opposed to face-to-face education where one form of education (distance education) sees students studying in virtual isolation while another form (face-to-face education) sees students studying within rich and varied forms of interaction. In the latter case, the key form of interaction is seen to be the opportunity for immediate, spontaneous and constructive direct, spoken communication between teacher and student.
The research on the MBA experience has revealed that valued forms of interaction can be both present and absent when participants interact with teaching staff at residential schools and during roving tutor visits. Conversely, valued forms of interaction can be both present and absent when participants interact amongst themselves or interact with key agents within their work environments. What appears more critical to examine is the extent to which any educational experience, be it designated distance education or conventional education, provides valued opportunities for interaction between the key agents in the educational process. Maintaining the distance education-conventional education dichotomy seems to be wholly unhelpful in any attempt to penetrate the underlying interaction networks which can promote or impede the process of professional development, irrespective of the mode of educational delivery.

The other key feature of any professional development experience no matter what its form is that it can create desires for learning which extend far beyond the teaching institution's sphere of influence or control. Participants' efforts to use their MBA learning to integrate themselves better with their existing or preferred worlds of professional practice, which encompassed perspective transformation and moves toward personal empowerment, lay well outside the teaching institution's sphere of activities. It required participants to negotiate and renegotiate a myriad of relationships with key actors in their professional worlds. The actions of these other key actors are totally outside the control or influence of the teaching institution. Ultimately, the extent of professional development, reflected in changed management thinking, feeling and acting, was determined by individual effort and social constraints. The real action was, in a sense, played out on the stages of people's worlds of work. Distance education, as a concept, takes on a peculiar and compelling logic when seen as a mode of learning which does not take place in a location remote from participants' everyday worlds, at least from the teaching institution's viewpoint. However, this logic is fractured from the participants' perspective because, to them, the location of the source of education is proximate and compelling. The value of the MBA was ultimately judged on its capacity to help participants negotiate and act upon their own professional worlds.

The focus, therefore, is the 'education of [professionals] at a distance' (Garrison 1989, p.9). The ultimate testing ground for participants' new-found knowledge is their workplaces. Distance education should at least be reconceptualised as education, the primary focus of which, occurs at a distance from a significant (but not sole) source of teaching - that is, the teaching institution - which will invariably contain elements of human interaction. For participants studying in total isolation from their peers and teaching staff, their workplaces would still potentially represent powerful facilitators of or
inhibitors to professional learning through various forms of human interaction. Arguably, the greatest 'distance' in professional education, in whatever form, is the distance which can exist between students' developing conceptions of their professional practices on the one hand, and their will to act upon their developing understandings in their professional lives. The 'distance' can be seen in terms of the disjunctions which can exist between reflection, theorising and action. Realising understandings through new professional practices becomes a significant 'distance' that needs to be negotiated successfully. The 'distance' therefore constitutes the disjunctions which can exist between the reality and imagined ideals of professional practice. It is the nature of this 'distance' which has provided the focus for much of the author's theorising on the process of professional development at a distance. Evans (1988, 1989) has attempted to make problematic the time-space relations in distance education, a dimension of 'distance' which is a significant factor in any institutional attempts to help participants negotiate their way toward new desirable professional realities.

Juler (1991) removes the notion of 'distance', as it is traditionally defined in terms of the physical separation of teacher and learner for much of the learning experience, from his view of the essence of the process of discourse which should underlie any educational experience, including distance education:

Distance education means creating educational communities in which teachers, students and others are linked in discourse wherever they may be through networks appropriate to their circumstances. The discourse comprises various communications which may be initiated by any of the participants with the purposes relevant to their particular needs. Typically, these communications will be about such matters as: being a member of an educational community; tutorial and other forms of student support; subject content and assignment work; administration, assessment and evaluation; and, not least, opportunities for social interaction. (p.125)

The emphasis in Juler's definition is the creation of networks of discourse appropriate to students' circumstances. The inference is that the desirability and feasibility of different forms of discourse must be seen in the context of student circumstances. Juler's definition highlights the importance of exploring forms of discourse in situ. As has already been concluded, the all-important networks of discourse required to promote professional development within the workplace are outside the direct control or influence of the teaching institution. The teaching institution's responsibility, therefore, is the orchestration of networks of discourse which can in turn help students to construct appropriate forms of interaction within their professional worlds. This begs a set of important questions: what learning communities can the teaching institution orchestrate? By what means can these communities be orchestrated? What are the roles of teachers and
students in these communities? What value do students ascribe to these learning communities? These questions are examined below.

THE ROLES OF THE TEACHER AND LEARNER IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS BY DISTANCE EDUCATION

The social construction of roles in the educational experience

The MBA experience highlights how educational roles can be and often are pre-figured in an educational program taught at a distance. This does not mean that the roles of teachers and participants in the educational experience are heavily prescribed. However, a commitment to curriculum presentation in forms other than direct, spoken communication, coupled with the commitment to and support of study groups, did create general roles for teachers and participants throughout the educational experience. The consequences of these pre-constructed roles were sometimes unanticipated by teaching staff during their irregular visits to study groups. On these occasions, participants expected staff to fit in with their learning activities, rather than expecting staff to teach them as in a classroom. Teachers exerted their greatest influence on participants' learning, either through the learning materials or assessment strategies, at a distance from the actual sites of learning (Chapter 6). These pedagogical strategies were determined, as is often the case in distance education, well before participants experienced the course. Gradually, participants learnt to function within the environment created by the institution. The key learning resources were the learning materials and the study group. Teaching staff's contribution became less and less critical as participants progressed through the MBA and as the learning experience moved from an individual to a collective peer group one.

The role of the teacher: from centre stage to the periphery

This peripheral role can be analysed from two perspectives. First, one can examine the characteristics of a good teacher occupying the role as it was lived out in the MBA experience and whether participants were satisfied with the way this role was generally fulfilled. Second, one can examine the role more critically to assess whether its nature, as constructed by the MBA design, was wholly suitable for people engaging in a distance education experience. Participants tended not to look past the role as defined in the experience they were undertaking. Therefore, nobody engaged in a more critical assessment of the role of the teacher in a professional development experience. The role of the teacher was seen as a 'given' to be judged on the basis of its existing practice, that
is, a what-is or descriptive rather than normative assessment of the teacher’s role in the educational experience was undertaken by participants.

In terms of the reality of the role as experienced by participants, three key aspects of the job can be identified. In examining these different aspects of the role it is easy for the analysis to degenerate into the documentation of a detailed set of somewhat banal competencies that tutors require to fulfill their roles satisfactorily. This analysis will eschew such detailed listings and, instead, concentrate on the states of mind and predispositions that good tutors appeared to demonstrate in the MBA experience. The first and most visible contribution the teacher was expected to make was the projection of appropriate subject matter expertise into a set of self-sufficient, well-integrated learning materials. Every participant clearly understood that the learning materials were to substitute for lectures normally associated with on-campus teaching. While this study has not focused on the educational and typographical characteristics of good learning materials as perceived by participants, other than to locate the learning materials within the interactions of the peer group, one salient feature should be highlighted. In assessing the relative value and status of different components of the textual materials, participants distinguished between the study guides which were perceived to be constructed by their teacher(s) for their particular program of study and professional needs as opposed to textbooks which were seen to be written for large, nondescript student markets. Study guides, which were treated as the primary learning materials, were perceived to be more customised and personalised than textbooks which were seen as learning texts which focused on merely teaching the subject matter in a vacuum. Participants were able to develop an intimate relationship with good study guides as these materials constructed meaningful contexts within which they could comprehend the material and perceive its applicability to their professional practices. This conclusion appears to be consistent with theories which value personalised, interactive text in distance education, e.g. Holmberg’s (1989) theory of ‘guided didactic conversation’ and the distinction he draws between the roles of distance education materials and conventional text books.

Two other aspects of the tutors’ role can be identified which did not strictly relate to a demonstration of their subject matter expertise. These non-subject-matter-related states of mind and predispositions were arguably more important than the demonstration of technical competence during the course in use. Participants expected teachers to be both accessible, within reasonable limits, and approachable. Being accessible did not necessarily mean that teachers were approachable. Approachability was conceived as the tutor being able to handle queries with alacrity. This state of readiness to help was contrasted with a literal, minimalist approach adopted by some teachers when responding
to inquiries. In these circumstances, the teacher appeared only willing to provide a
parsimonious response to the specific problem raised by the participant. With the good
teacher, participants found their problems clarified, expanded and fully rectified.
Moreover, they felt that the teacher was pleased to hear from them which engendered a
feeling of belonging and connectedness to the person responsible for developing and
running the unit being studied. Some participants were given the feeling that the tutor had
nothing else to do with his time than focus on and help solve the participant's problem.
Invariably, participants disengaged from these interactions feeling that their immediate
problems had been solved and that they had taken something more away from the
interaction than they had expected at the beginning of the contact. For those teachers who
were perceived to be highly approachable, new forms of interaction opened up which
allowed participants to discuss professional concerns outside the immediate requirements
of the program. In these situations, teachers actually worked with participants in a highly
personal way to help them solve their professional problems.

That aspect of approachability relating to a focused and personalised response was
pertinent to participants' perceptions of what constituted good assignment feedback.
Good assignment feedback was seen to be the tangible manifestation of a strong
commitment by the teacher to engage with an individual product of work, whether it be
from the individual participant or a particular study group. Participants sometimes
experienced the feeling that this commitment was not being wholeheartedly embraced.
(The negative learning consequences of feedback which participants perceived to be not
strongly related to individual assignments was highlighted in Chapter 6.) It was not
necessarily the fact that the feedback was grossly inadequate, but more of an impression
that there was insufficient effort being being put into the marking of an assignment.
Participants were looking for some reciprocity of effort in these circumstances. If they
had made the effort to construct a strong meaning in relation to a particular assignment
based on their interaction with the learning materials, they expected teachers to reciprocate
by constructing a meaningful response to their meaning constructions. One can envisage,
as Jarvis (1978) argues, how this sort of reciprocity in the important area of assignment
marking can form a launching platform for ongoing teacher and participant dialogue
which can facilitate learning in distance education rather than a once-off exchange of work
between the parties in the educative process. 'This demands a different approach to
merely assessing or communicating knowledge in the comments on the script. Now the
comments must lay the foundations of a relationship, through either personal, humane
and creative comments...'. (Jarvis 1978, p.15).
The second aspect of these non-subject-matter states of mind related to the teachers' ability to be able to empathise and sympathise with the special and significant stresses experienced by participants undertaking the MBA by distance learning (the nature of these personal stresses was examined in Chapter 8). The ability to be able to understand the personal and professional pressures on participants and to respond helpfully and flexibly when these pressures temporarily impeded their MBA studies was seen as a key attribute of a good teacher in the program. This positive attribute was contrasted with a strict and rigid approach displayed by some teachers. A sense of humour was also seen to be a key component of the empathetic approach. The combination of positive attributes in these areas was essential in creating an environment of trust and respect between teachers and participants. It appeared that participants believed that teachers who failed to demonstrate these attributes did not really respect or trust them as mature, highly motivated and competent learners attempting to do their best in their MBA studies. It was as if participants' bona fides was being brought into question when they confronted inaccessible, unapproachable and uncaring teaching staff. This lack of respect became contagious in the peer group setting as was dramatically evidenced at the fourth year residential school (see Chapter 7).

Burge et al. (1991) in a inter-institutional study of the interactions between tutors and learners in Canadian distance education organisations found that the tutor-learner environment was characterised by six conditions. The environment or world was seen to be silent, cognitive, receptive and reactive, cool at a interpersonal level and warmer, more satisfactory at an intrapersonal level. These different conditions of the tutor-learner world resonate with the MBA teacher-participant experience. There was no doubt that it was a reactive form of interaction where participants believed that teachers were as accessible as they wanted them to be and where participants initiated contact as and when the need arose. Queries on subject matter were invariably taken to the study group first for resolution; the group was the first line of academic support. These learner-directed 'tutorials' drew upon the resources and expertise of the group the origins of which were members' work experience, previous formal qualifications and informal training and individuals with the most advanced level of preparation in a particular topic of study. Teaching staff were only approached, usually by a member of the group delegated to resolve the problem, when the group itself was unable to find a resolution. Thus the teaching staff were the last resort in terms of academic student support. Most participants perceived little need to interact with teaching staff over content-related matters, although there were a couple of notable exceptions. Some basically never interacted, either directly or indirectly, with teaching staff at all. Certainly, the warmer, intrapersonal world was evident and sustained through extensive peer group interaction. It was also evidenced in
times of crisis in some participants' personal worlds where spouses adopted the key
tutor-counselling role in helping participants to work through seemingly unbearably high
study and work-related stresses (see Chapter 8). The conditions of silence and a coolness
in the interpersonal area were evident in the relationships that participants had with some
staff who were perceived to be poor tutors. On the other hand, a more animated and
warmer interpersonal relationship did exist with certain staff considered to be good
teachers.

Overwhelmingly, one can conclude that tutors, in the MBA experience, during the units
in use, were perceived to be reactive service providers responding to the sporadic
demands made upon them by participants. The marginal role of the tutor was
dramatically illustrated during study group visits (see Chapter 6) where they were
expected to fit into the study commitments of the group. There were times when tutors
were specifically asked not to attend study group meetings because participants felt that
little could be achieved through the visit and, more interestingly, that the presence of the
teacher could interfere with the dynamics of the group and therefore its productivity.
Study group visits by teaching staff were seen as more of a symbolic gesture that the
institution cared about the health and vitality of peer learning. In effect, teachers moved
from centre stage to the periphery once the materials were developed and participants
began to experience the course. The repositioning of teachers from centre stage to the
periphery of the distance learning experience has profound and no doubt disturbing
implications for those teachers who wish to control and dominate the learning experience
by directly conveying their knowledge to a largely passive and uncritical student group.
Distance education appears to break the hold of the authoritarian teacher over student
learning. Power and dominance cannot be wielded so effectively when physical distance
exists between teacher and taught.

A more critical question to consider is to what extent should teachers in distance education
accept the passive and reactive nature of their role once learners begin to experience their
learning materials. Brookfield (1986) addresses this issue as follows:

At the very least, it is important to realize that between the authoritarian transmission of
information to uncritically receptive automat and the nondirective, free-flowing
realization of learner-defined activities lies a crucial facilitation role. Facilitators have to
be as wary of supporting every inclination, preference, or demand of learners as they
are of forcing these same learners to follow a lockstep sequence of previously
prescribed educational activities. In both instances learners are liable to develop an
uncritical stance toward their personal and intellectual development; in the one case
because their opinion is never challenged or questioned, in the other because they are
given no choice or chance to voice an opinion. Either option denies the essentially
transactional nature of teaching-learning, and both options pretend that challenge,
Brookfield argues that a role for the teacher as facilitator must be found between teacher domination on the one hand, and learner sovereignty on the other. The need for the teacher as facilitator to demonstrate professional judgement on educational issues independently of learners' felt needs is a recurring issue in this chapter. The focus here, however, is the facilitator's role to challenge participants' perspectives through an ongoing educational transaction. This claim is particularly relevant to a professional development program where inevitably prior professional conceptions and practice held by participants will require some change. The question is: to what extent should the teacher exert a strong influence in any attempts to transform professional perspectives? Moreover, how feasible is it to attempt such facilitation in distance education? How will participants respond? It is impossible to provide definitive answers to these questions. In the absence of frequent interaction between teachers and participants in the MBA program during the course in use, substantial growth and development in perspectives occurred. However, this perspective transformation did not represent a fundamental reappraisal of existing conceptions and practices (see Chapter 9). Whether skilled and frequent facilitation could have more dramatically reshaped perspectives is impossible to tell. However, it can be said that such facilitation was neither sought nor desired by MBA participants. One can speculate that any mandatory attempt to create a greater level of teacher-participant interaction for this purpose would have been strongly resisted by participants as an intrusion on their already limited study time. The actual means of enabling facilitation is also problematic in distance education, although interactive technologies do provide an avenue for more frequent interaction between teachers and learners.

The role of the participant: from periphery to the centre stage

A corollary of the marginalisation of the teacher in distance education during the course in use is the bringing of the learner firmly on to the centre stage. The most obvious example of this was the quality of the peer learning through the study group and the perception that peers were the first point of contact on academic issues. This conclusion was reinforced, somewhat paradoxically, by the negative experience of Terry Plowman who had had the opportunity to work in Study Group A, located in Melbourne, in the first three years of the program, but found himself operating in a much smaller and less stable group, with one particularly dysfunctional member, in the final year when his work took him to Brisbane. Terry Plowman felt that he was dramatically isolated from the University in the final year of the program, not so much because of the greater physical distance between himself and the teaching institution per se, but because the less-than-satisfactory group
experience made him feel more vulnerable and desirous of teaching support. The breaking down of the peer group, as the first line of academic support, developed a need to reconsider the opportunities for interaction with teaching staff, opportunities that while more problematic to negotiate due to the new and more distant location, were never considered necessary to contemplate in the first three years of the program. Thus disconnectedness from effective peer interaction appeared to be the primary determinant of the acute sense of isolation from the teaching staff experienced by Terry Plowman in the final year of the program.

Overall, participants saw that they could control the learning experience through private interaction with the lecturer, whose teaching was represented predominantly in written form, and through interaction with fellow learners. An interesting aspect of this interaction with peers was the way in which learners collectively worked over the learning materials. The learning materials were treated as a resource by the group and worked over in selective and flexible ways to meet the group’s learning objectives. Gillard (1991) notes, in the context of face-to-face teaching, that a certain amount of physical distance separates teachers and learners and rather than being a barrier to learning such distance can actually facilitate effective learning. ‘The degree of distantiﬁcation found in the conventional lecture theatre allows for an element of judgement in the reception of learning, of choice among what items are to be learnt’ (Gillard 1991, p.3). Moreover, Gillard (1991, p.3) sees temporal distance as being valuable ‘in that it may allow time for comprehension to accumulate around a point’. Gillard’s observations are relevant to the groups’ interaction with learning materials. Physical and temporal distance between the learners and the real teacher, whose expertise was still located in a fixed and clear form within the learning texts, allowed participants to develop at their own pace and in their own judgement, unencumbered by the presence of the teacher, a sense of the meaning and relevance of the material to their professional perspectives. It is difficult not to conclude that what learners value mostly highly is the opportunity to interact with peers around the provision of useful resources. This opportunity appears to be more highly valued than the chance to hear first hand the teacher’s exposition of subject matter.

Opportunities for peer interaction can be effectively orchestrated by distance educators through facilitative pedagogies, including assessment strategies, which act as vehicles for such valued interaction. In professional education at a distance the facilitative role sees the teacher as an orchestrator or animator of an empowering learning environment which may not require teachers, once established, to play a leading role. This environment and its potentialities for perspective transformation are best nourished through the provision of timely feedback to assignment work which makes some genuine contribution to the
process of perspective development. Assignment feedback, therefore, should be seen as an integral part of the learning text, albeit less visible in form, which can potentially facilitate or impede individual and peer learning in distance education. The nature of assignment feedback which makes little contribution to perspective development was analysed in Chapter 6.

THE NATURE OF ASSESSMENT IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The consequences of teacher-determined assessment in the MBA program

Heron (1981), in a self-declared polemical piece on the role of assessment in higher education, argues that the issue of assessment is a political one, '...that is, it is to do with the exercise of power. And power is simply to do with who makes decisions about whom. I have power over people if I make unilateral decisions to which they are subject. I share power with people if I make decisions on a bilateral basis in consultation with them' (Heron 1981, p.55). He argues that the prevailing model of assessment in higher education is an authoritarian one where teachers determine unilaterally all aspects of the assessment process. This unilateral exercise of power is seen by Heron to undermine the development of learners' self-determining capacities. Heron rejects models of assessment which place all of the control over assessment in the hands of either teachers or learners. Moreover, he considers as unsatisfactory any model of power sharing which requires every aspect of the assessment process to be subject to negotiation between teachers and students. His favoured model contains elements of teacher determined, learner determined and collaborative forms of assessment. Collaborative assessment is seen by Heron to be a useful stage in the transition between the traditional authoritarian model of assessment and self and peer assessment. Self and peer assessment is seen as the most powerful form of assessment in professional education: 'Self and peer assessment is in my judgement the central way of maintaining and developing standards of professional practice' (Heron 1981, p.61).

The evidence presented in Chapter 6 supports Heron's conclusion on the central importance of self and peer group assessment in the professional educational process. What challenges Heron's critique, however, is the fact that the assessment model embodied in the MBA experience is essentially an authoritarian one where all key assessment decisions relating to the nature, timing and frequency of assessment were made unilaterally by the teaching institution. The unilateral exercise of power in this area did not undermine the development of self-directing tendencies in MBA participants,
although it could be argued that these tendencies already existed at the beginning of the course. More importantly, the institutional commitment to study groups, which manifested itself in the unilateral decision to encourage all those participants who could join a study group to participate in the submission of group assignments (this requirement was perceived by participants as being mandatory at the beginning of the *Marketing Management* unit), was vital to the development of self- and peer-group assessment skills in the final years of the program. As was seen in Chapter 4, the introduction of group assignments represented a difficult challenge for the study groups. It engendered much anguish, soul searching and more than a little initial resistance, particularly in Study Group A. It should be noted that the teacher of *Marketing Management* was prepared to address concerns raised by one group on the disadvantages of group assignments and in so doing emphasised the voluntary nature of the group-based mode of assessment (see Chapter 4). Emphasising the voluntariness of group assignments did leave the door open to this group to revert to the previous group approach it had adopted to assignment work. The group, however, do not choose to revert to this approach. This open, non-dictatorial, but largely incidental discussion between the teacher and participants does not appear to represent the type of collaborative approach that Heron has in mind in determining key aspects of assessment.

Participants' experience of assessment in the MBA program throws into question Heron's analysis of the destructive impact that authoritarian models of assessment can have on students' development as autonomous learners. It highlights the fact that it is not necessarily the unilateral exercise of power in this area per se which can be destructive of students' self-determining capacities, but the misuse of this power by teachers which can lead to unanticipated negative learning consequences. In fact, the wise and thoughtful exercise of control over the construction of assessment strategies can be a positive force in creating learning conditions conducive to the development of self- and peer-assessment skills. Thus teacher-determined assessment can create an effective structure for the establishment and growth of student-determined assessment skills. These skills may not be developed in the absence of the exercise of purposeful teacher judgement which sees beyond the short-term doubt and concern which may be experienced by students in response to novel assessment demands to the potential long-term learning benefits to be achieved by implementing certain unilaterally-determined assessment strategies.

The dilemma confronted by teachers in attempting to initiate participative learning through the establishment of study groups is what Moss Kanter (1983, p.244) refers to, in her argument for the need for managers to master participation in creating innovative organisations, as 'Participation-by-command: the paradox of initiation' where
'Participation is something the top orders the middle to do for the bottom'. Yet, Moss Kanter (1983, p.244) asks the rhetorical question: 'But how else can participation get launched? ...someone somewhere still has to be the initiator and pusher'. Clearly, the aim of MBA teachers, as the 'initiators' and 'pushers', is to encourage participants to work collaboratively in groups as a primary means of establishing and developing self- and peer-assessment skills. However, this desire was achieved through the construction of a strong impression that group assignments were mandatory for those who could participate in study groups. Participation was achieved through a subtle form of command. The author concurs with Moss Kanter's view that aiming to achieve collaborative forms of work through complete consensus and voluntary involvement, as might be suggested in Heron's analysis of the importance of collaborative assessment, may lead to protracted debate and slow, if any, action on instituting collaborative forms of learning. The opportunity for extensive forms of negotiation between teachers and learners over assessment requirements, it should be added, is particularly problematic in distance education. As occurred with the MBA study groups, student enthusiasm for major forms of participative learning may develop after their first positive experience of new assessment strategies which aim to achieve this objective. The purpose of peer-group learning is not to promote participation as a desirable and rewarding end in itself. Ultimately, participatory forms of learning have to be perceived by participants as leading to quality learning. Such learning has to be seen as being superior to that which could be achieved through individual study or less comprehensive group-based approaches. 'The irony of participation-by-command will eventually fade into historical memory as participation becomes seized and owned by those engaged in it...' (Moss Kanter 1983, p.245).

The implications appear clear for the promotion and achievement of peer learning in professional programs taught at a distance. While peer learning may occur through serendipity in the absence of institutional initiative and support in this area, the probability is that it is more likely to occur if such institutional commitment exists. This commitment needs to permeate an entire course of professional study, rather than only be initiated within a smaller set of its constituent components. Moreover, the institution must consider the needs of isolated students who can not regularly participate in face-to-face study groups. This in turn may demand an institutional resource commitment to support non-face-to-face study groups through the use of interactive technologies. Most importantly, the wise and creative use of pedagogies, including assessment strategies, whether such strategies are unilaterally determined by teachers or not, is essential in achieving sophisticated forms of self and peer assessment. Distance education especially
demands the appropriate use of teacher judgement in shaping pedagogies which are most likely to create and nourish the conditions for quality peer-group learning.

The special significance of self- and peer-assessment skills

By the final year of the program, observation of MBA study groups in action left the author with the strong impression that participants had so comprehensively developed the skills of self and group assessment, that they could have derived maximum learning value from the relevant units in the absence of teacher assessment of their work. If self and peer assessment were not substituting for institutional assessment, then these skills were strongly augmenting the teachers’ assessment of the groups’ work. In fact, these self- and group-assessment skills were being brought into play well before teachers’ assessment was provided on the groups’ work. These exact same skills were also used to assess the validity and usefulness of teacher assessment. The teachers’ assessment of the groups’ work can be seen to have become embedded in the ongoing assessment processes of the groups. In a sense, the importance of teacher assessment was diminished in value not the least because of the frequency of assignments and the timing of assignment feedback in the final year of the program. The nature and frequency of assignments certainly shaped the work of the groups, however, actual assignment feedback had a diminishing impact on the quality of the groups’ work. The development of sophisticated self- and peer-assessment skills was more than just beneficial for learning in the final year of the MBA, it was absolutely imperative as the speed of learning events overtook the institution’s capacity to provide timely feedback. The self-sufficiency observed in the final year of the program is, in the author’s view, the most potent evidence of self-directedness that manifested itself in the entire MBA experience. It is interesting to observe that this individual self-directedness grew and expressed itself within the context of peer learning. This observation would support Brookfield’s (1986) conclusion that:

Almost without exception those who have been involved in introducing self-directed learning techniques into formal institutions report that, far from being involved in an isolated, single-minded pursuit of individualised objectives, self-directed learners rely heavily on peer learning groups for support, information exchange, stimulus through new ideas, and locating relevant resources. (p.83)

The significance of interaction among peers cannot be underestimated in the MBA experience. To have the opportunity to interact among one’s peers, or equals, has a distinct and special value which cannot necessarily be found in the workplace or in participants’ dealings with teachers. At the end of the program, a number of participants noted that their performance as managers was not being assessed by their superiors in the
workplace. One interesting example of this lack of assessment was referred to by Belinda Hitchcock. Belinda explained her inability to find an appropriate mentor or role model within her organisation on which she could develop her management conceptions and practices. Belinda discovered this mentor-type support in her dealings with the two study groups with whom she interacted during her MBA studies. This interaction specifically allowed her to develop a 'broadmindedness' toward the task of management 'totally outside of my own job and I've enjoyed that' (comment made at end of program). In some instances, participants had received favourable performance appraisals only to find themselves being retrenched for other more sinister, political reasons. The opportunity to interact among peers off the job was seen to provide sources of professional-type assessment which were either missing, inadequate or contradictory in their work settings. Interacting with peers was seen to expose the participant to the perspectives of people who had an equally strong commitment to the professionalisation of their jobs. Some participants saw this commitment to job professionalisation as being inadequate among their peers at work. They had a feeling of almost outgrowing the opportunities for professional development through interaction with others at work.

MBA peer interaction, however, was located in a non-threatening learning environment which gave full rein to participants' divergent thinking on management. The chance to interact with people who had similar abilities, motivations and interests was the key to successful peer-based interaction. Not only did peer interaction begin to substitute for institutional assessment during the latter phases of the program, it also helped to overcome the vagaries of assessment as experienced in the workplace. The diversity of peer viewpoints must be seen to be located within a strong unitary frame of reference relating to a commonly held set of commitments to the benefits of professional development through off-the-job learning.

It appears that no matter how hard teaching staff might attempt to be treated as yet another peer in the group situation they can never really be an MBA participant. In the special circumstances described earlier, teachers may indeed become learners in dealing with participants, but it appears futile for them to aspire to peer status, a status reserved for those who have the special set of commitments identified above. The other significant factor which tends to define and distinguish teachers' role in the group was examined in Chapters 4 and 6. Teachers are perceived by participants as having a special status through the very nature of their job of being 'the teacher'. The deference which learners feel inclined to display towards their special status tends to inhibit free, 'boots-and-all' interaction amongst all group participants. Such inhibitions disappear when learners return to their normal patterns of genuine peer interaction, patterns which have developed
over a long period of time of regular and open contact. Breaking down these inhibitions is probably more difficult to achieve in distance education because of the practical difficulties of attempting to get to know the personalities of the various teaching staff.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING AGENDAS AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES

The study raises important questions about the nature of the curriculum in professional education courses. Once again the delicate balance that needs to be struck between teacher judgement of the required ground to be covered in the professional curriculum and participants' felt needs for professional growth is highlighted. The importance of the teacher exerting professional prerogatives, in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum, was revealed in the area of professional learning relating to the the development of the strategic perspective on organisational life. As was revealed in Chapter 9, the development of the strategic perspective represented new, revelatory learning for many participants. In the absence of any exposure to this perspective through their MBA studies, many participants would never have thought about their organisations in broader, more integrative and comprehensive terms. At the very least, the MBA greatly accelerated this perspective development for participants which in turn had substantial benefits for their self-confidence, job performance and, for some, career planning.

On the other hand, participants came to the MBA with a sense of the importance of people-related skills to the task of management. There was a strong need for participants to broaden and deepen these skills through their MBA studies. The desire to develop their conceptions and practices manifested itself in the need to learn about participative management. Participants did not perceive participative management as representing the total abdication of management responsibility to lead, support, monitor and structure environments conducive to this style of leadership. In other words, participative or democratic styles of management were not equated with a laissez-faire style of leadership. Participative management was seen to embrace contingency-based approaches to management, the educative role of management and the empowerment of others, including operating effectively within and attempting to change organisational cultures intent on controlling rather than empowering employees.

Participants' interest in these issues is indicative of the changing nature of work and management philosophies in what has been described as the 'post-entrepreneurial workplace' which demands greater innovation and cost effectiveness through synergy
hunting, building partnerships, devolution of responsibility, performance-based reward systems, skill development, teamwork and cooperation (Moss Kanter 1989). The importance of empowerment within the post-entrepreneurial workplace has also been highlighted by Vogt and Murrell (1990) who argue that managers must model their thinking and behaviour on the principles of participatory democracy to ensure that their organisations survive and prosper in a global marketplace characterised by ferocious competition.

While a consideration of such issues can be found in the MBA curriculum, they were buried within a highly specialised, compartmentalised, discipline-based approach to the treatment of people management in the course. The lack of explicitness in dealing with participants' agendas for professional action can be seen as a fundamental limitation of a traditional, discipline-based professional curriculum. It demands that participants have highly sophisticated 'mediatory mechanisms' to make the necessary connections and adaptations between their own frames of reference and the somewhat alien presentation of theory in the curriculum. The possibility that some participants' mediatary mechanisms may not be well enough developed to use external theory highlights the importance of recognising and working from the learning agendas that participants bring to a professional course of study. The recognition of participants' entry-level agendas could be incorporated within a problem-based approach to professional education, although responding to felt and developing needs does not necessarily mean that such needs should be responded to in an uncritical manner. Once again the role of teacher judgement comes to the fore.

The disjunctions between the academic, compartmentalised, discipline-based approach to teaching and the participant problem-based approach reveals, in the author's view, a significant 'distance' which can exist in any professional development experience. Northedge (1987) sees this distance in cultural terms; a cultural gap can exist between expert/academic discourse on a subject area and everyday student discourse on issues relevant to that field of study. Learners, therefore, face a special challenge in making sense of distance learning texts, a challenge involving them in mastering expert discourses or ways of conceptualising and locating themselves within the field of study. Gillard (1981, p.4) also refers to the 'distance' which can exist in distance learning materials when he comments that an 'implied teacher' can be found 'in off-campus course materials, and that the process of teaching and learning which is implicit in those materials should be the tendency to zero of the distance, intellectual, moral, and so on, between this implied teacher and the postulated learner in relation to the matter which is to be learnt'.
The building of stronger bridges between the academic study of management and the practice of management requires making academic theory more relevant to management as enacted in the workplace. Researchers on professional learning (Schön 1983, 1987) have questioned this false dichotomy between theory/knowledge and practice/experience or, put another way, the categorisation of academics as theory-oriented and practitioners as practice-oriented. Schön has argued that competent professionals demonstrate a knowing in their actions. In other words, they demonstrate personally powerful theories of action which they may not always be aware of. The practical implication of this theorising is a commitment to educative processes which challenge professionals to reflect critically on their actions, that is, reflect on action. There is no doubt that MBA participants reflected on their actions as they progressed through the MBA program and that many tried to act out their new understandings, although some were constrained by hostile organisational environments. The processes of critical self-reflection and action did appear, however, to remain a total mystery to many participants. One participant - Colin Brice - possessed a strong sensing of management situations without any apparent conscious thought, a kind of 'knowing in action', which he found difficult to explain. The source of this ability, or what Schön might call professional artistry, was ascribed to 'intuition' shaped by past experience.

It seems that participants' capacities to reflect on their professional experiences to develop personally meaningful theory could be strengthened by a more explicit consideration of this aspect of learning in the MBA experience. Having said this, it must be acknowledged that participants benefited greatly from much of the external theory presented in the MBA program (see Chapter 9). In the author's view, a commitment to help participants theorise about their own professional practices does not preclude the possibility, indeed, desirability of exposing them to the theorising of academics. Such external theory can make a major contribution to participants' own personal theorising. (It was noted in Chapter 9 that there was no evidence of such external theory extinguishing participants' personal theorising.) The challenge to integrate academic knowledge with personal knowledge in the continuing education of professionals is supported by Cervero (1988):

...while recognizing the primacy of practical forms of knowledge, educators should not dismiss technical knowledge. Rather, in fostering the learning of technical knowledge, educators must focus on ways of integrating it into professionals' repertoires of practical knowledge. (p.56)

Thus the teaching commitment can not only be to the process of critical self-reflection but also to the product of that reflection. Participants were more concerned with teachers'
theorising being grounded in the realities of management work, i.e. to have some readily understandable ecological validity. The modelling of the process of critical self-reflection by teachers from observation of experience through to theorising and practice, including the documentation of achievements at each stage, would appear to be of considerable value to professional learners as they embark on their own processes of professional theorising.

The reconceptualisation of professional curricula in response to the perceived needs of participants may require teachers to adopt a coherent ideology for presenting new curricula and pedagogies. For example, MBA participants’ growing commitment to the value that people make to organisational success, and the most appropriate ways of managing toward the creation of an effective human capability within the organisation, could be more fully embraced in a curriculum and pedagogy which focuses on the issues relating to people empowerment. Achieving an effective approach in this area may involve far more than a commitment to making existing academic theory relating to the theme of people empowerment more explicit and accessible to participants. It may demand a strong ideological approach which advocates and sustains the theme through critical debate. Advocacy of particular ideological views on the most appropriate forms of curricula and pedagogies is not, however, without its dangers. Brookfield (1986, p.17) refers to this danger when he argues that the role of the facilitator in fostering a critical approach ‘does not mean that the facilitator must try and convert or brainwash learners into accepting some new ideology’. The notion of professional empowerment or emancipation can become a distorted process where learners are seen to be empowered to the extent that they move from their existing ‘ill-informed’ positions to the new ‘enlightened’ views of professional practice held by their teachers. This danger appears particularly acute in those professions (e.g. management, education) where so much of the relevant knowledge base is open to contestation and dispute. In other professions (e.g. accountancy, law, engineering, medicine), at a given point in time, there is a large amount of knowledge determined by professional bodies and governments which must be mastered by learners if they are to be seen to be practising competently and ethically by their peers and by society. In these cases, teachers are obliged to spend much of their time teaching towards student mastery and application of fixed bodies of knowledge, although such bodies of knowledge do not necessarily need to be treated uncritically as immutable objects of study. Nevertheless, neither the individual teacher or aspiring or practising professional person has any say in the requirement to master such bodies of knowledge. It could also be reasonably argued that the mastery of these mandated bodies of knowledge is an essential precondition for their critical examination in the light of changing professional circumstances.
While the above analysis indicates that certain aspects of the conventional MBA curriculum are ripe for major review and reconceptualisation in response to participants felt needs, and that any such reconceptualisation would need to break down the archaic boundaries which appear to exist around disciplines involved in the area of people management, no amount of forward planning will ever be able to develop curricula suited to the specific professional needs of every course participant. For distance education, this creates special problems as the opportunities to respond in an immediate, spontaneous and specific fashion are limited by participants' circumstances. This social distance associated with distance education was not seen by participants as necessarily being bridged by the inclusion of a greater range of delivery media. As one participant was to observe early in his MBA experience, what was important to him was 'interpersonal interaction', with its intrinsic characteristic being that it is 'self-regulating in terms of feedback'.

A similar point to that relating to the difficulties of customising curricula can be made with respect to the opportunities that distance educators have to help their students directly in any attempted transformation of professional conceptions and practices. It appears that the role of the teacher in distance education, once the learning materials are constructed, is to help develop, through a variety of means (e.g. assignment feedback, interactive technologies), the professional conceptions and practices of the individual participant. The emphasis moves from a group-based approach to the preparation of materials which centres on general professional needs to an individual approach where distinct and unique needs are accommodated and developed. While 'cultural distance' is a significant form of distance which can exist in professional education, it could be argued that the spatial and temporal distance normally associated with distance education can exacerbate the 'cultural distance' dimension, although the mere proximity of teachers and learners by no means provides the opportunities to renegotiate existing mindsets which may be held by agents in the educative process. The customisation of professional care and support to meet individual needs during the distance education course in use does not militate against the desirability of putting in place flexible approaches to course material production and development which can rapidly capture emerging professional practitioner needs, problems and concerns.

THE STUDY GROUP AS A TYPE OF LEADERLESS WORK TEAM

Participants saw the study group as a unique team of like-minded individuals working collaboratively, and by the end of the program, non-competitively towards the focused
goal of deriving maximum learning from the MBA experience. They were a powerful source of motivation, they helped to compensate for individual lulls in performance and generally made the study experience more enjoyable that it may have been if the learning experience had been a predominantly private and individual one. Study groups were seen as non-hierarchical with no fixed positions of power and no desire by any group participant to dominate group deliberations.

I think that one of the most significant factors [relating to the study group] was that there was no master/slave or boss/employee situation there and that requires a little bit more temperate behaviour and more persuasion rather than dictation or edict types of control and influence over a group (Frank Dickson, comment made at end of third year).

This did not mean that participants fulfilled the same roles in the same ways at all times in the study group experience. As was seen in Chapter 4, leadership, for example, was demonstrated on a shifting basis depending on a range of factors occurring inside and outside the group. The opportunity for different individuals to demonstrate leadership in the group at different times was a significant learning experience because, as one participant observed, all group participants have strong management aspirations and therefore were interested in exploring the leadership role through demonstrating and experimenting with leadership skills in the group setting. The group provided an environment where individuals could settle for a level and type of contribution with which they and the group felt satisfied. Moreover, the study group environment was depicted as being sympathetic, low risk and non-threatening.

In exploring the applicability of the study group concept in the context of work teams in their organisational settings, participants were more able to see the differences and limitations of the 'community of equals' approach, rather than the potential for more egalitarian forms of participation in the workplace. The identification of the differences and limitations indicates participants' awareness of the realities of implementing and sustaining participative work teams in organisational settings. Work teams were depicted as being very often politicised, leader-dominated, high-risk environments. Moreover, group work was sometimes inappropriately used to disperse blame for failings rather than as a positive way of achieving organisational success and to make decisions which were sometimes better made in more autocratic ways. Wrong decisions made in work groups could affect the health of the organisation or one's future job prospects. As one participant commented: 'The study group is not a real situation, it is very focused, very diverse, there is not the same risk as is attached to a management team. Worst thing that can happen in a study group is that you dent your ego, whereas at work if you destroy your management team, you destroy your chances of promotion'.
Yet some participants did develop insights from their study group experiences into organic forms of management and the range of roles that people can constructively fulfil in leaderless groups. Specifically, Walter Abbott was able to describe a number of different leadership roles fulfilled by members of Study Group A, namely: the strategic leader; the innovators; the organisers; the critical reviewers; and the resource getters. The recognition of these key roles in the leaderless group could be seen to be important experiential learning. Such learning could help in the formation and cultivation of such groups in the workplace. Barry (1991) highlights the growing importance of 'bossless' teams in the workplace. He proposes a distributed leadership model to explain the effective operation of such groups. This model identifies four key leadership roles which are fulfilled in effective 'bossless' teams, namely: envisioning leadership; organising leadership; spanning leadership; and social leadership. There are similarities between Barry's list and the leadership roles that Walter Abbott believed were fulfilled in Study Group A. Significantly, organisational behaviour researchers are showing a growing interest in the nature of the leaderless group and its potentialities in organisational life. This exact same group is the type within which Deakin participants are encouraged to participate.

Participants' theorising on the pitfalls and misuses of participative approaches in the workforce is supported by the work of management theorists (Moss Kanter 1983; Sinclair 1989). The author believes, however, that participants' theorising in this important area could have been strengthened if the MBA's curriculum and pedagogy had more explicitly recognised the participants' developing learning agendas, the nature of the study group experience, participants' experiences of work groups in their organisations and the body of external theorising relevant to the issue of managing participative approaches effectively to achieve organisational and individual goals. Gibbs (1990) suggests a number of formal assessment approaches which can be used to encourage group members to reflect on the processes as well as the product of their group's work, e.g. team process reports, individual process reports, vivas with either whole teams or each member to explore group processes, exam questions relating to explanations of group processes and alternative ways of improving the work of a group. He argues that formal assessment requirements need to ensure that students focus on developing teamwork skills. Thus, it can be concluded, that course pedagogies, including assessment approaches, in professional development programs need to encourage the formation and maintenance of groups and group members' capacities to reflect critically on group processes in order to develop teamwork skills in different group settings.
The study group experience itself was under-utilised as a major point of reference for exploring participants' substantive interest in participation and people empowerment. The potentialities of leaderless groups in the workplace could have also been examined through the study group experience. This provides a good example of where the process of critical reflection could have been strengthened to help participants move beyond their understandings of the study group ideal and organisational realities to a deeper, more enlightened understanding of the uses, misuses, benefits, costs, dilemmas and contradictions surrounding the use of participation in the workplace.

Based on the study group experience in Deakin's MBA, a set of characteristics of effective study groups and, by implication, leaderless groups in the workplace can be formulated (see Table 10.1). Support for these characteristics can be found in work extending back to that of McGregor (1960) and Likert (1961). The implication for the institution is to emphasise the importance of group members seeing the study group as a vehicle for maximising learning through dialogue, collaboration and sound self-management. It can be hypothesised that an ineffective study group would be characterised by either a laissez-faire approach to leadership or destructive competition amongst members or both.

**Table 10.1 Characteristics of effective study groups**

1. Group members see the group as a community of equals - a genuine peer group - confronting similar demands.

2. Group members have a strong tendency toward collaboration as opposed to competition.

3. Group members see collaboration as the best way of maximising their learning.

4. Group members, within a collaborative frame of reference, strike an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and group allegiance and loyalty.

5. Group members adhere to a set of norms which determine reasonable and unreasonable behaviour across a number of crucial areas, e.g. fulfilment of various leadership roles, individual preparation for meetings, individual participation at meetings, determination of group work agendas.

6. Group members are skilled in leadership of a distributed and contingency-based nature. Leadership roles fulfilled can be categorised as follows:
(a) Strategic leadership, i.e. development of a vision for the way the group might operate as an effective entity. Also, path finder and synthesiser of group ideas on particular assignments.

(b) Organisational leadership, i.e. attention to links with teaching staff, planning, deadlines, time management and arrangements regarding appropriate meeting facilities in order to enhance the efficiency of the group's work.

(c) Innovative leadership, i.e. focus on stimulating divergent, creative thinking on group problems with the aim of improving the quality of the group's work.

(d) Resource getting leadership, i.e. determination to locate and secure key sources of information external to the group, again, with the aim of improving the quality of the group's work.

(e) Critical reviewer leadership, i.e. concentration on constructively reviewing the work of other team members in order to ensure that final work of the group fulfills all relevant external assessment criteria, is conceptually coherent and is presented in the best possible format.

An individual group member may occupy more than one role. However, no member is capable of occupying all roles in the group. Tendency for individual members to gravitate toward the fulfilment of sub-clusters of roles over time.

A further facet of leadership can be added:

(f) Social leadership directed at maintaining group commitment and morale in the face of extended periods of stress, and minimising interpersonal conflict. All members obliged to demonstrate leadership in this area.

7 Group members participate in open, full and intense forms of interaction directed at:

(a) creative thinking
(b) healthy consensus making, with a total absence of formal voting to resolve differences (c) encouraging and exploring dissenting views

8 Group members work hard to construct a supportive environment which is:

(a) relaxed and lacking in interpersonal ego conflict
(b) empathetic and sympathetic, within limits, to members whose participation temporarily declines due to personal and/or work pressures

9 Group members who can reflect critically on group objectives, processes and outcomes and change group dynamics in the light of changing educational demands and weaknesses in group approaches.
CONCLUSION

Professional education at a distance, as was experienced by MBA participants, was not characterised as an essentially private form of study where the individual learner interacted with learning material only. The MBA was characterised by multiple forms of human interaction located in participants' formal educational and professional worlds. These forms of interaction also had a substantial impact on participants' worlds which cannot be ignored. Some of these forms of interaction enabled professional learning while other forms constrained or compromised professional development. The study group was seen as the most powerful form of institutionally-initiated interaction. The MBA’s curriculum and pedagogies fostered, supported and shaped this peer forum for professional development. Rather than working against the development of self-directed, autonomous learners, the institution's commitment to constructing a structure for the development of peer interaction, considerably advanced the development of participants' autonomous tendencies. The author strongly concludes that the teacher in education at a distance must accept special responsibility for orchestrating learning communities which support participants' desire for professional growth and development. This orchestration requires that the teacher places him or herself within the learning community to assist the individual learner in the transformation of his or her professional conceptions and practices. It also requires that distance educators use their professional judgement, rather than slavishly responding to learners' felt needs at every turn.

The core statements which constitute this thesis encapsulate the importance of analysing human agency in professional education at a distance. This sociological perspective illuminates the nature of the professional empowerment process. Participants' quest for professional self-actualisation will only be achieved to the extent that they can survive and prosper within a complex set of interdependent relationships which exist in their everyday worlds. Pedagogies which promote autonomy do not suggest treating learners in isolation from one another (Boud 1988, pp.28-9) nor, could be added, other key interdependencies which exist in their professional worlds. As a consequence, the need for the provision of opportunities to experience educationally useful interdependencies, either through direct or mediated forms of communication, becomes more compelling.
REFERENCES

Akin, G. (1987)
'Varieties of managerial learning'
Organisational Dynamics, Autumn, pp.36-48.

Distant Relationships. Some Reflections on Interviews with Students and Tutors of the
Deakin Course 'Classroom Processes'
Unpublished Report, Deakin University, Geelong.

Altichter, H. (1990)
'Action research in distance education: some observations and reflections'
in T.Evans (ed.)
Research in Distance Education I, revised papers from the first Research in Distance
Education seminar, Deakin University 1989, Institute of Distance Education, Deakin
University, pp.111-25.

Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness

Postal Two-Way Communication in Correspondence Education: an empirical
investigation
Liber/Hermods, Malmo.

Ball, S. J. (1990)
'Self-doubt and soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork'
157-71.

Culture and conduct: an excursion in anthropology
Wadsworth, California.

'Managing the bossless team: lessons in distributed leadership'
Organisational Dynamics, Summer, pp.31-47.

'The MBA experience'
Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Association of Management Educators

Becker, H. (1960)
'Notes on the concept of commitment'

Becker, H.S., Geer, B. & Hughes, E.C. (1968)
Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College Life
*Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School*
The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
*The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*

Biddle, W.B., Smith, D.U., & Tremonti, L. (1985)
'Congruence between curriculum goals and students' perceptions of the learning environment'
*Journal of Medical Education*, vol.60, no.8, pp.627-34.

'Learning strategies, student motivation patterns, and subjectively perceived success'
in J.R. Kirby (ed.)
*Cognitive Strategies and Educational Performance*

Biggs, J.B. (1988a)
'Approaches to learning and to essay writing'
in R.R. Schmeck (ed.)
*Learning Strategies and Learning Styles*

Biggs, J.B. (1988b)
'Assessing student approaches to learning'
*Australian Psychologist*, vol.23, no.2, pp.197-206.

Biggs, J.B. (1989)
'Approaches to the enhancement of tertiary teaching'
*Higher Education Research and Development*, vol.8, no.1, pp.7-27.

Block, P. (1987)
*The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work*

*Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*
Kogan Page, London.

*Developing Student Autonomy in Learning*

Boud, D. (1990)
'Assessment and the promotion of academic values'

Bowden, J. (1988)
'Achieving change in teaching practices'
in P. Ramsden (ed.)
*Improving Learning: New Perspectives*

*Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*


Dahlgren, L. (1984) 'Outcomes of learning'
in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)
The Experience of Learning, Scottish Academic Press,
Edinburgh, pp.19-35.

Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts.

Eastcott, L. & Small, I (1984) 'New South Wales: Getting the mixture right'
in K. Smith (ed.) Diversity Down Under In Distance Education
Darling Downs Institute Press, Toowoomba, Queensland.

in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)
The Experience of Learning, Scottish Academic Press,
Edinburgh, pp.1-18.

Entwistle, N.J. (1985) 'Student learning and adult education'
in N.J. Entwistle (ed.) New Directions in Educational Psychology: 1. Learning and Teaching
Palmer Press, London.

in J.T.E. Richardson, M.W. Eysenck & D. Warren Piper (eds) Student Learning

Entwistle, N. & Hanley, M. (1978) 'Personality, cognitive style and students' learning strategies'

Croom Helm, London.


Evans, T.D. (1987) 'Distance students' strategies: a comparison of the strategies used by undergraduate humanities students and postgraduate education students'
'The dance of distance education: theories of time-space in relation to distance education',  
International Council of Distance Education, 14th World Conference, University of Oslo,  
Norway, August.

Evans, T. (1989)  
'Taking place: the social construction of place, time and space, and the (re)making of  
distances in distance education'  
*Distance Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp.170-83.

'Dialogue in distance education'  
A paper presented to the 14th World Conference of the International  
Council for Distance Education,  

Evans, T. & Nation, D. (1989a)  
'Critical reflections in distance education'  
in T. Evans and D. Nation (eds)  
*Critical Reflections on Distance Education*  

Evans, T. & Nation, D. (1989b)  
'Dialogue in practice, research and theory in distance education'  
*Open Learning*, vol.4, no.2, June, pp.37-42.

'Coaching and the art of management'  
*Organisational dynamics*, Autumn, pp. 16-32.

Fiedler, F. E. (1967)  
*A Theory of leadership Effectiveness*  

'A distance education curriculum for curriculum theory'  
in T. Evans & D. Nation (eds)  
*Critical Reflections on Distance Education*  
Falmer Press, Lewes, pp.147-77.

Forrester, P.G. (1986)  
The British MBA: An Assessment of Postgraduate Management  
Education in UK Universities  
Cranfield, Cranfield Press.

'Professional development for distance educators'  
A special interest group paper prepared for the 13th  
International Council for Distance Education,  
Melbourne, Australia, 13-20 August.

*Understanding Distance Education: A Framework for the Future*  
Routledge, London.
'An example of the quality of students' understanding: Initial conceptions of psychology'
*Study Methods Group Report No.6*, Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University.

'A review of the research of Ference Marton and the Goteborg Group: A phenomenological research perspective on learning'

'Why students don't learn'

'Student learning and course design 1: In-text teaching devices in Open University texts'

'The World of the learner'
in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)

Gibbs, G. (1990)
'Assessing teamwork skills'
*Bulletin of Teaching and Learning*, no. 5, Autumn, pp.6-9.

*The Constitution of Society*

Giddens, A. (1987)
*Social Theory and Modern Sociology*

*Sociology*


'Reconstructing independent learning'
Paper presented at the second Research in Distance Education seminar held at Deakin University, Geelong, November 26-28.

*The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research*
Aldine, Chicago.

Goffman, E. (1967)
*Interaction Ritual: Essays On Face-to-Face Behaviour*
Gough, E. (1978)
'Course teams - some comments on the Deakin experience'
in D. Keegan (ed.)
Course teams
Open College of Further Education, Adelaide.

'Is the university awful?: political activism and consciousness raising among external students'
in T. Evans & D. Nation (eds)

Communication and Meaning: The First Year Experience of Off-Campus Study
PhD thesis, Deakin University, Victoria.

Ethnography: Principles in Practice
Tavistock, London.

Hammersley, M. (1990)
Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide

Harris, D. (1987)
Openness & Closure in Distance Education
Falmer, London.

Harris, D. (1991)
'Towards a Critical Educational Technology in Distance Education'
in Book 4 Technology in Distance Education, Critical Issues in Distance Education, Master of Distance Education, Deakin University.

Heidegger, M. (1962)
Being and Time
J. Macquarie & E. Robinson (tr.)

Heinze, T. (1983)
'The social and psychological milieu of distance students'
Distance Education, vol. 4, no.1, March, pp. 53-62.

Heron, J. (1981)
'Assessment revisited'
in D. Boud (ed.)
Developing Student Autonomy in Learning

Herrmann, A. (1988)
'A conceptual framework for understanding the transitions in perceptions of external students'
Distance Education, vol. 9, no. 1, March, pp.5-26.

Herrmann, A., Cameron, J. & Davidson, G. (1991)
'On-campus requirements in remote area Australian External Studies'
Open Learning, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 21-7.
*Management of Organizational Behaviour*

*Management of Organizational Behaviour*

Hodgson, V.E. (1986)
The relevance and effectiveness of distance learning for management education
Unpublished Paper, Centre for the Study of Management Learning, University of Lancaster, pp.1-25.

Holmberg, B. (1989)
*Theory and Practice of Distance Education*
Routledge, London.


Holt, D.M., Petzall, S., & Viljoen, J. (1990a)
'The MBA experience by distance learning: what MBA participants bring to their studies' *Open Learning*, vol.5, no.3, November, pp.16-27.

'Before ... and after: MBA participants' first year experiences of distance learning' in T. Evans (ed.) *Research In Distance Education 1*, revised papers from the first Research in Distance Education seminar, Deakin University 1989, Institute of Distance Education, Deakin University, pp. 157-79.

'Unleashing the forces: Face-to-face study groups at a distance' *Distance Education*, vol.11, no.1, pp.125-49.

Homans, G. C. (1951)
*The Human Group*

Homans, G. C. (1961)
*Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms*

'Substitutes for leadership: effective alternatives to ineffective leadership' *Organisational Dynamics*, Summer, pp. 20-38.

Hudson, L. (1968)
*Frames of Mind*
Methuen, London.


Jarvis, P. (1978) 'Students' learning and tutors' marking' Teaching at a Distance, no. 13, Winter, pp.13-17.


Juler, P. (1991) Section 4 The Nature of Distance Education in Introduction to Distance Education, University of South Australia and Deakin University.


*Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*  
Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.

"Learning, empowerment and participative work processes: the educative work environment"  
in H. Leymann & H. Kornbluh (eds)  
*Socialization and Learning at Work: a New Approach to the Learning Process in the Workplace and Society*  
Avebury, Gower, Aldershot, pp.256-74.

"What effective general managers really do"  

"Learning from problem-solving"  
in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)  
*The Experience of Learning*  

Likert, R. (1961)  
*New Patterns of Management*  

Livingston, J. S. (1971)  
"Myth of the well-educated manager"  

Lockwood, F.G. (1986)  
"Activities in teaching texts - The dream and the reality"  

Lockwood, F. G. (1990)  
Activities in Distance Learning Texts  
Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Technology,  
Milton Keynes, UK.

Luckmann, T. (1978)  
*Phenomenology and Sociology*  

"Linking person-centred teaching to qualitative research training"  
in D. Boud & V. Griffen  
*Appreciating Adults Learning: From the Learners' perspective*  
Kogan Page, London.

"Learning from distance-teaching materials: a study of students' mediating responses"  
*Distance Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp.215-36.

"Distance learners' interaction with text while studying"  
*Distance Education*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp.71-91.
*Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*
Routledge, London.

Marton, F. (1981)
'Phenomenography - Describing conceptions of the world around us'

Marton, F. (1983)
*Beyond Individual Differences*
FernUniversität.

Marton, F. & Säljö, R. (1976)
'On qualitative differences in learning I - Outcome and process'
*British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.46, pp.4-11.

'What does it take to improve learning?'
in P. Ramsden (ed.)
*Improving Learning: New Perspectives*

'Approaches to learning'
in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)

'The rough and the smooth - Students' experiences of OU study'
Report No. 2, Student Research Centre, Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, Milton Keynes.

MBA Brochure (1990)
Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

McGregor, D. (1960)
*The Human Side of Enterprise*

McTaggart, R. (1991)
'Principles for participatory action research'
*Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, Spring, pp.168-87.

Mezirow, J. (1981)
'A critical theory of adult learning and education'
*Adult Education*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp.3-24.

Mezirow, J. & Associates (1990)
*Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: a Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*

McIntosh, N. (1975)
'The place of summer schools in the Open University'
*Teaching at a Distance*, no. 3, May, pp.48-60.
*Up to the mark: a study of the examination game*

Minnis, J.R. (1985)
'Ethnography, case study, grounded theory and
distance education research'
*Distance Education*, vol.6, no.2,
September, pp.189-98.

Mintzberg, H. (1973)
*The Nature of Managerial Work*

Morgan, A.R. (1976)
'The development of project-based learning in the
Open University'
*Programmed Learning and Educational Technology*,
vol.13, no.4.

Morgan, A.R. (1983)
'Theoretical aspects of project-based learning in higher
education'
*British Journal of Educational Technology*, vol.14, no.1,
January, pp.66-78.

'A report on qualitative methodologies in research
in distance education'
*Distance Education*, vol.5, no.2, pp.252-67.

'Course design and students' approaches to study'
*International Council for Distance Education Conference*
Oslo, August.

'What do Open University students initially understand
about learning?'
*Study Methods Group Report No.8*, Institute of Educational
Technology, The Open University, Milton Keynes, pp.1-15.

Morgan, A. (1991)
'Case-study research in distance education'
*Research in Distance Education*, a unit in the Deakin University and University of South
Australia's Masters in Distance Education, Deakin University, Geelong.

'Residential schools in open and distance education: quality time for quality learning?'
in T. Evans & D. Nation (eds)
*Reforming Open and Distance Education: Critical Reflections from Practice*

Morgan, G. (1986)
*Images of Organisation*
*Sage Publications*, Beverly Hills.
_The Change Masters_  

_When Giants Learn to Dance: Mastering the Challenges of Strategy, Management, and Careers in the 1990s_  
Simon and Schuster, New York.

'Pedagogical evaluation and change: teaching and research in mathematics distance education'  
in T. Evans (ed.)  
_Research in Distance Education I_, revised papers from the first Research in Distance Education seminar, Deakin University 1989, Institute of Distance Education, Deakin University, pp.180-99.

_Making experience pay: Management success through effective learning_  

'Learning styles and approaches: some empirical implications for medical education'  
in J. Bowden (ed.)  
_Student Learning: Research into Practice The Marysville Symposium_, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Australia, pp.61-94.

'Learning styles and approaches: implications for medical education'  
_Medical Education_, vol.20, pp.162-75.

'On being a course team chairman'  
_Teaching at a Distance_, no. 4, November, pp.47-51.

Northcott, P. H. (1978)  
'Course teams - some theoretical considerations with particular reference to the Open University experience'  
in D. Keegan (ed.)  
_Course Teams_  
Open College of Further Education, Adelaide.

Northcott, P. H. (1982)  
'Off campus MBA programme: Deakin University'  
_Indian Education_, vol. xii, nos 5 & 6, pp. 14-18.

Northcott, P. H. (1991)  
Individual and group management in distance education  
Part of the Management of Distance Education unit in Deakin University and University of South Australia's MDEd program, Deakin University, Geelong.

Northcott, P. H. & Thompson, D. J. (1987)  
_Assignment Turn-around Time: What Should Be Done? How Can Be Achieved?_  
Final Report, CTEC Evaluations and Investigations Program, Distance Education Unit, Deakin University.
Northedge, A. (1987)
'Returning to study'
in M. Thorpe & D. Grugeon (eds)
*Open Learning for Adults*

'Culture shock in the Open University'

*Open Learning in Transition: An Agenda for Action*
National Extension College, Cambridge.

'Weekend School survey'
*Distance Education*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp.285-97.

Pask, G & Scott, B.C.E. (1972)
'Learning strategies and individual competence'
*International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*,
vol.4, pp.217-25.

*Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*

Perry, W. (1976)
*Open University: A Personal Account by the First Vice-Chancellor*
Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

*Management Education and Development: Drift or Thrust into the 21st Century?*

Quality Tuition Optimum Academic Support for all Students (1990)
United Kingdom Open University.

'The context of learning'
in F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (eds)
*The Experience of Learning*, Scottish Academic Press,
Edinburgh, pp.144-64.

Ramsden, P. (1987a)
'Why and how to study student learning'
in A.H. Miller & G. Sachse - Akerlind (eds)
The Learner in Higher Education: A Forgotten Species?,
*Research and Development in Higher Education*, vol.9,
HERDSA, pp.141-54.

Ramsden, P. (1987b)
'Improving teaching and learning in higher education:
the case for a relational perspective'
*Studies in Higher Education*, vol.12, no.3, pp.275-86.
Ramsden, P. (1988)  
'Studying learning: improving teaching'  
in P. Ramsden (ed.)  
*Improving Learning: New Perspectives*  

'Perceptions of courses and approaches to studying: an encounter between paradigms'  

'Effects of academic departments on students' approaches to studying'  
*British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.51, pp.368-83.

'Students' learning and perceptions of teaching: school effectiveness reconsidered'  
Paper presented to the annual meeting of AERA, New Orleans.

'School environment and sixth form pupils' approaches to learning'  
*British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.59, pp.129-42.

Revans, R. (1983)  
'Action learning: its origins and nature'  
in M. Pedler (ed.)  
*Action Learning in Practice*  

Rogers, C. R. (1983)  
*Freedom To Learn for the 80's*  
Charles E. Merrill, Columbus.

'Promoting conceptual change learning from science textbooks'  
in P. Ramsden (ed.)  
*Improving Learning: New Perspectives*  

*Assessing Students How shall we know them?*  

Säljö, R. (1979a)  
'Learning about learning'  
*Higher Education*, vol.8, pp.443-51.

Säljö, R. (1979b)  
'Learning in the learner's perspective I: Some common-sense conceptions'  
*Reports from the Institute of Education*, University of Goteborg, No.76.

Säljö, R. (1979c)  
'Learning in the learner's perspective II: Differences in awareness'  
*Reports from the Institute of Education*, University of Goteborg, No.77.
*The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*

*Educating the Reflective Practitioner*

Schultz, A. (1972)
*The Phenomenology of the Social World*
Heinemann, London.

*The Tyranny of the Team*
Working Paper No. 4, March, The Graduate School of Management, the University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

'Developing managers: re-examining ten myths about MBAs and managers'

Smith, K. (1979)
*External Studies at New England: a silver jubilee review 1955-1979*
The Department of External Studies, The University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

'When teachers begin to theorise their practice'
in T. Evans & D. Nation (eds)
*Critical Practices on Distance Education*
Falmer Press, Lewes, pp. 197-233.

Spillane, R. (1987)
'The individual and the organisation'
study guide submitted for MBA 821
*Organisational Behaviour* course, Deakin University.

Stewart, R. (1967)
*Managers and Their Jobs*

*Choices for the Manager*

Svensson, L. (1977)
'On qualitative differences in learning: III Study skill and learning' *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.47, pp. 223-43.
Taylor, E., Morgan, A. & Gibbs, G. (1981a) 'The "orientation" of Open University Foundation students to their studies' *Teaching at a Distance*, no.20, Winter, pp.3-12. Article based on:


*Leadership and Decision Making*
University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa.

'Student perceptions of factors influencing tertiary learning'

'A longitudinal study of the approaches of learning of Australian tertiary students'
*Human Learning*, vol.4, pp.127-41.

'Alternative methods of group decision making'
in R. S. Cathcart & L. A. Samovar (eds)
*Small Group Communication: a Reader*
5th ed., Wm. C. Brown, Dubuque.
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Notes

- Unless otherwise stated, all participants lived and worked in Melbourne, the capital city of the Australian state of Victoria. Teaching staff listed all live in Geelong, Victoria and work at the Geelong Campus of Deakin University.
- Participant names, including those of teaching staff, are pseudonyms.
- Participant names are arranging alphabetically in their study groups.
- Information is arranged in the following order:
  - participant number
  - participant pseudonym
  - age of participant as of 1 January 1991, i.e. on entering the final year of the program
  - previous field of academic study
  - place of employment, including recent employment history (general information only)
  - reasons for undertaking formal management education
  - reasons for studying at a distance
  - miscellaneous information

The two remote participants were not involved at the beginning of the MBA collaborative research study and therefore were not interviewed at the start of the MBA, i.e. 1988. Background information on them was gathered during the third year residential school and an interview at the end of that year.

Study Group A

Participant 1, Walter Abbott, 33, agricultural science, manager of human resources information, in a large oil company, as of early 1991. Walter undertook the MBA in order to facilitate a more satisfying career in management. On entering the program, he was employed as development officer in the agro-chemical division of the same oil company. Frustrated with this technical job he enrolled in the MBA to demonstrate to his employer that he was keen to make a career move into management. Within the first year of the MBA, Walter had moved into the company's operations research area which, although still technical in nature, provided him with a greater exposure to management
work. Thus he quickly achieved his most urgent career objective of extricating himself from a narrow, technical specialist role. At the end of 1990, he moved into his current position which provided still further exposure to management issues. At the end of the MBA, Walter was on the verge of entering the world of actual management practice. In fact, he was expecting to move into an official middle management position in the year following the completion of his MBA studies. This transition to an official middle management role within the organisation was perceived by Walter as another major step in his career progression. He chose a distance education program because of his job mobility. Walter is married with two young children; the arrival of his third child was due at the end of the final year of the MBA program.

Participant 2, Anthony Collins, 43, engineering, senior design engineer, engineering consultancy firm. Anthony undertook the MBA to develop a background in management. In 1988, he moved out of the role of project manager in the public sector into a senior design engineering position in the private sector. This move allowed him to accomplish the immediate career objective of gaining experience in the private sector. At the end of 1990, he moved to another organisation, still in the position of senior design engineer, to provide himself with experience of a more commercially-oriented organisation. Anthony had experienced some frustration in not being able to apply more of his MBA learning on the job. On completing the MBA, Anthony had not attempted to move into a fully-fledged management position. This career objective was to be more actively pursued after the completion of the program. Anthony chose a distance education program because of job mobility. He is married with two children.

Participant 3, Frank Dickson, 40, science and teaching, regional manager, large multinational computer firm. Frank undertook the MBA to improve his management skills and broaden his knowledge of management. At the beginning of 1988, he was a senior sales executive with another large international computing firm. Later in 1988, he moved into the position of business services manager at the same company. In 1989, he successfully applied for his current position. However, at the end of the final year of the program Frank was retrenched from his current position. This retrenchment appeared to be caused by a personality difference he had encountered with his immediate superior. At the end of the MBA, Frank was occupying his current position in a caretaker capacity until the appointment of a new person who was to occupy a redefined job within the organisation. In the interim, Frank had applied for more senior middle management positions located both at the Headquarters of the parent and Australian sides of the operation. His applications for these jobs in other parts of the organisation were supported by other senior managers in the organisation. Frank was aware that he needed
to move to other work locations in order to pursue his management career in the organisation. Ironically, the retrenchment from one job in one area of the organisation provided Frank with the inducement to explore more senior job opportunities in other areas of the organisation. Nevertheless, the timing and causes of the retrenchment were regrettable and the ramifications of the decision continued to place considerable strain on Frank’s professional and personal relationships subsequent to the completion of the MBA program. Distance education provided him with the flexibility to schedule study around very demanding work commitments. Frank is married with three young children which he openly admits have been difficult to raise. The MBA placed considerable extra strains on his family life.

Participant 4, William Grant, 47, medicine, Director of government health agency. On beginning the MBA, William was appointed to the most senior management job in his organisation. Thus he was looking for the program to help him improve the performance of his organisation. He was particularly keen to study a management program which would provide him with a strong business focus. The MBA was, therefore, chosen ahead of a health administration program. William was particularly interested in the MBA highlighting and prioritising key management issues. He was not looking for the program to provide detailed solutions to these issues; he was capable of developing solutions customised to the needs of his organisation once the program had helped him to understand the key issues which needed to be considered. Without the issues, however, William believed that improvement in his managerial performance was halted. William was attracted to Deakin’s MBA because of its reputation and flexibility. The flexibility of distance education was important as he was often required to attend international conferences. William is married with two teenage children and another undertaking university studies.

Participant 5, Matthew Hilliard, 40, engineering, senior design engineer, engineering consultancy firm. Matthew’s position did not change during his MBA studies. He undertook the program to improve his managerial skills and performance and to prepare himself for a future career in management. Matthew wanted to be more than just a qualified engineer; he wanted to be a qualified manager. He was under no illusions that the MBA would make him a good manager. He saw the program as a way of giving him a better chance to perform well in a desired management position. Matthew did not attempt to enter management during his studies. At times he registered frustration with not being able to apply more of his MBA learning, although this frustration dissipated over the course of his studies. At the end of the program, he was still uncertain about his career progression, although he began to recognise opportunities to enter management
positions within his current organisation in the later stages of his MBA studies. On completing the MBA, Matthew recognised the need to pursue determinedly other career options in management outside his current environment if opportunities to move into management did not present themselves soon within his current organisational context. Matthew chose a distance education program for reasons of personal convenience. He is married with two young children, one of whom was born during the second year of the program. Like Frank Dickson, he found that the MBA placed a particularly heavy strain on his personal life.

Participant 6, Ken Johns, 41, science, manager in a research centre of a large resource processing firm. Ken occupied this position for the duration of the program. He was keen to move out of Melbourne and his current job on completing the MBA. Ken undertook the MBA to improve his management skills and his understanding of the field of management. In contrast to the other participants, he expected the MBA to have a stronger academic orientation and occasionally registered disappointment that this was not the case. Moreover, having proved to himself during the first year that he could successfully study the MBA, Ken was to thereafter struggle with his motivation to complete the program. However, to his surprise, Ken was offered a general management position within his current organisational subunit near the end of his MBA studies. The offering of this position, coinciding with his studies of general management issues in the final year of the program, appeared to have a dramatic positive influence on Ken's attitude to his current job, the value of working in his current organisational subunit, living in Melbourne and, finally, to the way he viewed the costs and benefits embodied in the MBA experience. The benefits derived from the MBA experience had been elevated in importance given the unexpected opportunity to occupy a general management position on completing the program. He chose a distance education program to avoid personal and professional disruption. Ken is married with three children.

Participant 7, Terry Plowman, 32, engineering, technical sales manager, small building materials manufacturer located in Queensland. Terry was a senior design engineer with a large building materials manufacturer for the first three years of the program. In 1988-89, he was located in the company's central offices in Melbourne. In 1990, he was moved to a site just out of Melbourne to help build a new facility. In 1991, he took up his current job in Brisbane, Queensland and joined a local MBA study group in that city for his final year studies. During his final year of studies the Brisbane-based firm went into receivership, although Terry managed to hold his job as efforts were made to resuscitate the firm. At the end of the MBA he was considering a job offer from a large Australian firm. While not providing an opportunity to pursue a career in management,
the job offer did hold out the chance to work in a large, stable organisation. Terry enrolled in the program to broaden his appreciation of the field of management. He had little opportunity to use his MBA learning in his engineering position, although the current job provided slightly more scope for applications. Terry is married, but has no children.

Participant 8, David Richards, 34, applied science (food technology), operations manager of food processing factory. Between 1988 and 1990, David held production and marketing positions in a subsidiary of a multinational food processing company located in Melbourne, Victoria. During the latter part of 1990 and 1991, he was involved in establishing the food processing factory in a provincial town in the state of New South Wales. This establishment venture required David to draw on a range of general management skills even though he was technically employed as a production manager. The new job required him and his family to live in the provincial town during the initial stage of establishing the venture, i.e. late 1990 and the first half of 1991. David's family moved back to Melbourne in mid-1991, while David, in the second half of the year, spent about half his time working on location and the other half acting as a consultant to the venture from his home in Melbourne. In first semester 1991, David was linked into the study group via the telephone; in second semester he was able to rejoin the group's face-to-face meetings. At the end of the MBA, David was pursuing a major new job opportunity in Brisbane.

David undertook the MBA to improve his management practice as well as giving him an insight into the strategic aspects of managing an organisation. He was keen to move into a general management position and the MBA was seen as a way of obtaining such a position more quickly than could be achieved through natural career progression. The MBA was to act as a 'circuit breaker' for David's career advancement by packing a large amount of work experience into a more intense educational experience. A distance education program was chosen to maximise flexibility, something which was required in the first semester of the final year of the program to accommodate David's job move. David was also attracted to the reputation of Deakin's MBA and considered it to be a privilege to have been accepted on the program (he was accepted on a second round of offers). He was passionate about his desire to get on to and complete the MBA. David is married with two teenage children. The interstate move in late 1990 placed considerable strain on his family. The family's dissatisfaction with living in the provincial town led David to relocate them back to Melbourne. It was also a factor in David deciding to work on the venture, as a consultant, from the family's home in Melbourne during the second half of 1991.
Study Group B

Participant 9, Colin Brice, 38, applied sciences (computing), managing director of own retail consultancy firm. Colin had occupied a variety of management and sales positions, principally in the computing industry, before he had the opportunity to establish his own private consulting company in 1989. In fact, Colin enrolled in the MBA to gain a strategic knowledge of management in anticipation of running his own company sometime after completing the program. No one was more surprised than Colin himself when he was given the opportunity to set up his own company in the early stages of the MBA. Ironically, the pressures of undertaking this business venture nearly led to his withdrawal from the MBA. Having successfully negotiated these difficulties, Colin looked to his MBA learning to help him run his new organisation. At the end of the MBA, Colin had rented premises to further develop his small, but growing company. The MBA was expected to provide knowledge which was of immediate practical use. A distance education program was chosen to accommodate intense professional, personal and social pressures. Colin was married at the beginning of the program; he has no children. He admitted that the MBA and professional commitments had demanded major personal sacrifices.

Participant 10, Craig Farrell, 37, engineering, services manager in a large state government instrumentality. Craig received two internal job promotions within his current organisation during the MBA. His decision to enrol in the MBA was characterised as an 'impulse purchase'. At the beginning of the MBA, Craig was unsure whether he would have the required level of interest and motivation to complete the program. At the end of the first year he was pleasantly surprised about the value he was deriving from the MBA. Thereafter, his interest in and motivation to complete the program remained high. Craig was interested in broadening his knowledge of management. He chose the MBA for reasons of flexibility and personal convenience. In second semester 1991, Craig took three months' leave from his place of employment to, amongst other things, explore possible career options which could be pursued subsequent to his completion of the MBA. On returning to work, he negotiated a lateral job move into a more senior middle management position within the government instrumentality. (This is not the job identified above. The job indicated - Manager: Services - was the one he held during most of his MBA studies). Moreover, senior management indicated that his skills were highly prized by the organisation and that he had the potential to enter the ranks of senior management within the organisation. Despite the lateral job promotion, the negotiation of favourable terms of employment in the new job and the signals from his superiors that he was senior management material, Craig remained ambivalent about his career prospects in the organisation. At the end of the MBA, he still harboured ambitions
to leave the organisation and seek a senior management position in the private sector. Initiatives taken to pursue this ambition of moving into the private sector during his three months' leave had failed to yield any attractive job opportunities. Craig is married with three young children. His easygoing temperament appeared to allow him to cope reasonably well with the strains the MBA placed on his personal life.

Participant 11, Tim Greaves, 29, engineering, project manager (engineering) for an international software engineering house. Tim was a workshop manager in the federal department of defence on entering the MBA. He enrolled in the program to gain a knowledge of the field of management in order to prepare himself in the longer term for a career outside the army. Unexpectedly, he left the army in 1989 and took up a position as a systems designer in a technology division of a large aviation firm. In 1990, he moved on to work in an engineering consultancy firm before taking up his current position in late 1990. Tim was happy to shift jobs regularly, with his design engineering skills being in high demand. He essentially saw the MBA as a pre-service educational experience and was unconcerned that there was limited immediate opportunity to apply his MBA learning on the job. In fact, he saw this as a great virtue. Tim was concerned to ascertain his interest in management and prepare himself for a transition into management in the longer term when he had more work experience. His current job, in the field of project management, does provide greater, although still limited, opportunity to apply the MBA than the other technical design engineer jobs that he had had in the past. He chose to undertake a distance learning program because his work in the army demanded regular interstate travel. His subsequent jobs also turned out to require regular interstate and overseas commitments. For example, in 1991, Tim was required to spend two months overseas on a work assignment. He is married, with one child born late in the final year of the program.

Participant 12, Keith Jamieson, 37, science, management information systems manager for a large vehicle manufacturer. Keith held his current job for the duration of the MBA program. Keith is something of an enigma. In contrast to other participants, he indicated a non-vocational, personal interest in studying the program as well as the desire to learn more about the strategic aspects of management. Thus he registered an interest in learning for learning's sake and indicated, at the beginning of the program, that he would probably start studying something else in a totally different area (e.g. philosophy) after completing the MBA. In contrast to his own self-declared learning agenda, participants in his study group believed that he was only interested in doing the minimum amount of work to get through the program and that he was mainly interested in the credential, i.e. he had a predominantly vocational/extrinsic orientation to study. One fellow colleague
believed that he had the typical engineering mentality to his studies. Keith's 'minimalist approach' placed strains on group relationships. A further apparent contradiction lay in Keith's professed preference for learning. He saw himself as an independent learner who learnt well by himself from books. He disliked residential schools and group assignments. While eschewing the value of group work, he was, however, happy to be a member of a study group and to use it as a means of getting through the program. Keith appeared to misjudge the group's commitment to the value of group interaction as a means of maximising learning from the program. Keith had hoped to be able to use his MBA learning to lift the profile of his functional area (MIS) within the organisation and to create for himself a more senior management position within the current environment.

Over the duration of his studies, however, he found that the organisation and consequently the department within which he worked was shrinking. At the end of the MBA, Keith confronted the choice of relocating to Sydney to pursue his career or leaving the organisation in search of a more amenable work environment which would accommodate his desire to fulfil a senior management role within the management information system specialisation. Keith chose a distance education program because of his geographical isolation from a business school. He lived and worked on the outskirts of Melbourne. He is married, and had his first child during the third year of the program. The birth of his first child, Keith admitted, had had a far greater impact on his family and social life compared with his MBA studies.

Participant 13, Michael Valenti, 35, applied chemistry, consulting as a systems analyst programmer to a small software house, based at a broking establishment. Michael had been employed in a number of project manager jobs during his MBA studies. He enrolled in the program to develop skills to enhance his career and also to broaden his career options. He was particularly interested in developing his own entrepreneurial company in the software field. While much of his consultancy work had given him some exposure to the entrepreneurial world within which he wanted to work, Michael had not made a decisive transition into this management world on completing the MBA. His future career plans on how and, indeed, whether this transition could be fully and successfully negotiated remained uncertain. He chose a distance education program for personal convenience. He is married with three young children. Michael was the study group coordinator for Study Group B for the duration of the MBA program. He was seen to have done this job conscientiously by other group members and acted as an important conduit between the group and teaching staff at Deakin University.
The remote participants

Participant 14, Belinda Hitchcock, 29, chemical engineering, shift manager at a pet food manufacturing company located in a provincial town in south-eastern New South Wales. Belinda enrolled in the MBA to broaden her knowledge of the organisation. Her career ambition, on completing the program, is to move from the operations area into the human resources management function within her current organisation.

Belinda had intermittently participated in the work of Study Group B over the first two years of the program. Due to personal and work commitments on the only night that other members could meet, she was unable to participate in group discussion relating to the preparation of group assignments in the Marketing Management unit in first semester 1990, and in the Finance unit in second semester of that year. She had, however, benefited indirectly from the work of the group by interacting with Malcolm Ingram when she had major problems with the program. Belinda had also been a member of a remote study group whose members were linked up through a teleconferencing system during the first three years of the MBA. In the first semester of the final year, Belinda regularly participated in the work of both the remote study group and Study Group B. She became a useful intermediary between these two groups and decided to associate her name with different group assignments from the two groups. In second semester of that year, her remote group made it clear that they expected her to participate in, and associate her name with, all the group assignments in the final core unit in Management Policy. She was either to be a full member of the remote group for this unit or she was to withdraw from the group completely. Belinda chose to stay with the remote group for the Management Policy assignments. However, she continued to interact with those members of Study Group B studying a particular elective she had opted to take in the second semester of the final year of the program. Belinda’s role as ‘go-between’ is examined in Chapter 5. Her increased participation in the work of Study Group B during the final year of the program appeared to be caused by a positive experience of interacting within this group at the third year residential school. Belinda is not married. Because of her work as shift manager, she tends to lead a fairly unusual life style.

Participant 15, Malcolm Ingram, 34, senior engineer for a local council in a provincial town in north-western Victoria. This position is administrative in nature. Malcolm undertook the MBA to broaden his horizons, having accumulated a string of engineering qualifications and certificates, including a certificate of municipal engineering. This latter certificate had been completed during the first two years of the MBA. Specifically, the MBA was to enable Malcolm to take charge of his own destiny by helping him to gain access to employment opportunities in the corporate world. However, opportunities
started to open up for Malcolm in the world of senior public sector management during the final year of the MBA program. Thus at the end of the MBA Malcolm was confronted with a major career choice: should he pursue a management career in the private sector which was his original intention on entering the MBA or should he, in a sense, stay put and pursue emerging opportunities within his current public sector work environment? Malcolm's chosen career route was to be finalised in the year following the completion of his MBA studies. The MBA degree was seen as the most worthwhile management qualification to obtain, while his decision to study by distance education was determined by his geographical isolation from a business school.

When Victorian-based participants were organised into study groups at the first year residential school Malcolm found himself in Study Group B. Given his geographical remoteness, he also joined a group of remote participants who were linked together through an electronic mail facility and then by the telephone. He took his initial involvement in the remote group seriously. He was the first member of the group to disseminate first drafts of his assignments to other members through electronic mail. Unfortunately, he found other members of the group unresponsive to his overtures to discuss assignment drafts via the electronic mail facility. Members of the remote group, in contrast to the face-to-face Melbourne group of which Malcolm was a member, remained defensive and closed to interaction through this medium. Malcolm believes that remote participants should be able to work effectively in non-face-to-face study groups using a combination of telephone conferencing, electronic mail and the facsimile machine. All of these facilities should be easily accessible to remote participants, even in their home environments. Why the remote group failed to work effectively was not so much due to lack of technical means to enable interaction to occur, but a lack of trust and openness among participants themselves. This trust and openness had not developed to a sufficient extent, at the first year residential school, to allow the group to function in a non-face-to-face environment. As a consequence of the remote group's failure to provide Malcolm with sufficient opportunity for interaction with peers, he focused his attentions on the Melbourne group in the final two years of the program. While remote from the Melbourne group, he 'picks up the good vibes of the group'; that is, their openness and receptiveness to the critical exchange of ideas. The goodwill rubbed off on Malcolm and provided a strong motivation for study.

Malcolm is married with two young children who were born during his MBA studies. The MBA had placed substantial strain on his family and social life. Given the professional importance of being seen at community social events, the MBA had also, by precluding him from attending these social gatherings, adversely affected his work.
Unlike other participants, Malcolm receives no financial support from his employer to undertake the program. This lack of financial support placed additional pressure on the family’s finances.

**Teaching staff quoted in the author’s study**

Vic Jaques, senior lecturer in marketing and management, taught MBA 832 *Marketing Management* in first semester, 1990 (see Chapter 4). Vic was MBA Director between 1988 and 1990. He was involved with the author on the MBA collaborative research study. Vic was seen as an outstanding director of the program and an extremely competent and highly motivated distance educator. He had developed a large amount of learning material for units on *Marketing Management, Strategic Marketing* and *Management Policy* since joining the University in the mid-1980s.

Derek Bartels, part-time lecturer in finance, taught MBA 853 *Finance* in second semester, 1990 and was director of the third year residential school (see Chapter 5). Before joining the University, Derek had himself completed an MBA and had had financial consultancy experience with a large chartered accounting firm. Outside his part-time teaching for the University, Derek runs his own company and is involved in a number of business ventures. Derek was highly regarded by participants because of his friendly, helpful and easygoing nature. Moreover, participants respected Derek because he was seen as a successful practitioner. One participant summed up the views of the group well: '... I guess the capital budgeting type of thing [a technique covered in the *Finance* unit] is near and dear to everyone's heart at the moment, because Derek is living proof that you can go out and apply a set of rules and make money. There's a lot of people out there that really want to be entrepreneurs in their own little way. ...a lot of the blokes in my group were discussing things with Derek purely from that point of view. ...they love Derek. Drives a BMW. He's probably not as, he doesn't come across as an academic probably. He's sort of full-time entrepreneur, part-time academic' (comment made by Keith Jamieson at the end of the third year of the program).

Bruce Gordon, senior lecturer in operations management, taught MBA 892 *Operations Management* in first semester, 1991 (see Chapter 6). Bruce had extensive experience as a process engineer and product engineer before joining academia. He does a considerable amount of fieldwork research to ascertain how companies go about the task of operations management and enjoys comparing actual practices to academic models presented in the literature. Bruce attempts to impart something of the realities of managing operations in his study group visits and assignment feedback. His actual operations experience did not
go unnoticed by participants, although the way he chose to present it had unintended negative learning consequences which are examined in Chapter 6.

Larry Davidson, professor of management, taught MBA 831 *Management Policy* in second semester, 1991 (see Chapter 7). Larry was the foundation Dean of the School of Management and instigator of the MBA by distance learning (see Chapter 2). He was a key supporter of the study group concept. His term as Dean ended in 1986. Since then he has focused on teaching management policy at the undergraduate and MBA levels as well as being the foundation Director of the School's entrepreneurial arm - the Centre for Management Services. Like Derek Bartels, he is seen as an entrepreneurial type. He is a dynamic performer at MBA residential schools and was judged by participants as having the right 'style' in interacting with the study groups during his study group visits.
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC, GEOGRAPHIC, ACADEMIC, INTELLECTUAL AND MANAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ENTERED THE MBA PROGRAM IN 1988

Notes

- The data in the left hand column relates to the sample of participants selected to participate in the collaborative research project on the MBA experience (see Chapter 1).
- The data in the right hand column relates to the total population of participants who enrolled in the program in 1988.
- The author's study includes 13 participants from the original sample of 18, plus 2 participants drawn from the rest of the population. The reasons for including these 2 participants is explained in Chapters 1 and 3. The author believes that the sample data profile is indicative of the profile of participants in the ethnography. Qualitative data on participants in the author's study can be found in Appendix A.
- GMAT stands for Graduate Management Admission Test which is explained at the beginning of Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>Sample (18)</th>
<th>Population (72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>Sample (18)</th>
<th>Population (72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Mining</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Finance</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Manufacturing</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Service</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>Sample (18)</td>
<td>Population (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Geelong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Country Victoria</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i.e. other than Melbourne &amp; Geelong)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Country NSW</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i.e. other than Sydney)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Country Qld</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i.e. other than Brisbane)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUALIFICATION</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eng/Sci</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Masters/PhD</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### GMAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Sample (18)</th>
<th>Population (72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 95+</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 90-94</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 85-89</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 80-84</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 75-79</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 70-74</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 65-69</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 60-64</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 55-59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 50-54</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 45-49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 &lt;44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Managerial Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Sample (18)</th>
<th>Population (72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Senior</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Middle</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Supervisory</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Technical</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Miscellaneous

- **Average age**: 34
- **Average GMAT**: 639
- **Institution**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Deakin</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **Year of MBA**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 First</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 First/Second</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 First/Second/Third</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Qualifications

All participants in sample with a postgraduate qualification (35%) had a first degree in science or engineering. Thus, 90% of sample have first degree in science or engineering.
APPENDIX C

SCHEDULE OF VISITS TO STUDY GROUPS AND TIMING
OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Notes

- Unless otherwise stated, all of Study Group A's meetings were held at William
  Grant's place of employment - Health Agency. The same applies to Study Group B
  whose meetings were held at Craig Farrell's place of employment - State
  Government Department.

- Dates and beginning and ending times of meetings attended are given (where
  available).

- The purposes of each meeting for Marketing Management are provided. This
  information is relevant to Chapter 4.

- The purposes and negative outcomes of select sessions at the third year residential
  school are provided. This information is relevant to Chapter 5.

- Not all study Group meetings attended in second semester, 1990.

- The purposes of a select number of sessions at the fourth year residential school are
  provided. This information is relevant to Chapter 7.

FIRST SEMESTER, 1990: MBA 832 MARKETING
MANAGEMENT

Study Group A

- Meeting 1, 12/3/90, 2.00pm, Health Agency.

- Meeting 2, 27/3/90, 7.30pm, William Grant's house, SSO case.

- Meeting 3, 4/4/90, 6.00pm, SSO case.

- Meeting 4, 10/4/90, 6.30-9.15pm, SSO case.

- Meeting 5, 26/4/90, 6.00-8.25pm, review of group approach to SSO case and
  brainstorming on Heinz.

- Meeting 6, 2/5/90, 6.00pm, Heinz case and visit by Vic Jaques with feedback on
  SSO case.

- Meeting 7, 9/5/90, 6.00pm, Heinz case.
• Meeting 8, 22/5/90, 6.00pm, Eastside case.
• Meeting 9, 6/6/90, 6.00pm, Eastside case.
• Meeting 10, 17/6/90, 2.00-4.30pm, preparation for marketing examination.

Study Group B

• Meeting 1, 19/3/90, 8.00-9.45pm, SSO case study.
• Meeting 2, 9/4/90, 7.00-9.00pm, SSO case.
• Meeting 3, 30/4/90, 7.00-10.20pm, Heinz case and visit by Vic Jaques with feedback on SSO case; discussion with chair on value of group assignments.
• Meeting 4, 14/5/90, 7.00-9.45pm, completion of Heinz (check Colin Brice's rewrite of first draft) and Eastside case.
• Meeting 5, 28/5/90, 7.00-10.30pm, Eastside case.

THIRD YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Dates: 2/9/90-7/9/90
• Docutel case study, 3/9/90, 11.00-12.30, communication by coercion.
• Study Groups A and B's presentations on the Flying High case study, 4/9/90, 10.00-11.00am.
• Dividend lecture, 5/9/90, 9.00-12.30, monologic communication.
• Negotiation role play, 5/9/90, 1.30-5.30.
• Industrial relations lecture, 6/9/90, 3.30-5.30pm, closing interaction by ridicule.

SECOND SEMESTER, 1990: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ASSIGNMENT IN MBA822 PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (SOME REFERENCE IN THESE MEETINGS TO MBA 853 FINANCE ASSIGNMENT 2)

Study Group A

• Meeting 1, 26/9/90, 6.00pm.
• Meeting 2, 4/10/90, 6.00pm, meeting held at Frank Dickson’s place of employment, only 3 members present.

• Meeting 3, 11/10/90, 6.00pm, Blood Bank.

**Study Group B**

• Meeting 1, 8/10/90, 7.00pm, both remote participants on-line.

**FIRST SEMESTER, 1991: MBA 892 OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT**

**Study Group A**

• Meeting 1, did not attend.

• Meeting 2, 7/3/91, 6.00-8.00pm.

• Meeting 3, 19/3/91, 6.20-8.30pm.

• Meeting 4, 11/4/91, 6.15-8.00pm.

• Meeting 5, 30/4/91, 6.10-8.00pm.

• Meeting 6, 9/5/91, 6.15-8.00pm.

• Meeting 7, 23/5/91, 6.00-9.30pm.

**Study Group B**

• Meeting 1, 4/3/91, 7.30-9.15pm.

• Meeting 2, 18/3/91, 7.20-9.45pm.

• Meeting 3, 8/4/91, 7.10-9.00pm.

• Meeting 4, 22/4/91, 7.10-8.50pm.

• Meeting 5, 6/5/91, 7.10-10.00pm.

• Meeting 6, 13/5/91, 7.30-9.30pm, meeting held at Michael Valentí’s house.

• Meeting 7, 20/5/91, 7.00-9.50pm.

• Meeting 8, 3/6/91, 7.00-9.30pm.

• Meeting 9, 10/6/91, 7.45-10.45pm, meeting held at Colin Brice’s house.
SECOND SEMESTER, 1991: MBA 831 MANAGEMENT POLICY

Study Group A

- Meeting 1, 22/7/91, 6.00-6.45pm (author had to leave meeting early to attend Study Group B meeting)
- Meeting 2, 1/8/91, 6.00-8.00pm.
- Meeting 3, 13/8/91, 6.00-8.00pm.
- Meeting 4, 27/8/91, 6.15-8.40pm.
- Meeting 5, 3/9/91, 6.00-9.40pm.
- Meeting 6, 17/9/91, 6.00-8.50pm.
- Meeting 7, 1/10/91, 6.30-8.50pm.
- Meeting 8, 8/10/91, 6.20-8.00pm.
- Meeting 9, 29/10/91, 6.15-7.25pm.

Study Group B

- Meeting 1, 22/7/91, 7.30-9.30, meeting held at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 3, 19/8/91, 7.00-10.30, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 4, 2/9/91, 7.00-9.40pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 5, 16/9/91, 7.30-9.50pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 6, 30/9/91, 8.00-9.55pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 7, 7/10/91, 8.00-10.00pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 8, 21/10/91, 8.00-9.15pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.
- Meeting 9, 28/10/91, 8.00-9.40pm, meeting at Colin Brice's house.

FOURTH YEAR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Dates: 13/10/91-17/10/91

- 14/10/91, Participants addressed by the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce.
• 15/10/91, Participants discuss among themselves courses of action in response to the address of the Dean.

• 17/10/91, Participants addressed by the Acting Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University.

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDY GROUP VISITS

Study Group A = 28
Study Group B = 24
Total = 52

TOTAL TIME SPENT IN STUDY GROUP MEETINGS OVER TWO YEARS OF FIELDWORK (timing of some meetings in semester 1, 1990 unknown)

Study Group A = 37 hrs 30mins
Study Group B = 51 hrs 40mins
Total = 89 hrs 20mins

Average time per meeting where times kept = 89hrs divided by 41 meetings = approx. 2 hrs per meeting.

If average figure multiplied by no. of meetings (11) where finish times not kept then 22 additional hrs of meeting time computed. Thus:

Grand total of meeting time = approx. 111hrs
APPENDIX D

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

Note: unless otherwise stated, all interviews were conducted in face-to-face settings in Melbourne.

Interviews conducted at the end of the third year of the program

• Walter Abbott, 22/11/90.
• Matthew Hilliard, 22/11/90.
• Terry Plowman, 28/11/90.
• Ken Johns, 29/11/90.
• William Grant, 11/12/90.
• Frank Dickson, 11/12/90.
• Anthony Collins, 13/12/90.
• Keith Jamieson, 14/12/90.
• Craig Farrell, 18/12/90.
• Colin Brice, 18/12/90.
• Malcolm Ingram, 19/12/90, telephone interview.
• Belinda Hitchcock, 19/12/90, telephone interview.
• Tim Greaves, 20/12/90.
• David Richards, 25/1/91, telephone interview.
• Michael Valenti, 25/1/91, telephone interview.

Interviews conducted at the end of the final year of the program

• Matthew Hilliard, 25/11/91.
• Walter Abbott, 25/11/91.
• Belinda Hitchcock, 5/12/91.
• Michael Valenti, 5/12/91.
• Terry Plowman, 5/12/91, telephone interview.
• Malcolm Ingram, 6/12/91, telephone interview.
• David Richards, 6/12/91, telephone interview.
• Anthony Collins, 9/12/91.
• Colin Brice, 9/12/91.
• Frank Dickson, 10/12/91.
• Ken Johns, 12/12/91.
• Tim Greaves, 16/12/91.
• Keith Jamieson, 17/12/91, telephone interview.
• Craig Farrell, 18/12/91.
• William Grant, 3/92.